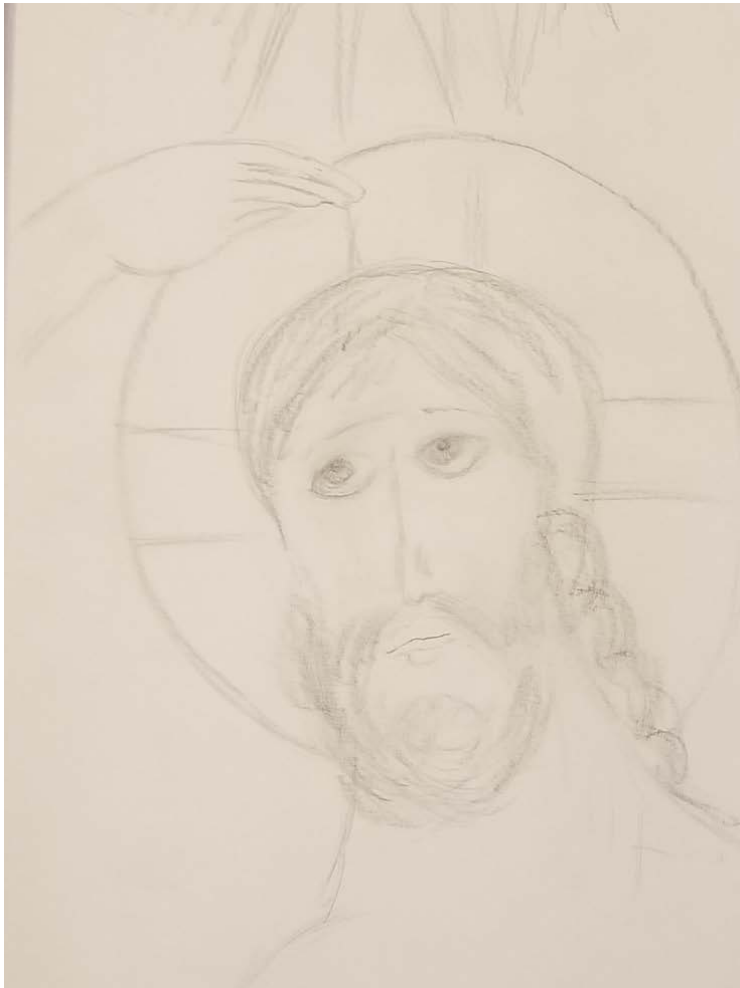




Sunday after Theophany

The Gospel According to Matthew 4:12-17

St. John the Baptist was doubtful about baptizing Christ. And he was greater than a prophet. He knew he was unworthy. He did not know everything though. The righteousness of God that is fulfilling today. There is a profound humanity in his doubt that we can relate with. With our own measure. In general, the gift of life overwhelms us. Because the offer is so great, it overflows our heart. And it makes us afraid. How much more can we take? For everytime it happens, the heart is enlarged by the gift. That's why the presence of God makes us afraid. What is new this time? It is a reality of the encounter that the psalms speak about. It enlarges the heart by drinking from the cup of salvation. It is not only a lack of faith in accepting the reality of the presence of the uncreated light within the created human being, but also the understanding that coming to a broad place requires a birth that takes time and allows the pain to be part of it.



But then, this is the holy ground where the encounter happens: "Sanctify the Lord Himself and He shall be your fear" (Is 8:13). It requires a movement of the soul that is not foreign to God but desired by Him, in order to sanctify Him because within the encounter we see that His sorrow is deeper, and it is related directly to His love for us. This becomes the sanctuary that teaches us the mystery of the light. How it is born within and before the darkness. The encounter is almost like a birth that happens before the travail. Just like in real life. The mother knows the gift from within in order to go through the travail. She knows the promise of joy because she experiences the love of the baby in the womb. Both her love for the baby and the baby's love for her.

Genesis 1:3-5

"Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw the light; it was good; and God divided the light from darkness".

Jn 3:5

"All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made. In Him was life, and life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it".

