

Judgement Sunday/Sunday of Meatfare - 23 February 2020

Tone 3

From St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 8:8-13; 9:1-2

“... For if any one sees you, a man of knowledge, at table in an idol's temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ...”

From the Gospel According to Matthew 25:31-46

“...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me...”

How is it then to approach the dread judgement seat of Christ with a wounded conscience? With a wounded conscience that keeps you on the surface, because if you dare to go deeper, to look for the Word of God, pain will spread all around you. A bloody conscience that does not let you see and hear because of the pain that comes from a wound produced by others, who make the idols their companions for a longlife journey and eat with them. We all share a humanity that is living with an eating disorder, that's why Christ makes Himself food for us. To eat and drink with a clear conscience unto eternal life and not unto condemnation.

We are easily wounding our brother's conscience if we do not dare to look and receive healing for ourselves. “*And on my wound they added pain*”. How can we dare to listen to and then receive the Word of God with a wounded conscience? How can we and our brothers receive the blood of Christ if we are accustomed with the taste of vinegar while being on the cross. “*And for my thirst they give me vinegar to drink*” - It may take away the thirst but it does not give you life. This is what we know, to take the medication so we don't feel the pain when the wound gets deeper.

We cannot approach the last judgement with a wounded conscience if we do not remember the first time we were judged. When God brought us into being, and in His love He looked at us and He judged us telling us that we were very good. Like Ronny said at Bridges this past Wednesday, that he would like to be judged by others when he does good.

And then, the second time, while being on the cross when we beheld the “sorrow of our freedom”, when He said “*forgive them Father for they do not know what they do*”. And the Father listened to the prayer of his Son on the cross. And forgiveness starts to happen. And we learn to receive it so that the healing can take place.

The mercy of God is the oil poured on our wounded conscience. And as the healing takes place, then we can listen clearly to the Word of God. To learn slowly to listen to the joy of our freedom, and in this clarity not to despair when we come to our senses and see what we were doing. We need to learn to receive His forgiveness, to learn to forgive ourselves and in the end, in His love, to forgive each other for adding pain to a wounded God while He was on the cross.

Any sign of suffering in a human being lets us see something from the cross of Jesus.

*I am thirsty, hungry and naked. Now, with you being healed and forgiven what are you going to do to Me?* And we start to approach Him with fear and love and in humility we learn to comfort and feed and clothe Him so instead of adding pain to his wound we can add joy.

P.S.

This past Wednesday at Bridges, there was a moment of silence at some point, after an unexpected guest popped in the room.

A native man, whose pain was eased a little by alcohol, came in and sat on the ground, refusing a chair, while all of us were sitting around the table. Among us, there were four clergymen and a seminarian, along with other people from the community and young guests. The room became even more silent after the man spoke, answering the question of the night: does your conscience speak to you? He talked about his experience of

being abused by clergy as a child in residential school. The pain that came from that was deep. What followed were 18 years in prison for him. As a result of the pain, I guess.

He tried to reconcile with his life and he was not successful, up to a point when he realised, as he said, that only God was a real man (we had a similar quote running on our announcement board for the Nativity). All of us humans are not completed but broken. Rather like half men. This revelation came to him, he said, when he became a leader in his native community. Like a father figure for others. And he saw how much love and forgiveness people need in order to move on with their life. As a leader he learned to accept that and forgive their wrongdoings. In the end, this triggered in his own heart forgiveness for those who had harmed him during his childhood.

Healing and forgiveness do happen, if we dare to learn to care for others. Those whom Christ brings in our way. We cannot forgive and reconcile with our past and get ready for the judgement in the “future” if we do not start caring for real for the present.

*“Blessed are you, who opens a gate in every moment, to enter in truth or tarry in hell.”*

*(Leonard Cohen)*

It is real.

