



From the 2nd Sunday of Matthew:

"At that time, as Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him..."



Antiphon III

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

Joy and new life. These are the signs of being called. These are the signs of the encounter with the Lord. The joy is so light and so deep that it engulfs your soul without taking away its depths or harming its simplicity. Just like life, the joy is also new. And it gathers together all the joy already experienced in life. It does not erase the memory or rather the reality of worldly joy. But it speaks to it in a new way. The joy is nurtured so it can grow. First it penetrates the soul as the afternoon light does in church, when it rests

on the icon of Christ. The icon is always beautiful, but when the light takes time to rest on it, something new is revealed to the eyes. So it is with the joy when it rests on the heart. Something new is revealed to the soul. A brightness never known before and a trust never experienced. A depth that lets you touch the root of the world. A kindness that is so personal that no fear could crack in through the "solitude of the soul". It is the moment when what is unique within the person is welcomed while visibly mingling with the gathering of the hearts. A form of prayer unspoken but listened inwardly by the heart. The Antiphons of the community that listen to the voice of Christ in silence.

What is new in life becomes so clear and so human that God Himself walks you into it. It is the certitude of life in every forgotten and unnurtured part of creation that man forgot to tend to; the refusal of life through the rejection of the first call. Death is a consequence of neglecting life because of the worries that falsely create the narrative. God lets you see the reality of death and of your own participation into that - through carelessness. He does not sugarcoat it but when everything looks the way it is - hopeless - He walks with you and comforts you and puts a new spirit within you. To witness life in this world now is to know the gravity of death and its limits by walking with joy in the hope of Resurrection. There is only one sorrow left after today's encounter, because all the others are searched with the light of the resurrection: the sorrow of the generation. The children that cannot be taught but only inspired. Because they have a longing heart and a freedom to discover, when the name is spoken clearly by Him. As much as the joy is shared in order to multiply, the freedom belongs to the longing of the heart, who is still searching on the shores of Galilee the joy that is here to stay.



Antiphon I

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

How do they look today? The divine longing and the wilderness. It is like a

crippled woman, plagued by a terminal illness, who brought her own cleaning product in her wheelchair, so she can clean the chapel all day on her knees. The knees are not good

enough to help her walk, but strong enough to keep her crawling on the floor, cleaning it with her hands and watering it with her tears. This scene I saw last Wednesday reminded me about the woman who washed Jesus's feet with her hair.

The same love unfulfilled by the world. The same betrayal and the same pain in the heart. So unbearable that you make it your own and personalize it. The same wilderness where Jesus was tempted 40 days, the same wilderness that leaves people broken and betrayed today. And yet, the same longing to love beyond anything else.

Anyone who knows the story of our disabled woman today, can understand the deep desert she has been living in. Unlike some of us who want to go there because this was the trend in the church a few weeks ago, she was born there and lived there all her life, for real. No St Zosima has found her yet. Maybe because there are no more saints these days who look for more perfection in others? Do they get comfortable in the monasteries prophesying about the future ?

So, while being in the desert, her longing grew so much so that she made the sanctuary her house. The main theme of the story today is not this brokenness that all of us know. But this longing that is divine and is growing in our hearts. The more we are kept within ourselves the more burning becomes the desire to be with the Lord. And to be kind to Him, because nobody was kind to you. This longing was truly divine within the soul of our disabled woman also because it was linked with her desire to come to confess about her life and to be baptized eventually.

But her journey needed to start with an act of kindness, from her to Christ. To tell Him from an abused heart that she had not betrayed Him, before confessing to Him and being baptized. She told me directly that she needed to do something for Him first. To take care of Him by letting this longing desire be poured out on the flour of His house.

I don't know what will happen. Our friend comes and goes and, just like in the desert, you don't get to see her for weeks or months. In religious fairy tales people get baptized so easily and live a nice life until they get old. Our people here are already old, sick and depressed. You never know when you are going to see them again. But after the chapel was cleaned on Wednesday, something changed profoundly. The Truth was seen and confessed: no abuse can take away our love for Him. So, there is no need to justify our sins. The love is there, we just need to let it manifest itself.

From the gospel on Wednesday , Matthew 7:21-23

"And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'"

What does it mean to be known? On Wednesday, it was painful to listen to an elderly woman talking about an experience she had had at the age of three. She saw her mother go out the door, telling her that she was going to the corner store and would be back

soon. Only she never came back. That was the last time she saw her mother. A memory of a 3 year old child who is now retired. She was still moved as she talked about her memories. How couldn't she be? What could this memory have done to her soul? To a child who is still waiting for her mother to come back, even after she retired and had children of her own. She knew that her mother later died of cancer, but she never saw her again.

When we hear God in the gospel saying "I've never known you, depart from me.." it frightens us because it looks like revenge. But maybe He does not know us, like the three year old child whose mother left out the door and never came back. He does not force us to stay in order to get to know each other. He does not know us by longing after us. There is unfulfilled love that cannot be fulfilled only by God. Because God does not take over but encounters us.

We might think He would not be as vulnerable as a three old child and He would not just wait for us. Yes, however, He does wait as a father for His prodigal son. And what makes one more vulnerable than love? Is it not love that brought Him on the cross?

To know or not to know someone is a matter of unfulfilled love. A departure and a vulnerability. And a three year old child waiting while suffering with hope and foolishness. I asked our friend if she knew why her mother had left? I thought maybe she had found out later. She told me smiling and with no resentment that she did not know, but that she must have had her reasons. As she said that, I felt that she spoke as a mother in her turn, who was not a child anymore. She left only after telling me her mother's name so that we could pray for both of them in church.

