

St. John the Compassionate Mission — Sunday Bulletins, November 2019

Thirteenth Sunday of Luke 24 November 2019

Tone 6

From today's gospel (Luke 18:18-27)

"But when he heard this he became sad, for he was very rich."

Ps 41 *"Why are thou cast down, O my soul? And why dost thou disquiet me?"*

These things have I remembered, and I poured out my soul within me, for I shall go to the place of the wondrous tabernacle, even to the house of God, with a voice of rejoicing and thanksgiving, yea, of the sound of them that keep festival.

The celebration of our volunteers this year looked like a real feast. It looked like "nothing was missing", as br. Luke said. It was the other way around from how we normally feel in our earthly life. When the more we take the more we feel like missing something. Something essential. Something vital for our life. Something we cannot live without. The more we take and we get, the more we miss deeply from within our heart. And we get sad altogether. The rich for missing the poor, the poor for being abandoned, the children for missing running free around the adults, the elderly for missing the voice of children, the healthy ones for not comforting the sick, the sick for not being cared for; those who are satisfied for taking too much from the hungry and the hungry from fasting without freedom. Forced by life to find comfort only in prayer. Because something that we cannot pinpoint has broken us apart.

After leaving the festival I felt gratitude for not being sad for whatever reason. For learning to taste the joy with others. For dancing and singing and eating and praying. As a community, with people who are young and old, poor and rich altogether, "healthy" or on ODSP, relying on Ontario Works or retired from a lawyer firm, with PhD's or without much school. Those who can sing and those who don't have a voice sang a song of joy to St. John, our patron saint. And dancing together, while nobody seemed to know what they were doing, but somehow that did not bother anyone. (I knew people in the room who never danced in public or alone, because they were too shy. During the celebration that came naturally to them).

We all had a taste of the treasure in heaven. What really takes away our sadness. We were blessed with the taste of it, because the poor were invited first. It was through their love that we were able to come together. They who love without judging and give without receiving. A festival of the church, where Christ is the head we say, but forget to mention that they are the heart. So all the members of the body could rejoice together for not being scattered anymore. And all of this starts when we remember that we have a heart.

Luke 14: 12-14

"When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they also might invite you in return and that will be your payment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Fioretti: Job fair - St Onesimos looking for a job

Even among the poor, there are some who are looking for the lowest seat at the feast. Jesus tells us to do that so through humility to be exalted. And not the other way around. Many people who came to the feast would have rather hid in the chapel. Or in a corner out of our sight. Just like S. After she worked all day on Thursday and Friday, decorating the room and painting the pictures for the volunteers, she did not find herself worthy even to partake of the food. She would have left hungry if somebody would not have brought her a plate.

She is a lonely refugee woman with no right to a health card. No right to work and be cared for. She is in need, among other things, of a job that would pay her cash. Because she is kept captive here with no rights yet. Like an old slave bearing the name Onesimos before meeting St. Paul. Whom, by chance, we celebrated the same day, on Nov. 22nd.

Ninth Sunday of Luke 17 November 2019

Tone 5

From today's gospel: Luke 12:16-21

"...But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?..."

From Antiphone III

In the Holy Spirit, as in the Father and the Logos, is the principle of life; from Him is every living being endowed with a soul.

Our homeless volunteer, Ricky, who suffered physical torture for being a christian back home, in Africa, talked to us on Wednesday about the way he prays, when we were reading today's gospel in the chapel. "I pray to God that he does not give me things that I cannot share", he said. Maybe that's why we had to find him a pair of winter boots size 1 (otherwise he would have had to share them, if he prayed to receive them). He did not ask for them. We saw that he was in need.

He also told us an African story about a poor child who, being thirsty, knocked at a door for water, but in return he got milk from the lady who opened the door. Quenching not only the boy's thirst but also his hunger with her act of kindness. After some years, the lady got really sick and, being poor, she was refused treatment in the hospital. The boy who received the milk from her, being a doctor now, did the surgery without being paid and saved her life. Remembering her kindness, the boy did the same thing for her.

He told us all this just to underline his belief that today's gospel is about not sharing. That's what brings about death. We build a tomb out of our riches if we do not share. What we have and what we don't have. In the light of his story, this seems to be true. The soul of the lady remained with her because of her kindness. Eventually she gave more than what she was required of her. Milk instead of water. Because she was a caring soul.

There is a clear strictness in the gospel when it comes to "our own". Greed, to use only for oneself, is a sign of something dying and of a soul perishing. It is not a moral dilemma, rather a reality of life and a need of the soul. For the man not to bury in himself, in order for the soul to keep dwelling within the body. And so to learn dwelling with the just.

