

From Father Nicolaie Atitienei, Executive Director of St. John's Mission



And upon those in the tombs, bestowing life

Angela hadn't come often to the Mission. She was here a few times with her friend, who is a younger sister for us, and likes to push a stroller with a baby doll inside. The doll has a name, and often has an IV in its arm, having just come out of the hospital, as our young friend claims.

Angela and this young sister (photo, p. 6) were friends living together. Even when Angela would not come, our younger sister would tell us of their struggle sharing a room. Their relationship was remarkable; they were so different physically, and yet so much alike in many ways.

Angela died last October, our little sister said. She died alone in her apartment, and her body was found days after, a reminder of how many people die alone today. Her obituary said she died peacefully in her sleep. A young person died peacefully in her sleep, and her body was found many days later...this is the icon of the broken community we all live in today. Why does a young person end up dying peacefully in her sleep? Is this the peace that we all desire? Is this the peace we are looking for? Was she sick? Did anybody know? Not our little sister. She received the news months later, even though she might have been Angela's closest friend.

This is not the first death of this kind we hear about at the Mission. People die alone or in their sleep, through overdose or euthanasia, and so on. With no burial. We remember the death of John, who was taken to the hospital, and his only friend heard nothing of him any more. John probably died in the hospital, with nobody bothering to know what really happened. And shortly after, new tenants moved into his apartment. The eyes

of his friends, who visited the Mission during Lent, told us of this pain, when nobody bothers to tell the poor that their brother or sister just died.

News about people dying suddenly has become the norm at the Mission, as has news that they were rarely attended to, or remembered after. They were hidden from the eyes of the world, and their memory is fading away, because people never really learned their name.

We know so much today and have access to so much information, becoming experts in geopolitics and economic theories and moral compasses that we keep in the small pockets close to our chest. But somehow, we are clueless that young people die "peacefully in their sleep" in Toronto.

We are missing something in our lives, and we don't know what it is. It might be that we are missing the people who died alone, though we somehow try to remember them now with a new feeling, with a genuine emotion we cannot define. Angela's death does not necessitate judgment for this time or for our broken society. Blame is not needed, nor for people to be guilty. For this generation, it is already late, but what is needed is for somebody to care, to take it to heart and say aloud to her that Christ is risen! She won't have to rejoice alone when the Bridegroom is coming to her tomb to give her eternal life. The salvation of one is joy for many. Alone or together, we must proclaim that. Christ is risen!

— Father Nicolaie

Love, love, love

I've been involved with the beautiful community of St. John's for over a year. This was our first Holy Week here as a family, with my wife Alia and baby daughter Numa (on the cover). I am grateful for these special liturgies together. It can be difficult for us as new parents, and especially for my wife as a breastfeeding mother, to be out in public for long periods. We never wish to cause a disturbance or be disrespectful. At the Mission we are supported with accommodations, encouragement, positivity, and love.

We're not exceptional; this is simply the spirit of the Mission. I've been privileged to serve in many ways at St. John's. No matter the occasion, involvement is encouraged, and whether it is someone familiar or a new face, the expression of love is the same. We've received many gifts from friends and strangers alike - love and support, great experiences and conversation, and gifts for Numa. I'm thankful for the many blessings, lessons, growth, support, and love always on offer to all.

— Tyler

I think I cannot do anything less; I shouldn't ask for anything more

When I started volunteering at St. John's, I was looking for experience to help me get a job. I applied all over for volunteering, but only here I received a response. It was my last option.

I was a bit nervous, because I am introverted and not likely to talk



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Carlos, at St. John's

much. However, from the moment I arrived, people greeted me warmly. On my first day, Linda gave me orientation, and Ozzy shared Turkish desserts. My first real conversation was with Sudharshan during tea-time.

I began in the kitchen, where Sudharshan became my first friend at St. John's. I met others, too, whom I appreciate to this day: Mohamed, Nikita, Mihael, Jeff, KC, Patrick, Sandra, Kaity, and Abraham. I enjoyed volunteering more and more, partly because I met non-Spanish-speaking friends with whom I could practice my English, and because I had not been exposed to Orthodox Christianity.

