



The Gospel According to Matthew 1:1-25

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel’ (which means, God with us).”



“The Word, in the womb of Mary has become silent...”

St Efraim the Syrian

To find silence, Hector says, you must go across Lakeshore Street at night, to get to the Ontario Lake. That is the quietest place in Toronto. You can hear the silence there and clean your senses, a place away from the noise of the city, he thinks. Sergei thinks the same. He receives peace from the water, by the side of the lake. They both know places of quietude that we don't since they are wandering the streets at night. In the world of images this makes sense, the cave and the deep waters have darkness in common. And this is the place where Christ descends through the cross.

During the week, the search for silence was interrupted often by the cry of the people. Somehow, Christmas touches in us old wounds which are not yet healed. There has been crying during the week with no comfort and present tragedies that remind us how fragile life is. Loss that does not look for consolation. Even if you make it by the cave, you cannot help but crying. The silence that comes from there makes you hear your own pain. That's



why some people make plans to avoid it. To find more busyness that numbs the soul.

One would wonder at times if, by becoming man, Christ did not attract more hate upon humanity. More jealousy for the communion between God and man. "This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." (Mk 12:7). One would think that humankind would be more considerate of itself since God became man, one of us. The violence with which we are destroying each other today makes you think if we have not mistaken this silence of God for something else.

The silence of God at Nativity is an invitation to action for both men and angels together. An action that helps with the journey for humanity in becoming like God.

That's what we hear in the gospel and see in the nativity icon: the angels talk to the shepherds and sing; they warn Joseph in his sleep a couple of times, and they convey messages to the magi. The magi bring gifts to Jesus and talk to Herod, escaping his cunningness by changing their plans of return. The shepherds listen to the angels, talk to each other, and find the star and the newborn babe. They share with His mother what they heard from the angels, being a witness to her. The midwives, in the icon, are working hard with love for the child and consideration for the mother.

Joseph abandons his thoughts and listens to the angel twice. He outruns Herod who sends the soldiers to look for the baby.

All this apparently improvised movement reminds us of a regular day at the mission where things change constantly and communication at times is misunderstood, only with

the purpose, for the whole community, of becoming the journey for life.

Thy mother is a cause for wonder: ... the Shepherd of all entered her womb and He became the Lamb, the Mighty One entered and put on insecurity from her womb; the Provisioner of all entered and experienced hunger; He who gives drink to all entered and experienced thirst. Naked and stripped there came forth from her He who clothes all..." (St Efraim).

During the week, an elderly lady we hadn't seen in a long time, asked us several questions about the Nativity, while she was crying because of the things that Christmas makes you think about. One question was about peace. Where is the peace that has been promised to us at Nativity?

The silence of God at Nativity invites to action and change for those who care for life. The gift of new life is given to the community who has the heart to receive it. Peace is coming from the change, when we stop listening to our own thoughts who make us sad and angry, and we listen instead to the angels that point to clarity in our life and to action. There is no quarrel within the community who cares for the new life because the work keeps them together. The work of caring for the one who became the most vulnerable among us. The mother with the newborn child (one month old) who came to St. Nicholas this year, visited us during the week. She was confessing how life has changed for her since the baby arrived. "Nothing is the same", she said, "everything is new." And with this change there is hope and there is peace, there is joy because there is love.

The heart of the community who loves the most fragile among us, is the heart that ponders on the mystery of God by participating in it. It is a community that, as in the icon of the Nativity, is made up of locals and strangers, poor and rich, kings and shepherds, some people who don't know each other, having different languages and different cultures, but together with the angels they care for new life. All of them are gathered around the heart that ponders on the Word of God who through her has become silent.

It is the love of the Theotokos for the Son of God who opens the community to new life. It is a love that unites and invites all to participation in the mystery of incarnation. A love that rejects none. A love that we can ponder on and experience ourselves. A love that bows down to our own poverty. A love that can be learned so we can all preserve and nourish life within us and around us. A love that covers our own weakness and invites us to participation as broken as we might be. A love that unites us and heals our wounds.

A love that invites to change, not because we are not good enough but because new things have been prepared for us. God who is without beginning and end, unchangeable and eternally the same, today clothes himself with our own poverty because He is welcome within this love, of the one who ponders on the Word who, through her, has become silent. This is the love that the treachery of violence cannot touch, because, even on the cross, she is faithful to the most vulnerable one. The love of Christ on the cross for us conquers death in us, where the love of the Mother for Her son, on the cross, has enlarged our heart deeper than the sorrow itself.

It is the love of God and of the Theotokos that unites us all in the joy of His resurrection. There is no other way for humanity but to participate in it fully today.

Christ is born!



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under the Omophorion of Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa