



14th Sunday of Luke The Gospel According to Luke 18:35-43

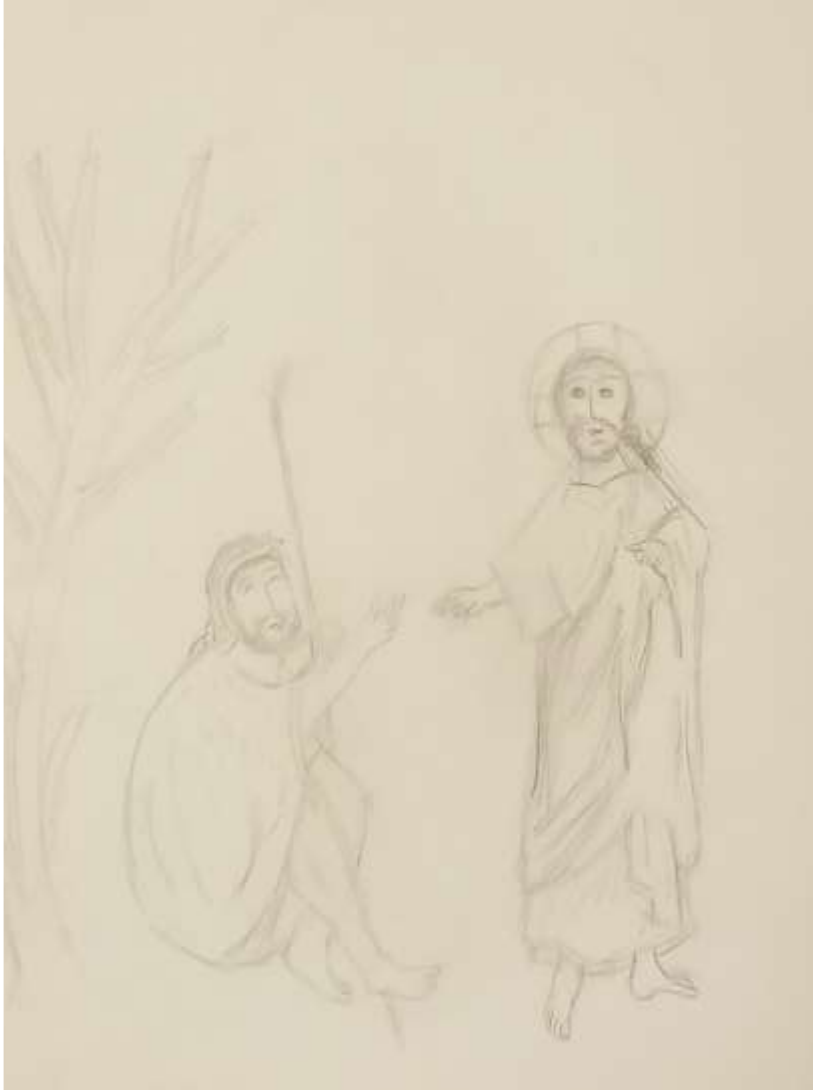
"At that time, as Jesus drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging; and hearing a multitude going by...And he cried, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

When looking at and reflecting on the gospel of today, a simple man from the Solentiname community said that only a person who feels very humiliated and very poor can cry: "Have mercy on me". The blind man, he concluded, was not only blind, but he was a blind beggar.

But then, the cry of the one who can really pray: "Son of David, have mercy on me", the cry of the one whose prayer is honest and real, the one whose soul reveals itself in the form of the prayer, is silenced by the community. Because it is not listening to the voice who prays and it avoids the presence of the one who encounters God. The church though identifies itself with the prayer of the poor. We take on their voice in prayer. There is no other way to approach God in thanksgiving together, but by borrowing from those who are very poor and very humiliated. The blind beggar, the Solentiname community concluded, is the people. The people are the blind beggar begging for alms at the edge of the road. "But when he asks for freedom, another member responds, they tell him to shut up because they can really screw him".(see *The Gospel in the Solentiname*, by Errnst Cardenal p.502).

In any "decent" society the blind beggar is not to be listened to or given any consideration. The "beggars cannot be choosers" is a saying that I heard many times even among those who live on the streets. It is an image deeply engraved within the collective mental of any given society.

