

New Year Service 1.1.18 John 10: 11-16

Dear friends in Christ,

the new year has begun—what will it hold in store for us? What unexpected is looming for us around the corner? Well, the new year has started off great- having enjoyed a joyous Festival of Nations-after we had sung, prayed, talked and celebrated together in this great venue called City of Basel and it's suburbs comprising three nations. But now? The first you will have to get through after worship is a long journey by bus. And on this bus, the spiritual and emotional island called European Taizè meeting with it's great people will disappear on the horizon. You are still filled with cheer and joy about these great once-in-a-lifetime experiences you made-but – as you all know:

These experiences will soon be a thing of the past. It will be a very unique part of your very own, unique make-up of your very own personality. Unique-unequivocally inexchangeable. You can be humbly proud of it-thanking the Lord to be part of this pilgrimage of trust. Your very own past.

Yet you might start feeling alone after a maybe tearful farewell. All this positive, warm –hearted energy that comes with a Taize-meeting and it's beautiful people, which we have been fed with, is now changing into a melancholic feeling-you can even call it grief. All these great people!

And your thoughts go out to those you met during these days: Vladimir from Belorus-this charming guy-so warm and so nice, whom I met at a workshop and who opened my eyes on various aspects of the Russian Orthodox Church –gone. He is on his way home. Will I ever see him again?

Roger from Ireland-this funny person and great guitar player whom I met on the train and spent the whole day with, having long, deep conversations about very intimate things-gone, he is on his way home. Will I ever see him again ?

Anna and Sophia from Germany-these two lovely and kind sisters, who I shared a good time of laughter with and who stepped forward to help out whenever they could-even reading a psalm in front of the congregation-gone on their way home. Will I ever see them again ?

And Basel disappears from your and you are on way on the long journey back home-the old thoughts might come to-or at you. Daily life will be kicking back in.

And these old thoughts are: Will I be able to meet the expectations my job holds on me? Will I make the numbers I am required to make to make ends meet? Will I achieve the requirements needed to pass my exam? Will I be able to keep my relationship with my boy-or girlfriend or marriage? Will my loved Ones-will myself be healthy in 2018? And what about the unpredictable?

And above all: Will there be peace?

These old thoughts will come back from their-from your holiday called European Taizé-meeting with all might-mixed with grief about the loss of the friends I have just gained.

You, I, we can not escape them. They are part of our lives. Yet-be assured-you don't travel alone. You don't resettle into daily life alone. You don't struggle alone. Not you, not Vladimir, not Roger, not Anna, not Sophia-not anyone.

Jesus says-I am the good shepherd. You met the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep right here in the City Basel while you were meeting your likeminded faithmates-now new friends, no matter what denomination or country they were from.

You met the good shepherd who is bringing the good news to you when attending the prayers, the bible studies and the workshops-you met the good shepherd in and with Vladimir, Roger, Anna, Sophia, Barbara, Lukas, Rosmarie, the good soul of the kitchen, with Deacon Wolfgang, Brother Alois and all the others involved.

You met the good shepherd who is healing the sick when you were talking about your worries and sorrows to strangers who in a short time became good friends-and when you laid them down on the cross in St. Jacobs Hall and other places.

You met the shepherd who feeds the hungry when you stayed with your generous host families.

And now the good shepherd will be coming with you on our journey home to shepherd you through your daily struggles knowing that a Taizé gathering is the exception of the rule of life.

But there are no rules without exceptions.

Exceptions are to equip you for the rules. This is why God created the Taizé community.

And while you are busy with your daily struggles-you are invited to remind yourself of the shepherd.

If you have one of these Taizé-crosses-just grab it-and feel it. And if you have a Bible-just read a little part of scripture. Maybe you can even make it part of your daily routine.

And then you remember these great few days –and through these memories you hear Jesus speak to you : « I am the shepherd. YOUR shepherd.

God has anointed me –now I am anointing you. Let me take your hand. I teach you, I guide you, I nurture you.

You are a child of God.

You are my child. You make a difference.

You, Vladimir, Rosmarie, Barbara, Laurenz, Frederik, Fredi, Evelyn, Madleine, Anna, Nathan, Sophia have this unique personality, which has been enriched with this spiritual and emotional experiences that I granted you all to have and make in Basel. I love each and every one of you. »

And the Lord goes on speaking to you: And now be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for I, the Lord, your God, will be with you, wherever you go.”

And while you are reflecting about it-your phone might peep-and you get a text from Vladimir-or Barabara saying « Wasn't it great? » Yes, it was. And you text back. „I was thinking of you just as were thinking of me.“

My dear friends from all across Europe: It was an honor for us to host you. You were great, loving guests. You are unique people. Loving and friendly. Knowing that you are existing brightens up me up when thinking about our future.

Be assured that we from Dornach pray for you to have a blessed and safe safe trip back-and that will keep a place for you in our hearts and minds.

You are beautiful, you are unique children of God!

May the Lord give us peace.

Amen