Any good thing in our life is from God. Any small and tiny thing felt within the heart or felt in others. And as little or much goodness as we might have in our life we are thirsty for more. When closing in the riches the one God bestows on us is like saying "this is enough". I've done my part. Either having too little or too much. To close out of pain or out of bounty.

By protecting our share though we take from others...But there is no share for us, only the body of Christ broken and distributed, whom he calls us to share. This is the life, who asks us to stay poor and hungry, to empty the barns and ourselves so we can receive the King of glory. Why perish alone, when all of us can have life abundantly in Christ?

WITH WINTER COMING, THE DESSERT IS COLD AND PEOPLE ARE IN NEED OF SLEEPING BAGS

Antiphon I

Blessed is the life of those who dwell in the desert, winged as they are by divine eros.

Our desert city is icy and cold. And windy and wet. Many homeless people asked me for sleeping bags that we don't really have right now. More people than I've seen before are now homeless, more people coming to us, just to sleep rather than anything else. People are tired and worn down. And winter just started. Is there anything else than the need to sleep and the desire to be left with yourself? On Wednesday, somebody who sleeps outside stayed with us for Bridges to reflect together on the temptation that the desert offers us. He spoke out of a deep pain from within his soul. One that knows the desert, as a place of loneliness. But where he finds God behind him. Being homeless, he says, "I never, never lived "without". Always having what I desired. I wanted a pack of cigarettes, I did not have one, but I would find enough butts just to make up for it. I did not have money to buy food being hungry but always finding a place to eat. Somehow God provides always. And I learned to trust that."

I thought to myself how this man, also being alone on the street, somehow ended up at Bridges, just to give us this witness. That the gospel is real and the Word is true. So we don't feel alone and abandoned in this desert city because of lack of faith and witness.

Eighth Sunday of Luke 10 November 2019

Tone 4

From Today's gospel, Luke 10:25-37:

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

I cried to You, O Lord, from the depth of my soul with fervor. Let Your divine ears be responsive to me (From Antiphon II at Orthros).

At the beginning of the week, I talked to a homeless person who told me a couple of stories about how he ended up half dead. And he showed me the scars left by a knife on his neck. From those who robbed him close to Regent Park a few years ago; just to prove his stories.

In both cases, no good Samaritan saved him. Once, it was by his own struggle he made it to life, the other time by "chance". He was taken to the dumpster, but the way the robbers left his body, strangely enough, it stopped the bleeding. So he ended up with life. More to live and more to suffer.

He told me other things, a part of his life, which I cannot share here, because of the deep wounds caused to his heart. So deep that he could not sit down while talking, even though tears came to his eyes. I was thinking how much more he can take. He was asking himself the same question. There was something though in his heart, and on his friendly face, deeper than any pain caused to him by people - life itself seemed to be here at fault too.

In these moments, here at the mission, we see what is the measure of hope and the value of life. From people who carry themselves out from the dumpsters because they have love for life. No joke here. He does not cling to life, but he loves it with all his being. The more he gets hurt the more he abandons himself to goodness. Like a blind person who has never seen the

light, but knows its brightness from the shortage of darkness. And from the noise that the light makes for those who cannot see it. Kindly enough just to make attentive his soul.

How do I know this? Because he told me: when he is deeply challenged and ready to give up he remembers Him (he points to the ceiling to show me). And besides this he loves his neighbor. Another poor soul robbed and mocked by other robbers. Who is on the brink of being terminated because of illness and abuse.

The good Samaritan sees life where others get stuck, searching endlessly with no "lack", for quality. To justify it. We, at times, do the same. Forgetting to rejoice, by getting sadder instead, at the view of what is broken. At what is missing or taken away from the beauty of life. In us or in others. The good Samaritan nurtures life where he sees it. Within himself and others, because he knows, like holy apostle Paul, that it is Christ who lives in us. And in his resurrection, even death remained with no dominion when confronted with a new life.

From holy apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians:

"it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

From Antiphon I

From the Holy Spirit every soul receives life, and through cleansing is lifted and brightened, in a hidden, sacred manner, by the trinal Monad.

Fioretti

How many times do we feel prayer is hard? How many times we promised to ourselves and to God that we'll find a way to meet each other?