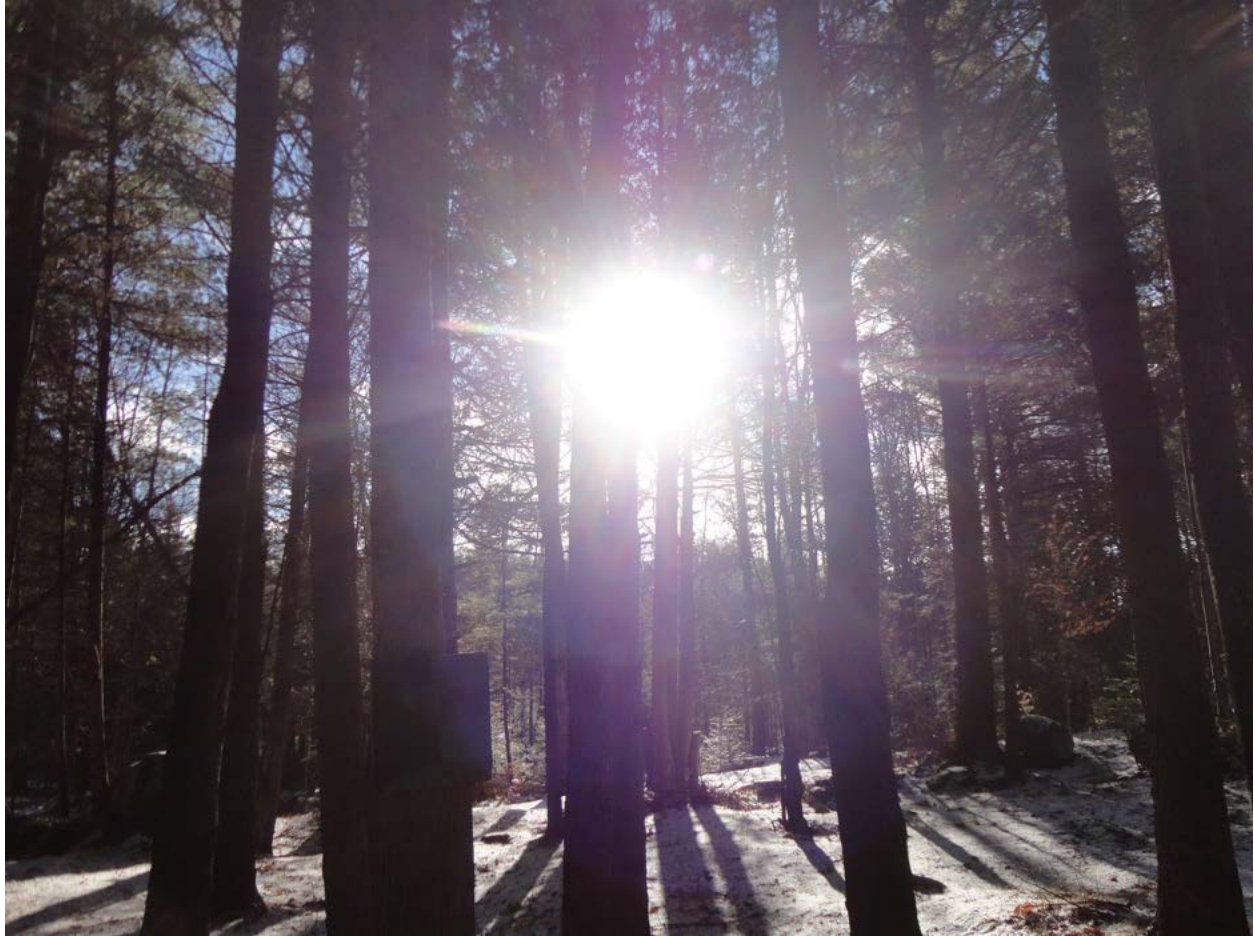
Is 9:1-2

"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

The presence of darkness is the sign of a life that is surrendering to the shadow of death. God separates the light from darkness by enlightening those who live therein. The man sanctifies with fear the presence of light without harming the joy of the encounter. It is not the darkness that God destroys but rather He enlightens the heart of those who could not see, in order for them to walk in freedom and grow within the light , so much so, that there will be no place of hiding on earth or under the earth.

The heart of man is the place of the growing light. In order for the darkness to become irrelevant. The growing of life requires the same approach that we offer God. To sanctify it and to live it with fear without diminishing the joy.

The attention to darkness creates confusion. The lack of attention to the growing light , to the gift that sanctifies life, gives birth to frustration and hate that manifests itself through violence; in order for the darkness to desire death. When nurtured, the light shows within the body and the face of the saints. It is through the body that you can see the form and the brightness of it. The body, that is so vulnerable to pain, is also showing the presence of the growing light within the heart. It is this profound vulnerability of the body to pain and harm that allows light to show its beauty. The promise of Christ for its saints is that this desire of the heart to nurture and grow in the light will be perfect. Nothing can harm it and take it away. The signs of a clear consciousness that would not be betrayed and left in the dark. There is room here for learning and falling, for learning and making mistakes. Into that there will be no betrayal. As long as the desire to walk from within the light will be genuine.