This past Thursday, I was given to listen for the second time to a relatively young person talking about the experience of being in hell. I remembered the first time had been a couple of years ago. This young man has been in jail and his body carries various signs of his testimony. His description was pretty impressive, mixing quotes from the bible with science theories to prove his point. At one point he mentioned there was some hope in hell. He did say they were separated by a gulf, but from hell, he said, you can see heaven. And then his face changed. He added he was there with his wife and his son. She is no longer here but he still cares for her soul. Having experienced hell and remembering his heaven, he started to cry. And for a moment, the remembrance of heaven and of those he loved was more real than the hell itself, which he is still experiencing in the present.

## **Sunday of the Prodigal Son - 16 February 2020**

### **Tone 2**

#### **From the Gospel According to Luke 15:11-32:**

*"There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them...*

*Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."*

#### **From St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 6:12-20**

*"You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body and in your spirit which belongs to God."*

It is not a small thing to see the scriptures fulfilled in our ears. It is everything we need in order to repent and confess the Truth. That's why it is good to remember when we are losing heart or faith that everything happens for the glory of God. And here in a broken community it is given to us to see and be amazed and to taste and see again how good the Lord is.

When the younger son asked for his inheritance, the father divided his livelihood to both of them. One of the sons spent it with harlots, the other one kept it for himself only. There is no love and generosity in either of them - at the beginning. In order to share with the father everything that he has and is given to you, you need to partake and live within this love. The father gives you everything he has, but you will receive nothing and become a stranger from him, if his love for you does not become, through you, generosity for others. To reconcile with God and each other, the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. A good son wants to become like the good father. And a good father waits with love for his son to come to his senses.

Simon is not waiting for anything. He showed me this week how much money he had in his pocket for the last week. 5¢ “You see what I have, but I did not spend anything because I don't need to. I have everything I need.” He told me this after I asked him where and how he lived. “In the neighborhood, on the street.” There is a store

somewhere up the street and the owner let him sleep at night at the back (outside) in a cupboard, a homemade shelter, on the condition that he packs everything in the morning and leaves nothing behind. He was telling me how grateful he was for that. He was grateful with no resentment or bitterness. Simon was sponsored by his brother to come from an Asian country 8 years ago. He has no right to any social security. He is totally broke. Back home he was working hard in construction. He lost one eye due to an accident. Here, he is looking for a job (anything), but nobody wants to hire him because he is too old. He told me how he had a phone conversation about a job with a restaurant owner who withdrew his offer after Simon told him his age. It was minimum wage job in a Chinese restaurant.

While he was looking for a job, Simon once lost his passport (his backpack was actually stolen at the Mission). Another time he was trying to find people to finance his phone card (6\$) so he could receive phone calls from places where he had applied. To get a job was the most important thing for him. It meant everything. However, while talking to a friend of his this week I found out he refused one. The owner of the restaurant where he sleeps outside offered him a job as a dishwasher, on account of the fact that the woman who was currently doing that job was too slow. The job could be his if he wanted it.

After thinking about the offer Simon refused it. Because, he thought, if he took the job it meant the woman would be out. But if he didn't, both of them could stay there. She could continue doing the dishes and he could still sleep outside in the cupboard during the night. He did not know the woman, and she was no sister to him by birth. But I think they became brother and sister in the eyes of God, through his generosity and love for what is good.

From today's gospel

*But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son;...''*

Fioretti

1. I've heard many times our little brother talking about his lost father with love and tears in his eyes. Every time telling people how much he missed him. This past Wednesday, after we read the gospel of the day in the chapel, he told us, with tears in his eyes, about the love of Jesus for him in a difficult moment, when his father had been mean to him. With more tears, he told us how much it hurt him at the time but how he still loved his father.

There is much love in the sons when they forgive their fathers for what they should have not done in the very beginning. It is this love that triggers forgiveness in the heart of a son in order to bring a father back to his senses. Alive or dead, forgiveness embraces and heals them all.

