

1st Sunday of Luke

“And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.”

How was it for the people to listen to Jesus speaking? We hear at times in the gospel people saying that nobody had spoken like that before. We can image the people’s joy waiting for Him to speak, to talk to them. The waiting turns into

longing, where the time becomes patient with itself because it is touched by the Word of God who is eternal and kind. And so it is with the hearts of men. How was it to live with this longing? Living with the expectation of encountering the Word of God in a personal manner. Longing for Him. Nothing disturbs your soul because you know that Christ is about to talk to you today. What is He going to say?

“When the sons of Jacob sold their fair young brother into the slavery to the Egyptians in an alien and distant land, Joseph wept inconsolably for his father; and when he saw his mother Rachel’s grave he shed tears, saying: “Seest thou, O mother mine, how they lead me into the bondage in an alien land?” (St Silouan - “On grace”).

The longing of the people for the Word of God comes from a place of sorrow. They’ve been hurt and sold into slavery. They’ve been oppressed and insulted. Abused and forgotten. Nobody talked to them in truth about why they were hurting. A woman shared her pain this week at the mission, repeating in tears: “Why me? Why do I have to go through all this? Why does nobody care? Why does nobody see it? I’ve tried so hard”. Because bad things happen to good people, we try to rationalize the pain together. And that made sense for a little while.

There is no one who can approach the suffering of people with a word of comfort. That’s why at the mission the most we can do at times is to listen and try to be present. We make room for the silence of God to touch the heart of the one who is wounded.

Today this silence that heals appears as being indifferent because it is not witnessed by another human being. A longtime friend visited us at the mission at breakfast on Wednesday. It was not easy to recognize her at the beginning. However, there was much joy, because oftentimes we fear for peoples’ lives after not seeing them for a couple of years. Because life on the street is not waiting for kindness to happen. As before, the experience of the violence of her soul comes on the surface, yelling with dynamis. It is a violence which she can deal with herself. “I know it. I



know its limits. I experienced it before. ... But I am afraid for others. That's why I try to stay away from church, not to bring it here".

Without success, I tried to say that the cross is already in the church. This is the place where the violence is conquered. In her loneliness, she does not believe me. She left eventually after saying at the end: "You know what, I should try to come back. It is hard not to lose your mind completely without talking to a human being."

There is no place today, where, like Joseph at times, people can share their tears and speak their pain. No tomb of a loving parent that brings comfort to a persecuted son. People are hurting without a word of Truth spoken to them, spoken to their injustice. Their poverty seems a curse, their illness a consequence of their sins, as they are made to believe, their abandonment, a natural cause of hating their own soul. For people to live they need to hear the truth or to listen, not alone, together with another human heart, to the silence of God who heals. Like the refugees who run away from the madness of their country where the war killed their parents and children, just to end up in an apparent rich heaven where they realise they are not desired because they do not deserve it. What does this do to your soul? What violence does more damage: the violence of the war from which you manage to escape or the violence of rejection, because you don't belong to us, and you are an intruder within our plastic heaven (see the note*)? Who is going to tell them that this is a lie? Who can undo the harm done to them? Who is going to be hospitable to them?

Many times, we see within the community the little we do and the failings we experience when trying to be a support for those who come through the doors. We are not skilled workers in healing and in talking back to people's sorrow to sell cheap the illusion of healing and the grandeur of faith. We are not good at making them good and pure and Orthodox because we are broken and lost ourselves. But what we can do, and what we try to do, is to be a witness to the pain of people, a suffering that is embraced by the grace of God now and in His kingdom. To become a presence that witnesses the silence that teaches us that poverty is not a curse but the place where Christ is blessing his people. That their tears are honest, and they should bring no shame to the soul but cleanse the eyes of those who see them. That their rejection is not a reason for hating the other but a force for hospitality and welcoming of the one who is disinterested in you. Because you know that you are a gift for the community who practices hospitality, a perfect gift offered in the purity of faith and received with a contrite heart.