Light at St. Mary of Egypt Refuge, dec 2020

The Galilee of the gentiles

It is natural for Christ to go at the margins as it is natural for the light to search first the deepest sorrows of the heart. On a personal level, for the heart, the sorrows become foundational. What was first the stumbling block, becomes, through the presence of light, foundational. The deepest sorrow becomes the joy that grows into the love for many. It is the same, for the community at large. What was despised and persecuted becomes a sign of healing and forgiveness through the presence of Christ. This becomes an offering for the many, and an invitation to taste of the fruits of the spirit.

Both John and Jesus did not go to the center. John spoke in the wilderness and people listened and they came with the desire to prepare to encounter the Bridegroom by clothing themselves with the good desire. Jesus went to Galilee of the gentiles, in their cities, to stay with them, to show that He is part of their life. At weddings, at banquets, setting a table, eating with the sinners, and healing those in need of healing. If John prepares the people, Jesus is living with them. The perfect icon of community living. He answers man's fear of God by sanctifying all the forms of human living. This happens among the gentiles also because of the chaos and lack of shepherds that moves Him to compassion. At the center, things are petrified and the shepherds are

watching and accusing each other. A political establishment where rulers, priests and conquerors are competing for control and power.

As the scriptures tell us, the life at the center is in danger because at the margins it has perished already. As we see today also, when something important touches those who rule, it is because the time became an enemy to those who leave at the margins. Life was depersonalized and dried up of energy and meaning because it was used and manipulated from the center. The renewal of life always starts at the margins. From there the movement of reconciliation would be genuine and real. At the center, suffering is twisted in order to fuel the hate, violence and revenge.

From today's gospel

"At that time, when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee".

From Saturday's gospel

"At that time, Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil".

St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 6:10-17

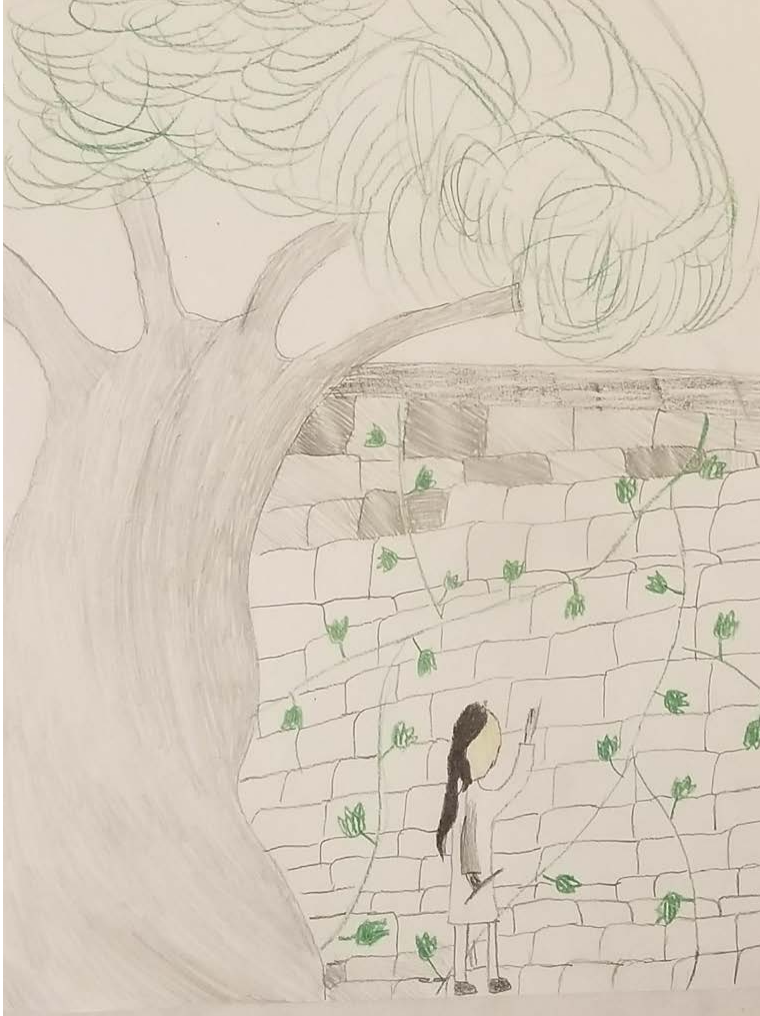
Brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Both the gospels and the epistles, as we stay more within the feast, speak about a threat and a need to fight. To confront or to move. The desert is a place of temptation where life was harmed profoundly. And we can see that very well around us. The desert is also a place where you can see where the threat is coming from. You cannot confront the threat if you do not know what really generates it. The experience of the desert is necessary in order to see from afar what is vulnerable within ourselves. Because it is within the heart that the battle is vicious for those who try to put on Christ. The movement of the light is for growing and enlarging the heart. It is a dynamis that requires a fight. A good one. When man does not see this, the frustration of giving up leaves the soul with a desire to fight without a real enemy. And then harm happens to people around us and to ourselves. If man does not struggle within his heart to approach Christ, he will end up seeing enemies all around him. When the man accepts His presence, the "enemy" is welcomed and approached with fear of God within the soul.