2. The community thanks Tiberiu for his generosity last Sunday. He took the time to fix our sink on Sunday when all of us were eating, leaving aside his own meal, eating by himself at the very end when his food had become cold and unappetising. The health inspector demanded the sink to be fixed, otherwise who knows what could have happened. The possibility of leaving hundreds of people with no food for the week was ominous. To work on a Sabbath and eat alone afterwards, in order to ensure food for so many others during the week is a generous gift that we receive with gratitude.

### **From Wednesday of Prodigal Son**

#### **The Gospel According to Mark 13:24-31**

*"...And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven..."*

For the second week in a row, we heard a person quoting the gospel of the day. The Gospel on Wednesday was about the second coming of Christ. When a tall homeless woman with blue eyes, holding a rosary in her hand, told us how He will take to Himself and comfort those who suffer, and deal forever with those who make others suffer. She concluded this way after she had told us about how she was abused by people in the subway. She was saved by a picture of Jesus, she said, that she was keeping with her. She cannot take the subway anymore and she was wondering how she could get to the west end of the city. "Don't worry", said Nick looking at her,

“we’ll pray to God and they will not bother you again”. “Oh, yes”, she replied. “I hope He scared them away.”

## **Sunday of the Publican & Pharisee - 09 February 2020**

### **Tone 1**

From today’s epistle - St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 3:10-15:

*“...Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...”*

Fioretti

Clara left St Mike’s hospital and we lost track of her. She was transferred to East General where people go, as Joanna said, to prepare themselves for something greater. She was discharged from there as well. Lucky her. Bryan called her on her cell phone and she promised she would come to visit us. That would be hard. She used to go several times a week for dialysis because of her diabetes. And, on top of that, she hurt her leg so badly that doctors at the hospital told her they might amputate it. It was for the second time in a couple of weeks she had hurt her leg. Who knows if we’ll ever see her again... That’s how you build a community in Toronto. With the hope that one day we’ll all be together. That day has not come yet...But don’t be discouraged.

When I saw Clara the last time, she was at the hospital and she asked me to give her a prayer rope. They did not give her a room with a TV and the thought of praying came to her handy. She also was visibly touched by something that happened to her leg the first time when she injured it. “It healed fast, she said, and in a way I’ve never seen before”. She knows wounds and how they heal from her experience with diabetes. “It healed after the priest put something on it. It healed completely and in a different way”. I remembered at the time that a little while after her leg was anointed with myrrh from St Dimitry (Fr. Roberto had it in the altar for many years; it is still as fragrant as the day we received it), she came to the mission walking almost fine. I was wondering if it was because of the myrrh, but at the time I did not want to ask too many questions so she wouldn’t think that I was hunting for a miracle. And besides that she was really sick with diabetes and with other really serious ailments. So I was thinking to myself how could I speak about a miracle that heals one part of the body but does not heal you completely? Hey, this is a mission miracle where nothing is perfect, I thought. But seeing Clara at the time and after thinking things through, the great miracle Clara received was the gift of the presence of God in her life in a way that she could not hide from or resist to it. She might have had many unhealed sicknesses, physical or mental, many things or people lost. Relationships in need of healing as well. But in all this abandonment of a life falling apart, God heals her leg and He becomes the center of her existence. Nothing less and nothing more than God alone came into her life. She received the perfect gift in a world that was collapsing: the sign of the kingdom of God where she started to dwell by being awfully sick. We see with the tax collector today, that it is in the stage of real rejection and deep vulnerability that he asks God to dwell with him in His holy place. Life itself looked like abandonment to Clara, but then she found in that place the Beloved One, the Bridegroom who brought life to her and was perfecting it now by taking her into Himself.