And when the beggar is blind too, then he becomes harmless in the eyes of the many. Because he does not present any threat. If, at times, leaders might consider the poor out of fear, when they realise one could not even see, then the attention is never offered to them. If they cannot read social media on Facebook or Twitter, why bother? You cannot read the post if you don't exist. Modern cartesianism .



What is touching in the gospel is that Jesus is talking to him. He is listening to him. And he asks him what he really wants. Many times at the mission I've seen people, the poorest of the poor, who are so easily disregarded. Of course, we can do things for them, we can help them cross the road or give alms, but we rarely enter into a dialogue with them. Either because they could not see what is going on, they are clueless, or they speak too much, without sense; or sometimes we want to teach them and to help them. But is this what they really want? Is this what we really need for them? And from each other. Is this where God is taking us?

God is good and beautiful, we see this today, because the image of today's gospel is one of beauty and goodness. The mercy that is given first is to enter into a dialogue with the voice which is always silenced. He is not necessarily doing an act of justice,, but rather entering within this profound human reality which He knows well because He is part of it. This is the mystery, God who is incomprehended is part of "it". Of this human reality where one's soul, tasting humility, is given a voice of prayer. To lead the community when approaching Him.

From psalm 45 - concerning hidden things

Our God is refuge and strength, a helper in afflictions which mighty befall us.

Therefore shall we not fear when the earth is shaken...

The nations were troubled, kingdoms tottered, the Most High gave forth His voice, the earth was shaken

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.

From today's gospel

"Son of David, have mercy on me!

So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him."

Jesus encounters the blind beggar just after He revealed the third time the Passion to the apostles. But they did not know what was spoken to them because "this saying was hidden from them" (Luke 18: 34). Now he was on his way to Jerusalem. He was surrendered by people who could not comprehend what He was going to undertake. He might have felt alone too. Misunderstood.

God alone does not find one person to be alone with Him. On the way to Jerusalem. Towards the cross. He was not understood within this roaring of the multitudes who were following Him for who knows what reason. And then He stays still. Because a voice is touching this loneliness of Jesus. "Son of David have mercy on Me"! The voice of the blind beggar touches the solitude of God on the way to the cross. It touches it in a way that is reassuring. The voice is asking for mercy, which He was going to pour on us all. God enters within the reality of the blind man, because the blind man is touching the solitude of God in that very moment. What was hidden is revealed within the dialogue between them. The question of Jesus is reassuring for both. It reveals the mystery of the encounter on the way to the cross. If it was not for the cry of the blind beggar, the humanity who was in need of restoration would have kept quiet. Not because we know God and were still, but because of the roaring that is out of touch. The answer of the blind beggar is asking for everything. For him to see what God prepared from old. It was like we say on Holy Friday "...show us your holy Resurrection".

To see, and to witness and to glorify God.

The mystery of listening while not seeing says much to us. How could you confess if you could not see? When the darkness is thick and the light long forgotten. How could we ask ourselves to confess what we cannot see with our eyes because our life resembles an abandoned being at the edge of the road? But if you cannot see, you can listen. Even the roaring cannot silence the presence of Christ. And if you could not see and hear, taste and understand, because within the broken bread God gives Himself to you completely. But if you could not use any of your senses because the smoke chokes us all, trust the blind beggar who does not lead you into the grave but rather glorifies God in prayer.



“Beggars can't be choosers” indeed because God fulfills their deep desire. To see and witness what they sense within their own solitude and poverty. At the end, Jesus does not tell them even that God made them well but that it was rather their faith. Because within the darkness and abandonment they meet with Christ, and relate with God from within the darkness, asking for light to shine so we can all be invited to receive the light. And so they become the voice that leads us all in prayer because their crying is touching the solitude of God. A reality that is inviting for us all. So the smoke can vanish and the wax from our eyes can melt away at the presence of the God of Jacob, the Son of David, the Son of God.

St Xenia, fool for Christ, whose feast we celebrate today, was often perceived by people merely a “simple minded beggar” and people would often persecute her and laugh at her.

Finding out where we are and where we are going

M. is not a beggar, neither is he blind. But according to what he says he is one of the few homeless people who spend the winter outside on the streets by themselves. He knows the others, a few of them, he says, who do the same. There are many homeless people in Toronto. During winter nights, they ride the streetcar, they find shelter in “out of the cold” places or empty rooms. Outside, there are just a few.