It is the same with the community at large. If the community neglects its heart - the poor, the destitutes and the sinners who are condemned by morality from the center - it will end up dividing itself. God manifests Himself within the distress of the poor. He perfects them to become for us a gift, an offering, so through their love and forgiveness when we can reconcile with each other.

There is no reconciliation when we continue to live the same life or rather to close ourselves even more within ourselves.

With Christ going to the margins, the poor and the destitutes become the heart of the Christian community. When we say "Christ is in our midst", in order to reply that "He is and ever shall be", we must look around and see how many of us are coming from the margins. Just to check on ourselves with kindness. This is not about the numbers. But the desire to let the light shine from within. So the body can be enlightened and on the face, the countenance of God may be beheld.



The wall does not keep the enemies outside but rather allows you to see the threat better within the heart. Just make you sure you are ready for battle. Otherwise no wall can stop you from receiving the light.

ASKING PEOPLE ABOUT THE CHANGE THAT IS COMING

We'll have a new section in the bulletin starting this Sunday. In the light of the losses and changes that the world experienced because of the pandemic, there are people who understand that the reality we used to know might not be the same. Somebody was saying that when you enter a crisis you cannot expect to come out of it the same. Either you get out better or worse, but never the same. The community, for the next months, until the summer, will try to understand how life will look for us. Or, actually, to see where life is coming from. In this attempt, we will ask people from the community to reflect with us.

Today, we listen to K.'s reflections regarding the pandemic and what he thinks we should try to do. I asked K. on Wednesday about what he thinks that people can do after the pandemic is over. He told me about a need to live. Not to get stuck in the lifestyle that the pandemic is offering as a coping mechanism to many today. He was referring to people being parked in front of a TV or on the internet, forgetting about real life. He understands that habits, once formed, are hard to break. But definitely people should go on with their lives.

What about our community? What would you like to see? What do you think we can do more or less?

Joking, he said that we need more people with money. Then he became serious when I insisted. He does not want to speak and offer advice. Eventually he said we should be more open. I asked what he meant by that. He said he meant to be closer to people and more natural. People lack simple interactions and simple things. He thinks that too much formalism, including that which becomes ritualistic, is not too good because people cannot relate with that. He said, I am not religious, I cannot say (I wrote before about his prayer life), but people should discover the simplicity of prayer. This is within the heart. You don't need complicated things to pray. Like now, if I eat or drink a cup of coffee, I can pray here. He points to his heart.

I asked him to be more specific about being open. He said, it is good even to be outside with people, like in a park. To be outside together. People need that.

I told him that sometimes we need to pray together. He agreed. He used to come a few years ago on Sundays. He stopped coming after a while because he thought church was for rich people and he is a poor man. He agreed when I said praying together is important. He said that people need time to learn to pray like that and in the meantime we need to learn to be more with them in simple ways.

He added that food after Liturgy on Sundays would be better if it was simpler. He remembered the old days. Maybe a soup, bread and water. We agreed on that.

K apologized every two sentences for speaking like that. He said he spoke too much and that he should not do that because he does not know, because he is not religious. He was not ironic, he really believed that.

What I understood from him is a need for simplicity and openness. To be with people through simple realities of life and, if possible, to do that outside of the building as well. And more prayer of the heart.