

Seventh Sunday of Luke 27 October 2019

Tone 2

From today's gospel

And a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years and had spent all her living upon physicians and could not be healed by anyone, came up behind him, and touched the fringe of his garment; and immediately her flow of blood ceased. And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" ... "Someone touched me; for I perceive that power has gone forth from me."

...Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But taking her by the hand he called, saying, "Child, arise."

What is the power of touch that we all know? What comes out of us when we touch another human being? Is it unto death or unto life that we "shake our hands"?

On Thursday we went to see Kevin. He died a few weeks ago. They found him in the river after he was kicked out from his subsidized apartment because his term was up. Just a few days before his death, he was at the mission for breakfast. Joanna talked to him at length, she knew him well. I changed a few words with him before he left, reassuring me that the hockey season had just started and he had something to look forward to in the next year. I had seen him before in worse shape. He had been homeless before.

The coffin was closed on Thursday, so we could not touch him. To venerate and kiss his body. Probably because they took him out of the water, Joanna said. It was not easy to pray there, with the people from the funeral home coming to make sure we do not take over the funeral and with the silence being hijacked by a TV that was playing continuously. In spite of all that, when we touched the coffin while praying we could still feel the grace of his soul departing from earth to heaven and from death to life. There was always something good in Kevin, and we could still feel it in that moment. But not broken by suffering and addiction as we saw him in his earthly life, but with a goodness that finds his real home in God. And we were blessed to witness that: "Your hands have made and fashioned me."

There is something about touch that we miss to ponder in our earthly life. Even though it is so obvious. It is by touching that God brings us life. From the very beginning when He fashioned us with His hands, to now when we dwell in Hades. He takes us by the hand. Our hand which is used more with violence and rejection than with kindness and life. Maybe that's why it takes so much faith to receive His hand because ours usually hands out fear. And how much faith does one need in order to learn to trade that for love. On Thursday morning, a woman flipped out in the room because somebody tapped her on her shoulder. Screaming, she said nobody should touch her. She couldn't stand anybody touching her. The same week, another person wanted to ban a boy from coming to the mission because his gesture reminded him about his past. Fear was coming out through his eyes, anger through the eyes of the woman.

Life and death could come through touching. Love and violence. Building walls around ourselves, or closing our coffins; it is more like a bandage that keeps a wound from getting infected, but does not bring the healing we are all looking for. To learn to touch without fear we need to touch like Thomas first. To get reassured that the wounds of our deeds caused in others are healed in Christ's resurrection. They are visible on his body not as a sign of remembrance of our sin, but as a sign of his forgiveness for us. So we can touch what we cannot believe. That which we harm God takes unto him to return us joy, if we dare touch His hand.

## **Antiphon II**

Hand me not to the teeth of my enemies, O my Savior; for in the manner of a lion they come against me your servant.

## **Fioretti 1**

Mary is a poor soul. So poor that she has only God to rest in. She continues to surprise me every day. By dwelling with the just in our earthly home. By doing what she thinks it is good in every moment. What is necessary at the moment, as father said, so you can do everything with joy. She likes singing, I know that well, so on Thursday I reminded her about singing outside. She had sung with us the week before. Teaching us a song too. Not this week. She stayed inside. To do (touch?) dishes she said. Somebody has to do that and there was nobody else around. And she said that with peace: like Mary who was listening to Christ's word and did it, and not like Marta, out of need for more work.

## **Antiphone III**

Let those who live for God not stretch forth their hands in unlawful acts; for Christ does not suffer His lot to be oppressed by the rod of sinners.

## **Fioretti about young Christians 2**

Young people dread being dragged to church. I heard that from someone this week. He said he liked church, but he stopped going because in his country (South Korea), as well as in his community here, every time you talk with somebody from church they try to convince you to come on Sunday. And besides all this, they build all these big churches and ask for money continuously. In the past, in South Korea, the church was vulnerable and people suffered for their faith. That's why people came to church. It was real. He comes here because nobody tried to convince him of anything. He feels free and not cornered.

We did not do that on purpose, I need to confess, I always thought about him as a modern young man with no interest in religion. Because he never comes to pray with us. He is only cutting butter, doing dishes and painting icons with Br Luke.

His story proved right the next day, unfortunately for me. I managed to chase out of church another young man who asked me about St. Anthony the great. He had the same name and he told me he was a Christian. When I showed him his icon, he asked me if the chapel was for real and whether we held services or we just kept it like that. I told him it was real and that he could use it anytime he wanted and he could also come on Sunday if he wanted to see more. That very same very moment he disappeared from my sight.

Today, Jesus touches the hand of the young girl to bring her to life. We need to learn first kindness and freedom in order to relate with young Christians. They are not spiritually dead. It is just us approaching them with fear. That is what keeps them away.