From Psalm 143

*“O Lord, what is man, that Thou art made known unto him? Or the son of man, Thou takest account of him? Man is like unto vanity, his days like a shadow pass away. O lord, bow down the heavens and come down; touch the mountains, and they shall smoke. Send forth Thy hand from on high; rescue and deliver me from many waters.*

*O God, a new song shall I chant unto Thee.*

Fioretti

I woke up this morning and shuffled to the mission. The room is bustling with people at every table. It's St. Agatha's day, the virgin martyr. Joanna runs up to me and announces that she had found someone this morning down the street with his head bashed in. "I saw his face covered in blood." she kept repeating "It frightened me." Life rushes on... prayer in front of icons, everyday greetings and conversations--- "Hey Guy, why aren't you wearing your hat?" "I can't wear it with my hearing aid on." "Don't put your stuff there?" "Do we need any bread today in Scarborough?" I ask a nearby person how he is doing and he tells me about the Superbowl. Then Guy's back. He lays a single cookie before me on a white napkin-- "there you go, boss!" Then Joanna's back. She finds me in the crowd and pulls me by the arm down the street. She wants to find out what's happened to

the man she found. She knows his name now, Arthur. She buzzes around up the street and up and around the officers. In the gray light of the morning there is still a lot of blood on the sewer grate beside the hat. It looks unreal, like pooled red paint. The police are still gathering information. Back at the mission, there's orange vomit cascading down the edge of the front red steps down onto the railing and steps leading down into the basement. No one knows who is responsible but Joanna suspects the midget who has been known to do this. In the last seconds there, I wish the acquaintance who had been watching the Superbowl goodbye and ask him what he's up to on this beautiful day. He says he'll be inside his house all day. He's been "sentenced." "Who sentenced you?" "Well, I've only got a couple years left. I'm getting ready to croak." Then off to the car and on the way to Scarborough.

Br Luke

**“Perfect humility is to be first in saying I love you.”**

Fioretti

Laura came late for gospel reading on Wednesday. Just before Elizabeth asked me smiling if I was a tax collector. Laura missed the reading of the gospel, but she came into the chapel rushing through. We discussed the reading for the coming Sunday, the one of the Publican and the Pharisee. I was not sure whether to choose the reading of the day for reflection or the parable, since we were going to talk about the parable at Bridges that night as well. As soon as she came in, Laura did not want to listen to the parable, but she started to speak about the reading of the day. Just like that, as if she knew it: you have to love God with all your strength and all your heart and your neighbour as yourself. I was not the only person in the room kind of shocked about what we heard. People asked her if she knew that this was the gospel of the day. Of course, she said smiling. There is no way, I was thinking to myself, that Laura read the gospel of the day before she came in. Those who know Laura understand what I mean. She came to Bridges as well in the evening where she commented on the parable about the tax collector and the pharisee. About the simple path of practical love. The path of humility. To notice people and be present and make them a tea or something that they enjoy. “Do this all the time. Notice them and be kind, you never know, they might have had a bad day”.

This is what the pharisee did not do. To notice the tax collector with kindness and to bring him something. Maybe the publican had had a bad day, and a cup of tea could have cheered him up. The pharisee was justifying his “royal” riches, seeing nothing in Truth, neither his neighbour nor God, not even himself. Being a sinner, the publican asked God to be glorified with Him. He asked for the mercy seat of God, from where you can touch and see the crucified love of God for all.

**Presentation of Our Lord - 02 February 2020**

**Tone 8**

**The Presentation of Our Lord and Savior in the Temple**

*The feast marks the anniversary of the foundation of the mission in Scarborough in 2016.*

*The Mission in Scarborough has been put under the protection of this feast. There is always a mystery (mysterion) in every encounter with another person. Patriarch Bartholomew speaks well about this reality in one of his books called "the mystery of encounter". It is this mystery and its actualization that the mission in Scarborough is called to bear witness by its life. The humbleness and real powerlessness of this witness is essential, for it to be real and evangelical. May the Lord help us to keep faithful to this truth.*

*I greet you all in the joy of this feast of the Lord.*

*P. Roberto*

**From The Gospel According to Luke 2:22-40:**

*"Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."*

To depart in peace does not mean, as someone was saying, to leave this life and to die in peace. But rather, by knowing Him, peace becomes the cloth with which Christ covers and warms a weary soul that is freezing to

death in the cold of sinful and broken humanity. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27) Peace is not something we can acquire, but learn to receive it when it is given through the encounter. And when it is given, the warmth becomes a burning desire to live for the sake of the resurrection despite and against sometimes our own instincts to go down into the pit. Following our own steps or dragged by others.