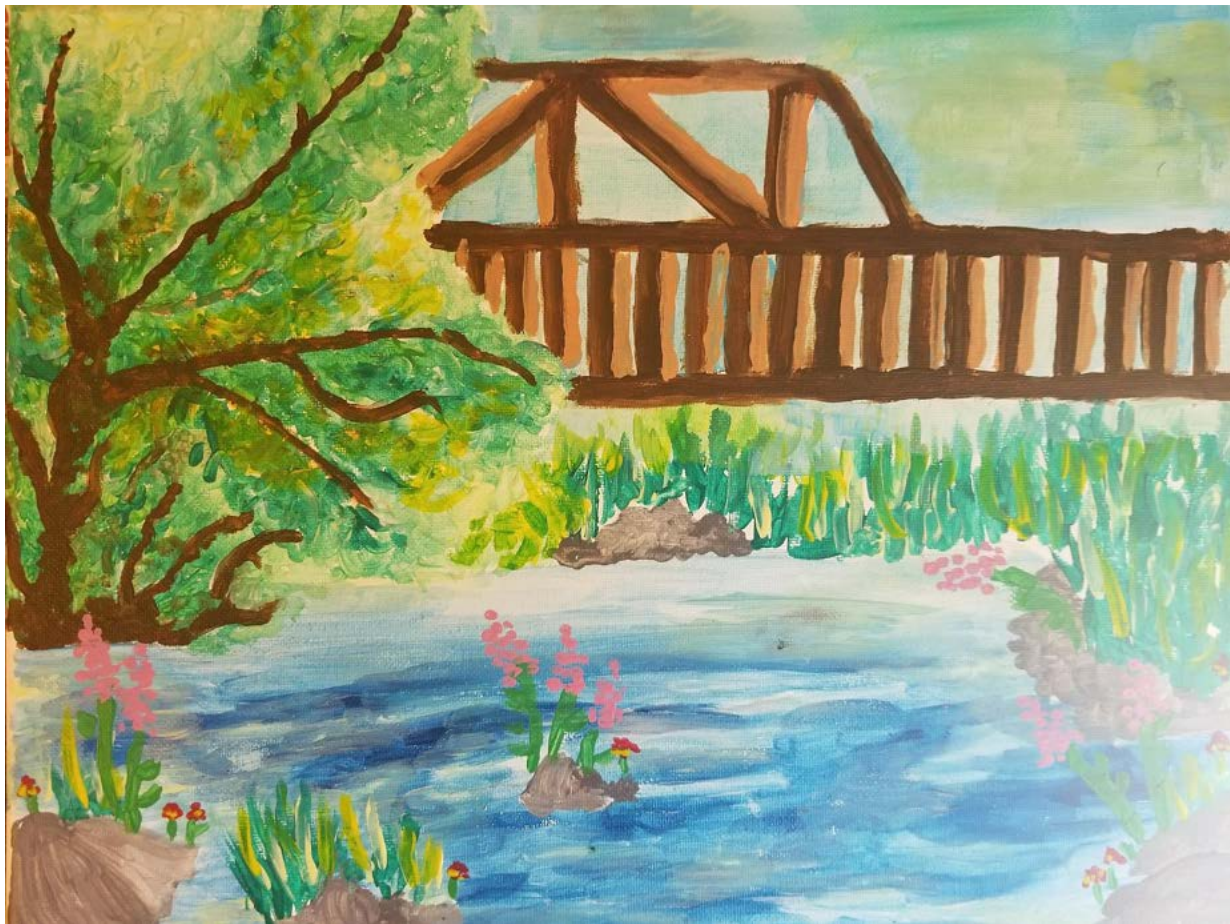
In such moments you understand that only the Resurrection makes sense and has really an answer and real hope for us humans.

At the present time, as people are rushing to resume their previous lives, it might be important to say that the memory of the time before the virus was not something that we enjoyed exceedingly. I don't remember people being entirely free or having a purpose, but rather being in pain. All kinds of pain. The virus helped us come closer to our pain. To see better the wounds that are still in need of healing. If nothing else, the virus brought us closer to the consequences of our way of living. Today people are rushing back to somewhere that resembles the old. However, we need to listen to the voice that calls our names today on the shores of Galilee. It is a voice that always prepares you for something new. It does not take you away from your pain but it comforts you with forgiveness so the goodness can be shared and life can be lived.

The journey with the Lord can always take you to different places. On the margins, in the depths of the earth, never in hiding, always ready to embrace the Lord. The joy of the journey comes because you walk with the Lord but also because it teaches you to see with His eyes and listen with His ears and taste from His love not from afar but from near

Him. Holiness is celebrated today because God shared it with His chosen ones, who also chose Him.

There is a scene in the story Lord of the Rings when a few characters prepare to leave on a dangerous journey, which was going to take them in the very place where the evil was making its lair. In its very fortress. The chances of success were minimal, if any. However, all the characters chose to embark on this journey understanding that there were real chances to never come back. After the decision was made and the oath was taken, one of the smaller characters got up and said with determination and joy: "Yes, let's go. But where are we going?" At times we feel the same. We do not know all the details of the journey or the places we might visit. We don't know how the journey might change us. But we embark, just like the character from the story, because we trust Him. And the joy of being together on the same path is everything we need to know.



The bridge at St. Mary of Egypt refuge who takes you into the deep forest.