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Letter No. 19 Spring 2008

*“They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people and I will be their God.”
Ezekiel 11:18-20*

Dear friends,

Ronda is a beautiful town in the mountains of Andalusia, 90 minutes from Malaga. However, that day the clouds were threatening rain and there was a chill in the wind. It was Easter week, and we were standing with a large crowd awaiting the procession. In the distance we observed an image of Christ crucified, carried by about 40 men with their faces covered. Others, including children, walked in front and behind the image, wearing hats and veils, seemingly like the Ku Klux Klan (the meaning of which we have yet to discover). The image was followed by women in traditional Spanish mourning outfits. At last, the most revered image came into view... a large, highly-decorated image of Mary, carried in the same manner as Jesus. As she passed, many in the crowd crossed themselves. People, in general, dressed up to watch the procession, and the restaurants were full to capacity in this little town. The *ayuntamiento* (town council) were worried, however, as the hotels were only 80 per cent occupied, 20 per cent less than the last year.



These processions are well known during *Semana Santa* (Holy Week), with Malaga holding four-five a day, each day of the week, and a final, large procession on Resurrection Sunday. Each procession represents a *Cofradía*, a 'brotherhood' of people with responsibility for caring for the image in the year and organising the procession, with the Sunday procession including a small number from each *Cofradía* in the city. As much as we try to understand and reflect on what we have seen, we can't help wondering what much of the symbolism has to do with the real meaning of Easter. We also feel sad that the Sunday procession, although large and with images of the resurrected Christ and a more glamorous Mary, had fewer people coming to watch. In Spain, the emphasis remains on Mary and on Christ crucified.

Almost a year

May 22 will mark a year since our arrival to Spain. The time has gone fast, and on a practical level we are now feeling much more 'at home' in Malaga, although still find that we know few people. It remains quite hard to build friendships, and people seem unsure of why we are here. A summary of this time would be: the first seven months as adaptation – getting to know people and grappling with different cultural and work expectations; the following months we increased in confidence with the ministry, and began to gain people's trust. We have realised this to be a key factor here in Spain: people trust you depending on the length of time you invest here and by watching how much you are willing to adapt.

This year we have also been amazed at, and encouraged by, the generosity, packages, phone calls and letters from churches and individuals. Thank you, too, to all those who helped towards a car which has been indispensable for our needs and flexibility in ministry. We are very touched by your kindness. Just over a year ago we thought it would be almost impossible for us to come to Spain due to the lack of financial support but thanks to many one-off gifts, we are here.

Unfortunately, we have just discovered, according to our latest budget update, that we ended the year in deficit. We are praying for God's provision to bridge that deficit and meet our needs for this year, particularly through committed, regular giving by individuals who feel able, including those in our link churches. Please contact us or CMS's Paul Read (paul.read@cms-uk.org and 01865 787400) if you would like to give regularly.

Conference

In January, we attended a conference with the leaders of El Centro Cultural, Andres and Ruth. The conference was about work in the Mediterranean region. It was a time of real blessing and refreshment for us as a family, and a time of strengthening our relationship with Andres and Ruth. We had opportunities to share our experiences and get to know workers in other countries, including Morocco, Tunisia, Ceuta and Melilla.

Visitors

A few friends have visited us since December, either staying with us or making the time to see us while on holiday. Felipe's parents also stayed with us in March, a real blessing as they had never met Aaron, now two years and four months old, and could finally converse with Sarah. They did a lot of bonding with the grandchildren, and we celebrated Sammy's fifth birthday together. This November, CMS will also be organising a small group to come and see the work here for a week (let us know if you'd be interested).

From each of us

Felipe: Being in leadership at the Centro Biblico, and with trust growing, please pray for wisdom in sharing our ideas for change within the team. I may also visit Morocco in the coming months.



Sarah: Language is finally at a conversational level, although still greatly flawed. Language lessons continue to confuse me, much to my frustration. I enjoy my English teaching, which has also provided time to share my faith and one girl is now interested in reading the Bible with me. Making friendships remains difficult though and the motivation to change this is hard to find at times.

Sam: School is going well, with a new teacher who has helped him enjoy drawing and reading. He can now speak quite a lot of Spanish, in the present tense, and easily switches between the two languages. We have applied to change school in September and pray that God opens/closes the door as he sees fit.

Aaron: Sammy is his role-model (for good and bad) and he continues learning new words. He likes climbing and dressing up, particularly like Spiderman. Glenis left in February, but a new girl from Honduras, Mavis, now looks after the boys two afternoons a week.

Going home

In July and August we are returning to the UK to visit family and churches. Sarah returns first with the boys and then Felipe at the end of July. We have very kindly been offered a car to use, and ask prayer for safety and endurance in our travels, especially for the boys. One aim is to spend time with Sarah's parents, as things have become more difficult for her mother, for which we ask your prayers. We also have new link churches in London and York, and will visit a few other churches as well (we have 15 supporting churches, so plan to visit a number each summer).

Please pray for this time as we share the vision that God has given us, praying for our need for further, regular financial support and as we strengthen our relationships with those of you partnering with us

Prayer and praise points:

Praise for...

- Sarah and Sams' improved Spanish
- A lovely visit with Felipe's parents
- The blessing of a car

- So many, faithfully praying for us
- Opportunities to share God's love.

Please pray for ...

- A divine decision regarding the best school for Sam
- Our summer furlough – endurance and inspiration in our visits, and safety in travel
- Sarah's parents
- Wisdom in sharing the gospel with those we meet
- Financial support
- Friendships.

Updates: We are trying to send out more frequent, email updates to those who are interested. If you would like to receive these, and haven't already, please let us know.

With love and prayers, as we continue serving the RISEN Christ.

Felipe, Sarah, Sam and Aaron.



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