



Thomas Sunday - John 20:19-31

"On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them: "Peace be with you."

The gospel today shows us Jesus in the midst of His apostles. He comes to them. It is not they who are looking for Him. They are together unified by fear. What we see throughout the resurrection gospels is that the apostles receive the news with doubt and with the hardest of hearts. Even so, their sorrow changes in joy, because their hearts burn from within.

It is the same with us today since the very beginning. The good news of the resurrection comes to us. The resurrection happens, whether we are present or not, whether we are in fear or we make others afraid, the reality of the light of the resurrection touches all of us. We should not settle on the joy brought by the light within our heart but rather learn how not to be resistant to the light, to the newest of life that cannot be fabricated or duplicated. From the very beginning, on Pascha night, the gospel spoke about this rejection by those who know Christ from a personal relationship with Him. It spoke about his own rejecting Him. **"He came to his own home, and his own people received him not"** (Jn 1 1-17). We are today of His own, He is the bridegroom, we are the community of the saints, His beloved bride, the church.

The scripture tells us not to settle on this joy because this joy is supposed to meet the sorrow of the world. Not to settle on joy, but learn how not to be resistant to the light of the resurrection because of our hardness of heart. Not to settle on joy but to look for Christ and to meet Him in the breaking of the bread.

How do we believe? How do we know that our belief is not a fairy tale? Laura said this week, it is very simple, you just believe. Either you believe or you don't, she says. There is nothing in between. She believes. "All this happened to us (she was talking about Easter) because somebody had to die for us. Let us remember and not forget that. Let us be thankful to Him", she says.

However, there is always a sign that proves the reality of the light within our own being. There is something that opens from within. A crack within our world, the way we know it. It is for us to pursue it. This door opens something new within our life as it opens within the life of the community. This is what the light of the resurrection does for us. By pursuing it we find something new we had never met before. Somehow, the depths of our being are not packed up with fear anymore. There is the newest of life within the heart as it is in the way we live now. This is what the light of the resurrection points us to. This is not about novelty and need for change for the sake of changing the colours. No, it is the newest of life as we have not known it yet, within the heart, within the place we live and with the people we live, within the community, world and universe. If nothing happens, and we settle on joy for a little while by doubting His presence, for a little while only we'll have the joy with us, but afterwards we'll return to the bottom of the sea where the pharaoh has drawn himself.

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

On Wednesday I went to a funeral with father. I think it is the second one in a row on a Bright Wednesday. It so happened that the young person we buried this year was called Andrew, just like the one we buried last year. On Wednesday later on that day, at the Liturgy, we heard in the gospel about Andrew the first called. They also shared a similar sorrow, even though at different ends of a troubling drug addiction spectrum that is making many victims in Toronto. This time Andrew was young, in his 30s, and he was the victim. Last year the story was more complex. Seeing his pictures I thought I met him at the mission. I might have been wrong. Father met the people close to him and they asked us to help with the prayer at the funeral. The people at the funeral home, after the service was over, thanked father that we were taking care of people like them. They wanted to continue, but we understood what they said, "...because nobody else does." Yes, they are our people.

We had different thoughts and unfinished prayers after the service. We shared in the past our reflections on this epidemic of drugs in Toronto, as we are confronted with them at the mission daily. There is no healing in sight and nothing to make us believe that some good could come out of it. However, apart from all this ideological intrusive and abusive takeover by the harm reduction culture, one thing that stands out, regardless of how wrong or "right" they might be about treating the addictions, is that we definitely do not know how to come together and to cry. To lament as a community for what we have become. Without blaming anybody, just to recognize the loss and the fact that something is broken. Just to come together and to mourn before arguing about the ideologies and the success or lack of success in letting people die. Just to come out of our ideological tomb and trench propaganda, without blaming each other. To show the little crumbs of love we might have for the young people who are killed by the addiction.

But we don't or we can't. The reality is that the city is not mourning for them. It did not know when they were alive and they do not know them now when they left. It does not rejoice or lament for them because it does not care. The ideologies and the screens made us all empty boxes with nothing left. Only those who were really close to them are left to suffer as if they did not suffer enough when they were alive.

It is here where we can pray and say *"My Lord and my God"*. Only the resurrection can open something new and hopeful for us in this ideologized sepulcher that harms the soul before killing the body.