## **Sixth Sunday of Luke 20 October 2019**

### **Tone 1**

*From today's Gospel Luke 8:26-39*

“Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind...”

There is buried anger that surfaces every time someone takes the veil off of our eyes stopping us from pretending to be blind. Within the resurrection, through Christ descending into hell, the hell becomes angered. And the anger grows.

A continuous stage of anger that does not push us to reach out in darkness to Christ, it does not bring good news for those in captivity. Ignorance is not a virtue, but a sin that makes you forget God and the life he gifted us with. When we come out of it we are angry. It doesn't really matter which side we are on in the debate. “We live in Babylon” and we think this is holy land. Even in a broken community like ours, where there is unity, we could not become aware and awaken without being frustrated and angered. We are like a body full of itchy sores that touch each other, becoming deeper and more painful. When we behold the sores of Babylon that were uncovered on Wednesday, we see no hope. When we hear that people choose to complete their life through death instead of receiving the hand of Christ, bearing the marks of the healed wounds. They refuse His hand, offering to take them back to life, but rather, being alive ask for another hand to bring them death. Not because of pain, but because life is completed in death? Babylon used to take people in captivity. And then, by the river, people would weep, remembering Zion. Today we made our way there. Forgetting to sing with joy, asking instead for something in return. This is not going to end up well even though it is legal.

We are set against each other every time we talk about this. Some out of pain and frustration of having to listen again and again to lies presented as truth. And to be forced to keep quiet about it when children around you are being hurt. On the other side, to suffer and to feel that your suffering matters for no one. And to try to end the suffering by adding more bruises to your soul and body, until one or the other collapse.

How do we get out of it?

On Wednesday, in the chapel, we listened to the gospel. It was about the evil that gets into the herd of swine, pushing them to run over the cliff. We remembered from the gospel the young man who was staying by Jesus' feet after he was healed. This is what we remembered and tried to keep with us. And, when asked what this meant for them, people said (all of them innocent souls):

“When I am sad, I go to a quiet place and I talk. I talk to God.” Another said. “This is church.” And the last completed: “God never abandons us. He will forever be with us. We need to be patient and to trust.”

P.N.

*From Psalm 79 and 81*

O lord God of hosts, make us to return and cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

They have not known, nor understood; they walk in darkness. Let all the foundations of the earth be shaken.

I said: Ye are gods, and all of you the sons of the Most High

But like men ye die, and like one of the rulers do ye fall.

O lord God of hosts, make us to return and cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

*From today's Anthiphon (I and III Mode 1)*

Ceaseless does divine longing become in those who dwell in the wilderness, outside of the futile world as they are.

Because they said to me, let us journey to the courts of the Lord, my spirit has been cheered, and my ear rejoices.

### Fioretti

How can you be patient when you are longing ceaselessly in the wilderness? By singing?

This past Thursday brother Luke took us outside to sing on the street. Without asking anything in return, we sang. It was cold, people were walking by us with their headphones on and we disturbed them with songs. The song of Sion in a strange land. Joy in the neighborhood of sorrows. We reminded each other that life is good. And it was also good that most of the people did not get angry at us. On the contrary. Some took off their headphones, others smiled, others showed the desire to sing with us. By the river, when asked to sing a song of joy, out of sorrow you refuse because of the strange land. By the fountain, in front of the mission, when nobody asks you anything, to sing about joy is essential in order to remember that our longing is eternal, since it will eventually rest in Christ.

## **Sunday of the 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council 13 October 2019**

### **Tone 8**

### **Antiphon I**

“From my youth does the enemy tempt me, and with the pleasures he scorches me. But trusting You, O Lord, monumentally do I defeat him. Let the haters of Zion become as the grass is before it is plucked up.”

A “fleur du mal” is not a fioretti. I think the expression belongs to Baudelaire, a French poet who wrote, as people might say today, a “dark poetry”, seeing beauty in what was not pleasant to the eye. I read a few of his poems when I was younger and I cannot say I disliked them. On the contrary. But they were not what we sometimes call at the mission “fleurs du mal”. At the mission, as in our lives, we sometimes come across situations that torment us. Or people who cannot help but try to hurt others. How do we receive them? What do we do? There is no kindness in violence as there is no love in hate. And no victory in war that is “fought” with weapons. So where is the flower, where is the beauty? What type of seed sprouted something that brings about harm? There is an ongoing temptation either to pretend that it does not exist, letting it grow and develop, or to approach it in a type of relationship that seduces you, by giving you the illusion of a good fight, with a clear desire “to take your soul away by not giving anything in return” (C.S. Lewis).

