



9th Sunday of Luke The Gospel According to Luke 12:16-21

"This night your soul is required of you..."

Antiphon I. Grave Mode.

In the south he who sows afflictions with tears and with fasting will reap the sheaves of joy, the staff of life everlasting.

When adults are afraid to live today, children are having a tough job finding joy.

When we hear in today's gospel: "*this night your soul is required of you*", we are looking over our shoulder to see whom God is talking to. We're hoping it is not to us. Everything is fine as long as He's not addressing us. Should we still ask though to participate in this conversation? And yet, if He is not talking to us, whom is He talking to? The saying in today's gospel today is not conciliatory and does not stab you like darts but cuts right through you. A truth so consistent that it goes all the way down inside your very being to separate a man from his soul. Death, within this context, seems a fairy tale and easy to take. If the soul is separated from you then who are you? What is there left of you? Death separates the soul from the body. The ultimate violence done to the human being. But yet, death is not desired by God, He is the God of the living. And if the God of the living is taking the soul what is there left? There is definitely no will left to "commit one's spirit into His hands". From the very beginning God does not set up a limit to His love for us and to our freedom to receive His love. Death came as a consequence of sin. A limit to our wrong doings. And yet, God did not stop us from sinning. Always inviting, always caring. He conquered even the limit we set for ourselves, through sin: death. He erased any limits we set up for ourselves, for a big price. We easily feel entitled for what we are afraid of: life. He does not waste any moment to give Himself completely for the life of the world.

We pray that God does not take our soul from us. But by praying so, we are invited to have compassion for the one whose soul is taken tonight. To be with him and suffer with him. To identify with him in his misery and turmoil. If one single soul is taken away from among us tonight, something from humanity is deeply emptied. If the soul is not committed into His hands tonight but taken, something from human freedom is diminishing tonight. If something is required, it can no longer be given freely to Him.

Maybe what the parable is asking from us is to pray for this soul and to identify with him. To suffer collectively and to search for hope, because of the many innocent souls who are perishing tonight without God asking for that. On the contrary, God is blessing this unity within their being. The soul and body tonight. He "perfects a body" for the soul so peace can be brought to both. And

yet, because there are no limits to His love, life is harmed by sin again. The innocence of life, the innocence of love, the innocence of life everlasting.

From the gospel on Friday:

"It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin..."

If we cannot identify with the soul that is required let us try to identify with the ones who are harmed. There is nothing in between, no matter how hard we search for something else. On Friday, while preparing for the feast service, I talked to E. I had a revelation about how much she has been present within the community during all these years. Coming to eat, and bringing us news (both good and bad, depending on the times), praying in the chapel during the week together or by herself, coming to the Liturgy almost every Sunday and saying "Our father" in Spanish. She came again with a prayer request. She had many prayer requests over the years. This time she wanted us to pray for a young boy who, she said, got shot in the neighbourhood. "It is not on the news, but people are talking about it." Last Monday, on CBC radio news, they were talking about a similar situation in a different neighbourhood, at Jane and Finch. E. came to bring a prayer request. She ended up staying for the service for a few hours and prayed herself for them as well. For both the boy and the parents. She mentioned it several times.

The soul that is not requested but is given into His hands tonight is innocent. How could we step into the feast, where the innocence of the mother of God is nurtured with prayer in the presence of God, within the Holy of Holies, with the loss of an innocent soul? How can you enter into the feast without fracturing the joy but stay honest about the times? How can you feast today in an evil time when innocent souls are not required but handed out to God by hands that cannot touch without bringing about harm? It is so generalized today. An unspoken children's crusade that gives us again an undesired view of evil's lack of imagination. Same old, same old again. It is from this world that the mother of God is detaching as she enters into the temple, in the presence of God. A world that is about to lose its soul tonight. From among men, in every generation, God sets apart people to teach them kindness and to fall in love with Him again. Most of the time in the desert, so they do not have too many things to cling onto. The prophets, his chosen people from Egypt. Those who are harmed by the world but still refuse to lose their innocence. God takes them from there, to bring them in. All the time, the memory of the experienced evil is plundering the hearts of those set apart. And the fight with idolatry is vicious. Yet, God does not do anything in order to waste. The remembrance of His encounter is always stronger and deeper than the memory of evil that always seduces you. Those set apart for the sake of the entire world battle with evil, and the remembrance of God's mercy leads them through.

