



Sunday, January 01, 2023

A living presepio

On Christmas Eve, I was drawn by a burning desire to pray at the Mission before the Liturgy. It was just getting dark and inside the narthex, alone, Brother Luke was keeping silent watch. Little by little more people came, some young people came, to sit by the icon several hours before the start of the Liturgy. Their presence was very moving.



Fragment from Sant'Egidio presepio

In the Orthodox Church we don't have a "presepio" but, as for every major feast, an Icon is "revealed" during the vigil service that makes present, real, the mystery that is being celebrated. The space where the icon is displayed becomes, through the prayer of the church, a pneumatic space. Around the icon, space and time are filled with the Holy Spirit where time and space now reveal a mystery that is eternally present. We don't just remember the Nativity, we become present to its mystery.

As the darkness descended in the church, the Icon became more luminous. A growing sense grew in me that we were all waiting in the actual cave where Christ was to be born. I had been in Bethlehem many years ago, but the narthex that night was not less real than that. The narthex became the cave of the Mission where every day countless people come with sorrows, disgust and hope; it was now the cave "more resplendent than a palace."

I imagined hearing the cave whispering in the dark: "Come O Mary and let Him be born here among us! Jesus, here you will find yourself at home. Here every day the poor, the strangers, the humble are received and welcomed. Here the gospel

is heard and explained. Here, dear Jesus, you will find room among your people who are not perfect and very vulnerable. Right now, here, you will feel home.”
The wind was very strong and cold that night, the darkness in the world was almost palpable, but now the icon became enlarged and truly each of us became part of the mystery that it revealed. The community, both the ones present and the absent ones, so much part of our life, we all became a living Presepio. Later the fire from the altar lit in us a joy that no darkness or doubt will ever take away: God with us, God in us.
(fr Roberto)

“she refused to be consoled, because they were no more.”

The Gospel According to Matthew 2:13-23 - January 29



How can the joy of the nativity touch the sorrow that cannot be consoled no more? God hides in Egypt while the innocents are dying? I remember this question coming from a child a few years ago. Why does God allow that to happen? Was it because He was born that they died? The same question I heard from older people this year on Christmas day. People who do not go to church but because of age start to see the rationality of the gospel today, in a world that has lost its meaning. Older people start to rediscover the innocence of the children, asking the right questions, with a desire to believe that somehow goodness would prevail.

In reality, as we speak, the joy of the nativity seems to be less present in our hearts while the skepticism and anger of the world are predominant and steadily growing. We have reasons to be angry because we live in a time where people are hurting themselves and each other. The loss that could not be consoled is turning into anger that looks for vengeance, while the pain becomes bigger and the wound deeper. Nothing satisfies that.

It was always the power of death that made the “kings of the world” strong and undefeated in the eyes of the poor. They can take a life easily with no justification.

They harm you to show their power. They take from you whom you love in ways that are diverse. They teach us to do the same with each other. Their oppression was as real at the time of Herod as it is today. A feeling of hopelessness and anger is taking over the hearts of the people. We see that today, with the authorities who are legally doing that, and we feel more vulnerable and more alone and more ready to die without cause. The only thing we have left seems to be the justification of our inner anger that does not seize the pain but rather makes us look like cowards because we do not act on it. It seems that the spirits that run rampant today in the streets are winning.

During the procession this year at the refuge, we found out that God becomes human and He shares in the sorrow that cannot be comforted by man. (see the original Huron carol below). This is the miracle at Christmas and during the year, while the sorrow that cannot receive comfort is shared with Christ. There is no more loneliness because ***“God is at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul.”*** (Ps 109:31) Rachel cries alone because nobody can feel her pain. Nobody was sharing into the sorrow. ***“And I looked for one that would grieve together with me, but there was none: and for one that would comfort me, and I found none.”*** (Ps 69:20)

Today, the joy of the Nativity is born out of this encounter between the one who cannot be consoled with the one who can feel her pain and console her. He shared in this pain from the time he lost to death the man He loved. And so through Christ those who have the experience of the unconsolated loss, learn to comfort the loss of others. We are called to be part of this encounter in order to heal our anger.

We might have found ourselves close to people’s sorrows that cannot be consoled, we might have experienced losses in our lives, smaller or greater. We know the hopelessness that comes with that, we know the tendency to keep that alone within the heart. Nativity tells us that God is with us, it is time to open the heart and to receive comfort. By doing so we become the witness today for the authority that there is nothing that can take that cannot be consoled by Christ.

Christ does not teach to forget what we lost. He does not teach us to replace the loss with a new reality that is as fragile as the one before. He does not give us guaranties that what we have now will last forever. In time that is not possible. He enlarges our heart so we can love what is temporary and fragile and remember the loss in prayer with Him. It is not through its length that time touches on eternity, but rather through its moments which are deep and real in manifestation of the uncreated light that we see at Nativity with our own eyes. Every moment of time opens into eternity, while its length is as an old cloth that will eventually become completely worn out.