M. reminds me of Dean that we buried close to the refuge. People who live on the street in both summer and winter, with integrity. Dean was different in personality. But both of them respected the community and had a special consideration for the church.

M. is more talkative and more open. He could give you more details about the things he sees or experiences in the streets. Somebody was telling me last week that it is hard to understand why he smiles most of the mornings and how he could have such a light spirit. On Thursday he looked upset. Because his shopping cart had been stolen and together with it the money that he made by collecting cans. A few weeks worth of work. It was the sixth time he got robbed on the street. It is this madness and violence that he cannot take or reconcile with. It is not the life he lives, but what the other people do to him. This madness is so irrational. There is no need for that to happen. To help me understand better he gives me an example of how young people scratch new cars with a knife at one of the dealerships in the neighborhood. It does not help them with anything, nobody does anything to them. They just wreck very expensive new cars just because they want to. Even the dealers don't care too much because the insurance covers the costs. So they do nothing. He is the only one that does something. He keeps watch over the night and chases them away. He sleeps at night around the place and keeps the evildoers away. I did not ask M. about our desire to find out who we are as a community and what we can do as we go ahead after the pandemic. He started to tell me his thoughts without me asking. He cares a lot about this

church. Many times he needs to ask people outside not to damage the building or the stairs. He thinks we should take better care of the place and not let all the people in. He mentions those who come to destroy and to pick on people. He used strong words to emphasize that. He said this is a church and if they come and fill the room, people who really care and need the church would not be able to come in. Definitely he thinks we should tighten up the church more. I thought he meant, if we do keep watch, to make sure we act and speak the Truth of what we see. Not only contemplate the picture.

At the end I asked him if there was anything we could do to support or help him during winter. A woolen blanket. The type they used to have in the military. It keeps you warm and does not make you sweat like the sleeping bags do.

Another understanding of our times

This week, in the spirit of the Christian community week, we met at the mission with Fr. Walter and his community from St. Bartholomew's church. We invited them to work at the breakfast program together and to pray. At the end, we shared for a little while our thoughts regarding the pandemic and the way we are touched by it. And how we see the church. The shared reflection revealed a few realities:

There seems to be a contraction of the church. Or a change in which what is essential will prevail. At first, after the lockdown, the church did not see an increased interest in people attending the services. On the contrary. Less people came back. Habits were built online, in the virtual world, that now are asking for their reward. Which means more virtual time spent online. There was a common understanding of the community being purified, sifted like the chaff, where those who would choose to stay would be strengthened and more attentive to what they are being called to live and to do. There were new people coming to church. This happened before but it did not always last. There is no guarantee that things would be different this time around. We should receive the new people in hope and with care. But this reality has to be linked with the overall understanding of a community that is called to live what is essential in faith. (Maybe the word that we were looking for on Friday was "pruning").

We need to stay more in prayer and to rediscover the prayer for the sake of being with God. Not as a place of refuge but rather as a place of encounter. From where we can see what we need to do. There was a mutual recognition that the only place and time that brought people together during the pandemic was the work for the poor. Both communities have within their rhythm a practice of being with the stranger. That was what energized people and gave them a purpose. One young person from the group said that she thinks the way the parish was structured in the past, with people congregating on Sunday as a community, would not be possible again. There was a clear need for something else.

There was a common understanding that something is changing. Maybe not necessarily in becoming something new, but rather discovering what is really essential in faith and living that with integrity. There was also a recognition that not necessarily many people would follow that.

Please pray

Anthony and his wife Any and children Joseph and Elisabeth who are Christian refugees from Bangladesh

Members of Good Neighbours\St Zoticos

Jocelyn

Vassunt

Marshall

Daisy

John

Shuda

Roseau

AL Monica

Bob

Mary

The staff and residents, with families, of the Caressant Care Mclaughlin LTC home: 30 residents and staff who have tested positive for Covid-19.

Navpreet; Manpreet; Jamie; Sue; Reishma; Anne; Kevin; Bob; Nazia

From St John's

Camelia, Colin, Michael, Peter, Henry, George, Kelly, Michael