When a new baby is baptized (not only babies get baptized) the priest, when churching the child, says the prayer of St Symeon in front of the icon of Christ, holding the child in his arms. The child is brought into a new life through baptism. Baptism in itself could be stressful for the baby and the priest, but at the end of it the peace surpasses any understanding. For the baby for sure, I don't know about the priest. At times he could sense it too because "there is so much grace in a newly baptized child" and this cannot leave him indifferent all the time.

When coming to the apostles, after the resurrection, Christ gives them peace. Peace is the gate that brings you from life to everlasting life. It is the garment of the resurrection that covers any empty heart or weary soul and body. It is the certitude that you are alive and that you can share that with any human being without being concerned with time or wasting; the encounter with the Lord, when being gathered inside for the fear of those who you think might persecute you.

Encounter between people could also bring peace, if not distress. This can take different forms and different colours. The reality is that people know more today about anxiety and teach children in school how to cope with it. Peace is not mentioned. It is left aside when we forget to wait for something really good to happen. To expect Him with a great hope. Children should be taught to receive the peace, the same peace they remember from their own baptism. It is still there within their heart. It is in our hearts too. It never abandons humanity. Because Christ took humanity unto Himself.

On Friday, without doing anything good, I felt a lot of peace while talking to a woman with a broken life and a perfect smile. She is haunted by those who are looking to take her soul in a brutal way. I learned a few things about her from people in the community. She is a mother who lost her child to CAS probably, bouncing from streets to different strange apartments. And all this with a lack of awareness on her side that leaves one speechless. Even though she describes and speaks about things that, if taken seriously, would frighten anyone, there was genuine peace in her heart. So genuine that a human mind would not comprehend or reconcile with. I could not even let her finish the conversation. I had to leave. She didn't mind, she said she would come back.

I could sense the peace coming from her even though I could not explain it. Maybe it came from her foolishness, she reasoned and behaved more like a child; or maybe from the suffering that a human soul experiences at the hands of others. Like a noncanonical martyr, who sees Christ in the arena when everybody else gets caught in the details of the violence.

We think, for a good reason, that when people live with such distress in their life, a tragic end is everything that they can expect. It might not be that way; maybe the more people are harmed by evil, the closer they come to the light of the resurrection. Their reward is greater in heaven and through the grace of God, somehow, every now and then, we can see it too.

So we can be present and receive the peace when visited inside, being locked in by the fear of those who could bring about harm. And not to keep quiet about the uncanonical witness of the resurrection of those who spread peace around them while being fed to the mouths of the hungry lions.

#### **From today's epistle of St Paul to the Hebrews 7:7-17:**

*"...This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of him, "Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."*

**Is 6: 5** *"So I said, "Woe is me, because I am pierced to the heart, for being a man and having unclean lips; for I saw the King, the Lord of hosts, with my eyes."*

**From today's gospel:** *"Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."*

Priesthood by the grace and not by the law, in Christ does not support the ordinary.

“It brings the power of an endless life” (St Paul). The peace of a poor priest comes from being here and seeing both the resurrection and the spear that pierces the soul.

The resurrection is one and universal live giving, and the sword is actually doubled: to see the Lord with your own eyes and not to be able to kiss him because of unclean lips. And the other side, to see the innocents pierced deep by the spear and to struggle with hope, repentance and the coldness of heart in general. Being poor, God gives you peace in order for the distress not to take over.

Too bad though, that we, the priests these days, are rather rich in many things: knowledge, skills, words, wisdom and so on. And we use all things to better understand the laws and to function worldly. Since we are assertive and well esteemed, lacking persecution, we are left with all the skills to cope with anxiety. With not too much peace, we live with the hope that poverty in church will be a vow taken by many one day. And this in time could become prayer. An honest prayer of a rich priest. Lord have mercy.