Not for our friend. He said on Wednesday at bridges that he did not know he can pray so much. He realized this while panhandling on the street. And praying for those who would give him something. And he did not stop here. God gave him to pray also for those who are suffering in other parts of the world. Only if, he said, "if we could pray for them together". He knew about the situation in Hong Kong and Iraq. For those who suffer in the communist prisons. And how they treat young people there, with no mercy. Rodney, for those who know him, is not a talkative person. When he speaks he is always thoughtful and say things he thinks through. He never spoke about prayer before, even though he stayed a few times last year for compliance after bridges. I always had a silent admiration for him and for how he lived his life. He worked for 40 years as a support worker. Like a Samaritan paid poorly. And he lost his job when somebody complained about him. For not having enough strength anymore. He has now, as we know, a respectable age, which unfortunately does not qualify him to care for people. Because as a Samaritan, he needs to carry the one beaten or sick on the back of his donkey. And where there is no more strength, the good Samaritan would lose his job in Toronto. And when you lose everything, you start to pray. Because nobody can take Him away from you. And through Him, you start to care for others through prayer. For those who are locked in and beaten up. So they do not die alone when abuse happens. But under the vigil of a good Samaritan whose donkey was stolen in Toronto. A native guy panhandling on the streets of our city so he can learn to pray more. .

From Antiphons III and III

Whosoever has acquired hope in the Lord is superior to all whatsoever might grieve him.

Let my heart be lifted up unto You, O Logos; and none of the world's delights will entice me to be earthly-minded.

Fifth Sunday of Luke 03 November 2019

Tone 3

From today's antiphon

You rescued the captivity of Zion out of Babylon, O Logos; do also draw me up from the passions to life.

O Christ the Fruit of the womb, by the Spirit are the saints forever as adopted sons to You as to a father.

Gazing on your offspring round about your table bearing branches of good works, be glad, O arch-pastor.

Laura asked herself a question while walking on the street. And God answered her. As she was walking she was wondering who God was. And in the same moment a ladybug landed on her shoulder. And then she understood that this is the first touch of God. It was God talking to her and answering her question. This is who God is. His first touch, she said. These were her words. At times, when I share with others stories from people who come to the Mission, I try to see and tell them within the context of the Gospel. To look for their meaning. Now, listening to her I remained silent and confessed that to her. I needed to continue to listen to what she said, even after she had stopped talking. I just tried to remember her words. Now I am rather afraid, not to distort her words and change the meaning.

It took us two generations of saints, St. Silouan and St. Sophrony, in order for us to accept that God approaches us in humility, in kindness and that there is no violence in Him. Only the one we handed out Him on the cross and when we receive our daily bread. To pay something in return for his love. And here was Laura sharing with us, on a Wednesday evening, the first touch of God to our soul. As it was revealed to her, when the ladybug landed on her shoulder. You have to know and speak to Laura, to

see for yourself who she is, so you can really receive this witness with unwounded joy. But she spoke to us that evening about other things as well. About the fact that our church is lacking one thing: the children. Especially during the week. So we can listen to their joy. That Jesus wants children to come to him. And “you guys stop them”. And that the children need to be cared for, and that they should not be exposed to any kind of violence (she was not talking about the violence on TV or in video games but the real one, among ourselves). That we need to be careful and think that the children might be tempted too. Now and in the future.

All this was her answer to our reflection concerning people in captivity of a self sufficient society. The modern Babylon, or the same old Egyptian captivity. “*Where I did not know that I could not see/ Where I did not know who was hunting me*”. And the effect that this has on children. At the end of Bridges she said that she came that night just to let us know about the children and about what we lack...

The first touch of God. To remember it. So we can again listen to the voice of children playing freely within the church. The fruit of the womb, adopted through the spirit by Him as father. And if we complain that there are no ladybugs in winter, to look for flurries. They can bring gentleness to our soul if we do not overdress in winter. The first touch of God, who always comes first to those who long for the children. To heal the caregivers so they can hear the joy.

From today’s gospel (Luke 16:19-31)

...And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores...

On Friday afternoon, when the time looked like it had no escape from our hanging clock, paralyzed inside of it with no desire to move - a form of modern akedia, that leaked through the room from people who look for idle talk; an akedia, asking for prayer and stillness in order not to spread everywhere - I approached a homeless person who hang around the mission all day. Sleeping on the floor and on a chair: Peter. He was drinking a 2 litre bottle of coke by himself at the table (he later told me he was trying not to get dehydrated), when I approached him. He talked to me about the human soul. How the soul can also be affected by the affliction of the body. Because of the tribulation of life. But, he said, even if the soul is afflicted, this will not be held against it in front of the seat of God. I understood he was talking about the last judgement. I wanted to know more about the affliction of the soul but an old friend came to the table changing the conversation, before I could get all my answers. I did understand that while the soul is afflicted by our human interaction with each other, God approaches it with a lot of care. In the meantime another person from our community came, and Peter shared with him the last glass of coke so he would not fight dehydration by himself but joined by others. While I remembered a hymn sung during lent:

*“Do not turn your face away from me for I am afflicted
Hear me speedily, draw near unto my soul and deliver me”*