No so with the Mother of God, not so. She comes forth towards God from a world that is about to have its soul required from it tonight, in order to listen to the voice, who tells her how the world could keep its soul. The Theotokos does not have the memory of evil in her heart because she always looks forward towards Him. It is a patient expectation of peace. The encounter with God

becomes for her a dwelling place. She would not know what to expect but she would never be afraid of life.

Always on her way towards Him. She is not set apart from this world, but she comes from this world because she knows, as a mother, the pain of this world. And she knows that only Him can comfort and bring about healing. Peace. The real peace. Not one fabricated by negotiations, traded at the marketplace. Kept in balance by guns pointed at each other. But a peace that becomes a natural habitat for the human beings because it is brought from the very tomb by God to us.



Today, every day, the Virgin is on her way...

The Theotokos would have not known again what to expect. You approach in prayer. Your soul presses closer and closer to Him, just to find out that you are going to become a mother for Him. "How can that be?" A mother to a dying world whose soul is going to be required tonight and the mother of God. The mother to the Son who is dying for us so we can keep our soul and render it to God in prayer. To have your heart pierced twice so the word of God would not cut our being to its very bottom. To detach from us the soul. But to remain in our perfect freedom and to commit our spirit to Him.

The journey of the Virgin Mary is never ending. On the way to Elizabeth, on the way to Bethlehem, as a refugee in Egypt, back in Nazareth, towards Caana at the wedding, towards the cross. Always listening to Him. It is this journey that brings her at the footstool of His feet. Listening to His

words from the cross. She listens on behalf of all. She does not listen for herself, she listens for us so we can hear. Her listening opened to us the gate of heaven.

The innocence of the mother of God brings her to the cross. When a human heart is looking for yjis innocence and trusts God, it is being set aside. The patience of being at the table of the Lord is taught slowly. The innocent soul becomes in time a living witness that the life who is taken tonight is never wasted because God did not desire to be wasted . This innocence becomes indeed a witness of the resurrection because it knows the piercing of the cross. One might have no strength after seeing the cross. And then, a companion is given so the journey does not continue alone. Also, not to be by yourself when the resurrection will be seen by many and doubted by none. When there will be nothing else to be said. Only listening.

"The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.' (today's gospel)

The community here was rich in witnesses of the innocence that sees beyond the tomb in Toronto. So rich that those of us who are new got comfortable at times. The fruits are not to be consumed or stored. There is an acute need to become poor so we can have more thirst for the Truth. To be and keep ourselves honest without having anxiety of losing anything but the fear of God. And to learn not to be afraid of being alive. Always ready to walk. On our way. Whatever will be taken. Because innocence does not have a home of itself but, just like the Mother of God, it makes from the encounter a dwelling place. By learning to listen, the community opens a gate to all who are searching for their innocence. The listening ear of men breaks a crack in the skepticism of the world so rays of holiness can break through. The natural light that warms the eyes of all those who come from an oppressing darkness.



The Mother of God who is teaching us how to keep our soul tonight.

(Drawing made by a volunteer on Friday, before the feast. She never painted icons before. She did not know she knew how to draw so well.)