Our relationship is only with God and each other. It needs nourishment and patience, demanding all our attention and care. We recently had people return at the mission after having been banned. Some returned after the time of banishment had expired, others tried to sneak in. If people return with no intentions, things are easier. But most of the time they return for payback. How can you have a relationship with them in this situation? The right way is to have forgiveness for each other, but until then, it is better to stay afar. It is important to remember the pain of God when we don’t repent; to think of His patience and suffering when we fail to love; when we hurt each other; to remember His endurance beyond anything else. Where everything perishes His mercy endures forever. It is also good to remember our suffering when we are away from Him, the pain and the longing that is present in every human heart. We need to refuse to look at the “mal” that is seductive but to come closer to the suffering and to the brokenness of the heart. And, if nothing else, we need to remember this in prayer.

P.N.

## **Antiphon IV**

Behold, what is so good or so delightful as for brothers to reside together? For in this has the Lord promised life everlasting. He who so adorns the lilies of the field commands not to be concerned about one's own raiment.

### ***Fioretti***

For a long time, I have not seen people leaving money on the icon at church (and I do not think that all of us should do that either). But on Friday, before the prayer, the gesture had a different meaning when done by a homeless woman, who had walked all night on the street trying to spot a shelter. She left a coin, as an offering, she said. I knew she had no money to take the TTC. As she had no place, no papers, no family, not even a refugee status to which she is legally entitled. Someone who has nothing brings to God what she has. Everything. And this is not about money. All morning I called different shelters to try to find some hope for her and I got just a tiny taste of what it means to be abandoned in the city. In the middle of all that rejection she gives thanks to God and makes an offering. When I talked to her, she would not blame anybody, but just pray to God to keep her sane in all this nonsense. "And He has done it, so far." She said again smiling.

## **Third Sunday of Luke – 06 October 2019**

### **Tone 7**

Justina and Cyprian were celebrated on Wednesday, Oct 2. Both of them were coming within the church with a past where the cult of idols mingled together with magic. Justina's father was serving the idols as a sacerdot, while Cyprian was using magic and demons to go about his business.

It was Justina who encountered Christ and through her, her family came to light. The light of Christ, being all baptized. Cyprian followed them, after he tried unsuccessfully to seduce Justina, for a foolish man who had paid for his services. He was baptized after he realized that the magic and the demons' help he was using were totally ineffective on Justina. Eventually Cyprian becomes a bishop and ordains Justina as a deaconess and both of them undertake martyrdom. To witness together the love that God has for us.

The same day I talked to one of our volunteers who experienced torture for being a Christian back in his native country. Now he can hardly walk, having been paralyzed in a hospital for a long time. While talking to me he showed me his fingers. How deformed they looked from being beaten and broken. His story resembles somehow the life of Justina. He too had a father who was serving idols back home. No metaphor here. He was generating a lot of revenue with that. People who were fighting for power would come to him for his craft. He was a celebrity. His son, our volunteer, was going to be his successor. Everything was arranged, only that when the time came, the son did not want to undertake serving the idols. Because he was a Christian. He refused to take his father's place. To inherit all the power and the business from his parent. And then they tortured him. He did not tell me how he escaped. Only that he was hospitalized for a long time with no certainty that he was ever going to walk again. He left behind him the terror but also his family with whom he cannot even talk now. And he ended up in Toronto. Completely alone, ready for another type of torture. No place to stay here, no work because of his physical disability and no community. Loneliness here, he said, is unbearable, ready to kill what the torture was not able to do back home, the hope. When he talked to me he looked more afraid for what his life was going to look like from here on than for what he had experienced back home. It is not unusual for the martyrs to get from one witness to another one. Just to help us see something that our eyes cannot.

On Friday, two days after we had spoken, he visited us again. To help us cut butter for the bakery. And to pray with us and for us. We did the Jesus prayer together in the chapel. To conclude at the end that sometimes, the only thing we have is prayer. And God. And everything we can do is to witness this to each other.

Fioretti

Lately, outside the mission, I tend to avoid looking for people I know from our community. Because we sometimes happen to get all kind of reactions for different reasons. Especially after the events that happened lately. People are different outside of church and sometimes they dislike you sincerely (Even though I got sworn at both within and outside the church). I can totally understand that and I don't get upset about it. We try to build relationships with each other and learn to care. But we fail most often than not. And then most of the blame falls on you. Which at the ends sounds pretty fair.

On Friday I met in a specific ethnic store with one of our homeless community members. He is neither a Muslim nor a Christian, he says, but he likes God. He was going to spend the night at McDonalds or at Tim Horton's because the shelters had too much sickness he said, which is not real sickness but a strange one that gets under your skin and harms you for a long time. He has an interesting story. A lost son with no family and no country to return to. He is Kurdish. He wants to leave Canada but where to go? And where he wants to go, they cannot deport him (Irak). After having said all this, he refused to let me go before buying dinner for me and Mihaela. What a joy that brought to my heart! After sharing the meal together he thanked us for eating his food and then we each went on our ways. There is no better food in the world than the one offered to you by a homeless man. Who has no country either?