I was surprised how similar it is to my own religion. I saw the pictures on the walls, but I didn't pay attention until later. The depiction of the multiplication of the loaves astonished me – exactly what we were doing, sharing food with the hungry. I thought the painting at the chapel entrance was of three angels contemplating the presence of God inside, but it is God Himself, sharing a meal with Abraham and Sarah. God is also at the table with us when we invite Him in by saying grace. That is overwhelming.

I went back to my country for a time. On returning, I visited the Mission to see my closest friends, Sandra and Sudharshan. I kept volunteering, mostly because of them. Sometimes decisions turn out to be God's will.

Some months after my return, my life turned 180°, and I moved into the

community house. Since then, many people have told me how surprised and thankful they are for the way I work at St. John's – volunteers, members of the community, and guests. But I think I cannot do anything less; I shouldn't ask for anything more. They gave me a place to live and food to eat. Literally, they kept me alive. Nothing can repay the gift of another day.

Living and working here made me realize how little I understood St. John's. It's not only about feeding the hungry, but also about feeding seeking souls.

People find God here. People find friends who care. Living at Lourmel House, I found a family in Christ, each person with their own role, with whom I can share a meal and talk about the day and week.

I don't know if God planned this when I decided to come to Canada, but I know I've been blessed with an opportunity not everyone has. It's up to me whether I make the most of it.

— Carlos

Pope Francis



Francis and Bartholomew (CNS)

"A precious brother in Christ," and "a true friend of Orthodoxy," Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew said on the falling asleep of Francis, the bishop of Rome. "Throughout these twelve years of his papacy, he was a faithful friend, companion, and supporter of the Ecumenical Patriarchate...He left behind an example of genuine humility and brotherly love."

In 2020 Pope Francis gifted our community with a relic of St. John the Evangelist, as a sign of blessing for the witness of the Mission among the poor in Toronto.

Where's my picture?

Amelia broke her hand over the summer. It took longer to heal than expected, partly from re-injuring it on the crowded TTC.

However, even with her hand in a cast, she used the other to paint or draw for us every week. "A picture," as she puts it. More precisely, one from the Sunday Gospel. The picture stays all week on the kitchen door, so people can see it. It's a way to remind us our struggles in life have a purpose, and the struggle leads to beauty and new life. And that there is a promise we kept forgetting about...

"Where's my picture?" asks Amelia every week. She needs to see something before she starts her work. Something that was painted before, so she does not re-invent things. She's been doing this for more than six months, gifting us with beauty and truth every week, so everybody can see it and have no defence against it. She does not know it but the Mission's visitors receive her gift.

Thank you, Amelia (her photo is on p. 6), for your gift that helps us see beauty mingled with truth, posted on the kitchen door.

For the poor man is God

St. Maximos, in his *Mystagogy of the Churdn*: "For the poor man is God." This sums up the mystery of the Incarnation, in its temporal implications and in its future unfolding in glory. For the poor man is Christ, the Incarnate Logos. Within this statement, of Maximos lies the whole Christian life and the destiny of humanity.

Maximos is a genius of theological thought, and in this simple phrase is a flowering of the certainty proclaimed by the Council of Nicaea. With its 1,700th anniversary this year, Patriarch Bartholomew exhorts us to "restart from Nicaea," reminding us that the First Ecumenical Council proclaimed the doctrine of the Incarnation. In Jesus, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, God became human. Nothing more can be said or known apart from this truth. In Christ, God

is never without man, nor man without God.

Jesus tells us two things will endure until the end of the age: the poor are always with us (in Matthew, Mark, and John), and he is always with us until the end of time (Matthew 28:20). At the end of the age, what will be revealed? Maximos teaches that all the nations will have to face that "the poor man is God." The Incarnation is not an esoteric religious construct, nor revelation of new ritualistic rules, nor re-working of human power structures. The Incarnation, Maximos says, is God joining himself completely to suffering humanity. God embraces what makes us, in our eyes, unacceptable to him.

Early Fathers saw this. John Chrysostom: "When we help a poor person, God becomes indebted to us." In the little-known 'Theology of Social Justice,' the Cappadocian Fathers speak of the poor as the Body of God.

St. Maximos says, in perfect conversation with the Gospels, the tradition of early Fathers, and the universal teachers of the church: "For if the Word has shown that the one who is in need of having good done to him is God – for as long, he tells us, as you did it for one of these least ones, you did it for me – on God's very word, then, he will much more show that the one who can do good and who does it is truly God by grace and participation because he has taken on in happy imitation the energy and characteristic of his own doing good."