Stories from the life at the mission by Br Luke

I came to the mission one cold night during the quarantine. The building was abandoned with no lights on inside. The door was covered with warning signs about confirmed Covid cases. Coming around the corner, I ran into a tableau vivant: a group of shadowy figures huddled on and around the steps of the church. One of them was a small man who was familiar from the breakfast program. Three of his friends, strangers all, a mix of rough looking women and men, were sitting on the steps. Four bikes were lying on the ground across the whole sidewalk. No one could walk by. The small man was hunched over a bag amongst the bikes. He was trying to close a bulging bag. He was moving very slowly. The three figures on the steps were even more still. They were sitting, hunched, motionless. They were quiet but their posture and slight movements gave the impression that they were moaning. My first idea was that I had stumbled upon some kind of memorial service. It seemed like time had just suddenly stopped mid-moment and that they had been thrown into prayer on the steps of this desolate church from who knows where. Him on the ground and the three a bit above him. What had brought them here? I sat beside the little man. The three above took no notice. The little man said that he had stashed a bag of clothes behind the church. He pointed to one of the three, "his girlfriend died this weekend," he said starkly. They barely registered my presence. The one whose girlfriend had died had a glass pipe in his hand. It kept slipping from his fingers and falling to the pavement. He would pick it up and then it would slowly fall out again. Eventually it fell and shattered. He burst into a fit of cursing. The little man told him not to do this "in front of the church where I come every day." Then he told them to get going. I could barely believe they were capable of biking in their state but they mutely climbed on to the bikes. I told the little guy to wait and ran inside the dark building to find some food for him. The fridge was nearly empty. Only old, peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches. I gave him a handful, and he accepted them. One by one. Each one that he took made me feel more guilty. I wished I hadn't tried to give him anything.

"There's no way to starve in Toronto, even if you tried."

I talked to P. at the breakfast program and he told me that he had just come from a big breakfast down the road. "It's once a week" he said "and it starts at 5 am." "Can you go inside?" I ask. "Yes," he says. "There's so much food in Toronto," he says. "I know heroin addicts who come up here for a few months just to fatten up. Coptics, Muslims, Churches. You can get mussels over there. Foodbank over there. It's really crazy." He says that the other night he was sleeping by the Gardiner and a woman from the Salvation Army found him with a spotlight. She woke him up and forced him to eat. "Breakfast in bed," he mused "with a concrete pillow." He tells me that the poor people are very fat already and yet people are stuffing them like Hansel and Gretel. He saw a woman handing out muffins the other day on a street corner that were like \$12 coffee shop muffins. "Most of the time we're looking for protein," he says. Food is everywhere but it's very hard to find laundry or a shower. "Most people spend all their money on drugs," he says,

“and then they don’t have money for laundry.” “That’s why there are so many clothes on the ground downtown. It’s cheaper for people to buy new pairs of clothes than it is to launder them.”



Another encounter

I met on the steps of the mission today a man who confessed he was addicted to fentanyl. He was a complete stranger who happened to be walking by. He was from the other side of town and had come to seek a friend who had turned out not to be home. He seemed extremely helpless. While he waited for his breakfast to come, we started talking, He told me about many near death encounters he had had and how dangerous the drug could be. He said that he suspects that people are killing each other with fentanyl intentionally. “When someone has some money or good stuff that someone wants and they are high on it,” he told me “the people around him sometimes intentionally overdose him to get his stuff.” He has marks on his face from when he has fallen from the drugs. “Do you do drugs?” he asks. “Good, Get a masters degree and start saving money. Invest in real estate. That’s where the money is. That way you can retire early when you’re 40 or 50” “What about God? Where will you retire from God?”



The natural place of oil dropped from a lamp is on the face of the mother of God. The icon in the chapel on Friday. The

icon of the unborn children. The miracles at the mission happen but they are not those we expect. The myrrh from the icon is for us the joy of those who have a curiosity about God without having been baptised. Ready to pray, to draw angels or to work. With joy and curiosity. With a lifted heart. It is so rare today, even if for a few days when it happens, it is like a streaming myrrh icon. Comfort for a soul that is afraid to wake up and to believe. Because of the short span of the desire to live today in Toronto.