After the talk on Thursday with our sister who was in distress, we walked together to the chapel. Reluctant at the beginning because of distrust, she accepted eventually to see the

silence that is not ignorant of you. After a little while she asked the priest to leave so she can have a few minutes together with God alone in order to taste from the silence who knows your name.

“You know”, she said the next day, “with all that distress that I am in right now, something happened to me last night. I remember being in the chapel and that helped, it somehow helped. I did not feel completely alone”.

We are a busy community at times and this week seemed to be busy in events, both in the morning and during the day. But it is the business of the community that practices hospitality that becomes a real witness to the silence of the chapel that heals the wound of the human soul. Because in truth, many people participate within the hospitality of the community, from those who volunteer during the week and those who work and labour to those who support the work or sing and pray at the service, both the poor and the rich, the young and the old, the one with knowledge or the one who does not have much to teach, come together to become a witness to the person who is rejected and wounded by the indifference. Because we all live with the longing for the beauty of the gospel because someday, we will all remember the Word of God spoken to us in a personal manner.

Note:

A follow up from a question of a man who gives us a lot of trouble these days: “Do you know what Jesus will ask us when He comes today on earth? ... What is with all this plastic?”

From the reflection on Friday:

“And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink...”

There was much to learn and see. People who stayed for the gospel reflection had different cultural backgrounds. The refugees from Uganda who came to volunteer were predominant in the room.

We reflected more on the little gift of the poor man. God does not overwhelm him with his goodness because it could become unbearable for him. It teaches the poor soul, in humility, goodness every day. It prepares it for the kingdom and everlasting joy.

A young person said that now he understands why God does not grant him the things he prays for. He needs to learn how to receive the good in order not to be wasted.

Another young refugee said that God multiplies the little we have in order to share with all, including with those who want to harm us. Both with those who harm us and those who do us good in their faithfulness.

The One Always With Us - (a poem By Elisha after reflecting on the psalms and people she met at the mission)

When we weep
And we lament
"I have never been so alone!"
Quiet now-
The One is near us always
Never are we alone-

A fatal needle
Doses his arm
And The One is with him
Enveloping him in love
As one of His angels
Rests his hand
On the young man's brow-

Before his final sin
The temptation which had
Fed his life nothing but sorrow
He had repented
Of his whole life
And newness
Of rich spring green
Moved his heart to healing

His story
Is for many of us
Too painful to listen to
The One has always been listening

To his cries
That the demon release him
From its talons of addiction
And from the voices
That torment him so

He is a witness
For his many friends
Gone missing or having
Taken their last breath
Right in his arms
As he whispered to them,
"You are not alone.
Now you get to meet Jesus."

This young man's name-
Ask him when you see him-
Greet him with good cheer
Give him good food to eat

And judge him not
For The One speaks
Through him
Even in his leaving-

In our world
This man's
That woman's

Fate is sadly
Not unexpected
It is rampant-

But even as that final needle
Seeps into their veins

The One is with them

Even in some dim filthy room
Where the young man
With a name and
All his beloved friend's names

The One who has
Known his name
Since before
He was conceived
Loves him beyond measure
And has the angel take leave of him
So that the man cries out,
"Aren't I alone?"

And the great mercy
Of The One
Made manifest
Just for this young man
Of many names of ours lost
Will live with Him forever
In the newness of the green
Of springtime always

And in his leaving
He knows he is not alone-

As in our own weeping
Despairing the emptiness
Turn your heart just so-
The One is always with you

None of us are ever truly alone-

September 25 – October 1

Tuesday	8:30 am 7:30 pm	Morning Prayer Psalms Study – via zoom	Wednesday	4:00 pm 6:30 pm 8pm	Vespers Bridges Compline
Thursday	8:30 am 12:30 pm 2:00 pm	Morning Prayer Noon Hours Jesus Prayer	Friday	7:00 am 12:30pm 2:00pm	Orthros Noon Hours Jesus Prayer
Saturday	9:00am 2:30pm	Morning Prayer Reader Vespers	Sunday	7:00 am 8:30 am 11am	Orthros Divine Liturgy Life Chain



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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, September 24, 2023

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