This is how we will know if the resurrection is real for us as a community: if we are bearers of good news for the people who are cornered into death. If we meet them in the breaking of the bread. If we part the waters for them so they can walk on dry land and not sink into the sea together with the pharaoh. When coming our way, they will know if we are resistant to the light of the resurrection because they could not take a fake hope when they are hunted by death. Both in life and in death we receive the light and pray *" My Lord and my God."* Because if there is no resurrection for them there is no God (see St John of Damascus for details in Pentecostarion on Synaxaristes - Pascha) . They expect us to see the resurrection in them without seeing any signs of healing within their body because there are none.

"Though we have not beheld Thee with our eyelids, yet with our hearts have we believed in Thee with love" (St John of Damascus)

Br Luke's fioretti

Strangers no more

A guy swings around the corner of the mission after the breakfast program has closed. I am able to sneak a little food to him and in return he shares a lot. As we speak I realize that he is not a stranger but someone we know well. It is not his voice or face that causes recognition. He is bundled up in unfamiliar clothes. Disguised really. When I see his hands then I know him. Thick and scabbed. I remember them picking up cigarette butts in the garden of the mission with such gratitude many seasons ago. I bring him little things piecemeal and he tells me about what he wants. He says he used to come here every day. He talks about mom dying. He was going to see her that week. He had not seen her for a long time. She left a phone message on his phone but he is afraid to check it. She is the only person in his family he talked to. He does not know if she had a funeral. His family told him no. He says he feels ashamed. He is a small person wearing oversized clothes that don't fit and hood over his face. He is full of thanks and appreciation for the little things I bring him-- a samosa, a chickpea sandwich etc. which he eats on the steps of the mission. He is not especially verbal about it but gratitude radiates from him.

Warming to the place I sit

beside a young woman at Good Neighbours who I have not seen before. She is young and somewhat standoffish. She asks us for a bed. It takes some time to figure out she is looking for a place to sleep at night and has been referred here by central intake to wait and keep calling. At first she can't enter the building at all. "It smells in here!" "What do you smell?" "The incense is too strong." She comes in and sits down. She is drinking a glass of beer. I tell her about our rules about drinking and other rules we have about electronics and screens so that people can talk with one another. She comes back at me fiercely. "What are you talking about? Drop-ins have meth and heroin kits in the bathroom now. This place is not for everyone. What am I supposed to just sit outside and drink my beer out there? This must be a private place. What? Is the church going to make me sit outside and drink my beer? This place had too many rules. It's not for everyone." I give over the argument but remain sitting beside her copying quotes from the little brother of Jesus letters. I am copying one from Miguel in South America. An old friend of the mission comes over and reads the quote and starts laughing. It reads "the reality of someone you are deeply in love with gives meaning to everything." He sits down beside me and shares that he has bone cancer and it's not going good with him. Then someone else comes and someone else. I can feel the young woman's awareness of everything around her. A man sits down across from her with a paper. He is not aware of her mood. He is new to the country from Sudan and has received 4 beds from our house the last week. He is thankful. "We slept on the floor for 9 days. I am an accountant and manager back home but my credentials here are worthless. I need to become

fluent." A few meters away another table is lively with people talking and communicating. All throughout, the woman is sitting quietly taking it all in. I'm not sure if she will defy the rules or what she will do. Suddenly she speaks. "Do you have clothes here? You should get some new pants for that guy leaving, his pants are ripped?" Then the tears swell in her eyes and slowly fall as she talks about how she had been up calling central intake since 4 in the morning when her mom kicked her out. She has 4 kids and has been staying in shelters. She says she worked at Amazon warehouse until she was fired for being routinely late. "I couldn't get there on time from the shelter. Unless I slept at Kennedy station that way. I was always 15 minutes late. They move you around in the shelters like you are cattle. You don't know where you will sleep the next night. I pray to God that someone will not come to shelter tonight. Maybe that is a bad thing to pray for but I am so tired." Central intake offers her a place downtown where it sounds like she has already been. "I don't want to go down there again and wait in the cold again for an hour." When I return from running errands in the back she is gone without a goodbye or a bus token.