If the poor man is God, it is because of God's condescension in becoming poor for us, and in taking upon himself – through his own suf-

Needs list – can you help?

- sugar, jam, pancake mix, syrup
- oil, herbs, spices
- pasta, rice, lentils
- men's socks
- XL disposable gloves, aprons
- bleach, shampoo, soap (dish, bars, liquid)



fering – the sufferings of each one. "Until the end of time," always suffering mystically out of goodness in proportion to each one's suffering, Maximos concludes after profoundly expounding on the Incarnation.

Blaise Pascal rephrases Maximos: "Christ is on the cross until the end of time." A modern theologian comments on this text of Maximos by saying: "In Jesus the eschaton become immanent, for in him the suffering of all is found; in his person, in his historical place in time, he has taken up all of time and revealed its end and leads it to transcendence. It is finished – it is ended – the end truly has come in Jesus.... He took on the poverty which sin established so the plentitude of divinity can be all in all."

In the future life, we will contemplate in eternal bliss the Trinity, through the face of "the poor man who is God." The Gospel teaches us that we don't enter eternal life by walking over Lazarus at our doorstep, or the beaten fellow left on our roadway.

It's more than that. The Incarnation, as Maximos understands it, reveals who God is, and who we are, in the poor man who is God. It is not about doing good for the less fortunate (deserving ones!) so that we earn heaven. Maximos' statement, with the urgency of a lover for his bride, sends us to the school of those who suffer at the margins. God becomes incarnate for us; our first step is accepting that we are only that, a poor man. No one is less than us, and the Incarnation occurs the only way it can.

By becoming the poor man, God saves each of us. But if I don't see the

poor man as God, neither will I recognize him in others, because I won't recognize Him in me. To live out of this realization that the poor man is God is to discover how much I am loved. And, loved not to be saved, but rather saved because I am loved. God becomes the poor man because this reveals who God is, who we are, and how we are saved and loved by him.

Maximos reminds us of the implications of God's Incarnation, "inhumanization" (ἐνανθρωπήσαντα), as the Nicene Creed professes. Yes, a renewal of faith, but also a practical rediscovery of what was, is, and will be true for ever: the flesh of the hungry, thirsty, homeless, and imprisoned, is the flesh of God the poor man.

At St. John's Mission, we seek each day to live practically the dogma Nicaea defined, with the Fathers of the Church, the saints, and in particular the church of the See of Andrew, the "mother church of Christ's poor."

Our Ecumenical Patriarch exhorts the church along with the whole of Christianity to rediscover the truth, this "fire" of Nicaea. May this fire confessed by St. Maximos again ignite the Christian witness of the Good News, of God's practical condescension.

Memory Eternal!

William Jaffray died in August,, 2024, aged over 100. He and his late wife Joyce were long-time residents of Scarborough, dedicating their lives to helping others. William wished to donate a cash legacy to charities, including St. John's.

We will keep William in our prayers, and ask anyone with a picture of him to share it with us.

You Can Help



Visit St. John's Bakery

- "Award-winning nonprofit social enterprise producing Toronto's best organic sourdough breads and sweets"
- Check out our baked goods, as seen on stjohnsbakery.com
- Visit 153 Broadview; leave happy

Volunteer

- Volunteers are the heart of what we do at St. John's
- Volunteer by yourself, or as a group
- Visit, phone or e-mail us to find out more, or tap the Volunteer button at the top of our web site

Donate goods

• Check the 'Needs list' box on page 5, and the longer list on our web site

Donate by cheque, or cash

Tax receipts are issued, as we are a Canadian registered charity

Donate on-line

- Make a no-fee donation using PayPal, single or recurring; pay by credit card, or your PayPal account
- Tap Donate now at the top of our web site
- CanadaHelps can also be used, but with a fee

Donate securities

- Plan donations in your will or life insurance policy
- Donate RRSP, RRIF, TFSA, stocks, real estate
- Donate through endowments, donor-advised funds, private foundations

Donate through your employer

• Your employer may offer (matching) donations through payroll deductions, as well as group volunteering



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Faces of St. John's

Front page — Fred, in front of the Mission on Broadview Avenue

This page, clockwise from top-right — Amelia (p. 3); two photos from our Lourmel House; Angela (left) and friend (p. 2); three photos from our Pascha 2025 play.