It is the experience of the community at St John's to witness this love for what is not perfect and what can be lost tomorrow while gifted today. The asceticism of the open doors brings this news of the sorrow that cannot be consoled yet shared with Christ. At times, we are given to experience the loss that is irreplaceable, at times to receive the comfort of seeing others healed or comforted in their pain. The evil spirit of today is powerless when we learn that we can love God with all our soul and all our heart. This is the time for us to experience this freedom. This comforts the soul and heals the encounters between us.

This evil time today is teaching us to fall in love with Christ and with everything that He loves in humanity. Because God is with us.

Huron carol

Take courage every human
for Jesus Christ is born
The spirit that enslaved us
Has left the woods is gone
so stop your ears, don't let your thoughts
be weakened by this spirit dark

Chorus: Jesus Ahtonia,
Jesus is born
in excelsis gloria

The sky people are coming
with message great and rare
be on top of life, rejoice
At Mary's child most fair
three such have left for such a place
they are important men of place

Chorus: Jesus Ahtonia...



above the trees a star appears
to lead them to the place
where Jesus born is resting
on Mary's lap and face
this child do they come and greet
his name they can't stop to repeat

Jesus Ahtonia...

With reverence they do oil his head
his goodness they exclaim
how good he is to come to them and
as his family claim
he has come for us to care
our griefs and loves with us to share

Prayer list for the sick and those who have recovered: Joanna; Coleen; Kelly; Gaia; Linda; Leon; Trixie; Nick; Peter; José, George, Mihaela; Bernadette, Elisha; Kayla; Harley, Maria and Carlos; Omar; Elisabeth; Ben, Kim: George; Maria Becatam ;Seena; Ocean ,Tony, Nikitha; Dianne; Joy; Susie; Alex; Maurice; Lynn; Molly; Thomas; Varghese; Delia; Leela; Mary; Tanya; Basma; Aditi; Larry; Darius; Lori; Lisa; Cindy; Césare; Fatima; Debbie; Donald; Hermina; Raúl; EK Thomas; Nebu; Evangelia; Sarah; Shelley; Bill; Ruth, Kristian and Frank; Maria; Mike; Luke; Anusia; Lavalin’s son; Sana; Father George Patrick, and Father Michael Miklos/Pani Karen Miklos; Dominique and her daughter; Mike; Luke; Arjuna; Joy; Susie; Lynn; Molly’; Thomas; Alex; Fathima; Frank; Chris; Karunawathi, Gloria, Vijekumari, Delia; Valerie; Traian; Peter; Marco; Kim; Tihomir; Kate; Payton Clark; Sana, and her family; Isaiah; Mary; Sydney; Peter; Christine; Stephanie; Iulia; Jason; Sophia;er; Charles; Paul; Phillip and his wife Juliet; Cristeena; Waheeda and children; Shirin and her family; Cristina; Daniela, Jerry; Delia ; Ragaie; Victoria; Mike; Farida; Roselyne and family ; Ana; Cornelia; Leon; Jerry; Gloria; Anne; Marina; Marie; Edemene; Joanna and family; Rejoice; Romana, Coline, Michael, Peter, Henry, George, Kelly; Tom; Marina; Kumari; Susan; child James; Aaron; Sylvia; Fr Jonathan; Tharshini and her two children; Ann Tyron and her family; Sandra Gomaz’s children; Sameen; Sophia; Amy; Swetha and children; Charitha; Jitesh’s parents; Demene; Carol; Gloria; Hawa Bibi; Vimaladevi; Lynn; Michelle; Emanuel(Mani); Stefanie; Geoff; Joey; Sophia; Melanie; Tanya; Piper; Darius; Zamalek; Nelly; Nahla; Mira; Sandral; Brenda; Vol; Gomaz; ; Helen; Paul; Wafaa.

Please pray for the deceased: Roy; Jake; Richard; Fr Tony; Zatia; Tom; Fred; Shrin; Andre; Andree; Akhir; Arjuna; Dillon; Elena; Pani Mary; Rejoice`s mother; Edmund; Pani Eleanor; Fr John; Alexandru; Constantin; Robert; Fr Aurel; Georgi; Rada; Petre; Stela; William; Samuel; Debbie; John; Amy, Willie; Dave’s wife; Ana; Shirin’s cousin in Jordan; Father Lawrence; Dave; Anne Tyran’s father; Edith, Sr. Mary Magdalene; Joice; BettyAnn; James; Pauanasuy Kamthasang; Maria; Andrei; Agostina; Carminda; Vimaladevi’s sister; Sri’s mother; Carol’s Mother and 23 year old nephew; Demene’s mother, Dalalzaki.

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