Healing in action

I have seen people often healed by the river of life that flows through the mission even on its slowest day.

Last Friday, in Scarborough, a young woman came to us who was very sad. We talked a little and sat out in front of the storefront because the weather was good. One by one people would approach and the sad woman shared in these exchanges like a fly on the wall.

First came a little old woman from Syria. She came to the food bank but wished to talk more even though we do not share a common language. Slowly we shared a limited conversation. Her eyes and spirit spoke of such a great desire to share and a tenderness. Then a tall, scary looking guy walked over on his way to the marijuana store next door. "It's not right," he says, "you being right beside a place like this. I'm not religious or anything but I help people. I convinced my friend not to commit suicide." Listening to the people, the woman seems to become more happy. I suspect she would be even more relieved if she could have stayed longer. Then she would have seen a man who passionately objected to certain prayers the week before join us again and accept them in silence.

Finally, a woman arrived at the end of the day who had something interesting to say. What she said was not exactly consoling but maybe it too would have helped. She was a young single mother at her wits end. She unburdened herself eating yogurt after yogurt. "I feel so tired on the weekend. My kids are tugging on me but I don't have energy to do anything. My family does not want to see me. "Just because we love the kids it does not mean that we love you," this is what they say to me. "I am afraid" she says "of the day that I will let them go. You can only carry painful things so long before you let them go. I am afraid of the day when I will have taken so much abuse from them that I will no longer care."

Happy birthday from the mission

Pesky requests at the mission often lead to surprising tenderness. A guy at the mission asked me for a laundry list of things on his way out of the breakfast program. Most of these things struck me as long shots in our clothing boutique. Long shots at best. A red coat, red shoes for his girlfriend size 8, womens underwear, gloves for himself. Miraculously we had them all except the red shoes. Then I ran into fr. Nicolaie and he showed me some red shoes that had just come in. When I gave them to the man he was very excited. In his gratitude he shared that he was staying with his girlfriend and didn't have any money to get her anything on her birthday.

Let us rise early at the break of dawn

On bright Tuesday, I woke up with a mission. I wanted to see if anything was different. I rushed to the mission for the breakfast program. This was the first day the mission was open since the end of holy week, since Holy Pascha, since the resurrection and the beginning of bright week. So much had happened. I wanted to be different too. I left the house around 4 am. There were already 4 guys sitting on the steps chatting when I got there. They seemed very closely knit. I found comradery there. I found Johan sitting on the steps beside a man talking with him like a brother. I found a small group of steady volunteers who knew each other well. I found many people eager to share. At the end of the day I met a young woman who wrote me an impromptu thank you note on an Xmas card and offered me money (and drugs) to thank us for serving. "Don't worry" she consoled me, "I have enough." It felt good to be there and something was different. For now we can welcome the poor here in the light of the Resurrection. Alleluia.

Community life:

One thing that stayed with us during the time that prepared us for the Holy Week and Pascha was the reading of the scripture with people at the mission. We were able to read together and reflect on Isaiah, Genesis and the Proverbs. Something that we remember and try to take with us.

We also remembered the Chrismation during Holy Week of Elisha and Zachary. This we could not forget and we are grateful for.

Laura really liked the tomb. She liked it the best among all the flower arrangements. She said that the angels did a good job and we should be thankful to them.

Mission church collections of two Sundays, April 17/24 2022: donations \$940 (\$40 is for flowers), \$105 candle box, \$30 wine/candles

May 1 - 7

Tuesday	8:30 am	Morning Prayer	Wednesday	8:30 am 12:30 pm 4:00 pm 6:30 pm	Paschal Hours Paschal Hours Vespers/Dinner Bridges/8pm Compline
Thursday	8:30 am 12:30 pm 2:00 pm	Paschal Hours Paschal Hours Paschal Hours	Friday	7:00 am 12:30 pm 2:00 pm	Divine Liturgy Paschal Hours Paschal Hours
Saturday	8:00 am Noon	Paschal Hours Paschal Hours	Sunday	6:00 am 7:00 am 8:30 am	Jesus Prayer Orthros Divine Liturgy



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We are an apostolate of the ecumenical patriarchate "Mother Church of Christ's poor"
under the Omophorion of Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

St. Silouan Chapel, April 30, 2022

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