

*Apophthegmata
for a little flock*

I will open my mouth
with a parable;
I will utter hidden things.
- *Psalm 78*

Holy Thursday, The Twelve Gospels

Today Christ has received all our prayers, from young to old, from those who kept vigil the whole time and were able to keep watch to those who are now half-asleep. **He has listened from the cross, and He will answer all prayers.**

We come to pray by the cross of Christ, to see how we have partaken in the crucifixion of the innocent one. We see how many of His wounds are ours, how much we hurt Him, and the pain we have caused. The cross always reveals all the secrets of the heart of man. That's why we can only look at the cross with honesty. The cross is the place where things are revealed and changed.

Yesterday we saw betrayal, abandonment, abuse stripping, thirst, unforgiveness. Now **we look into the very depths of the heart and see the sins we'd forgotten, the dark places in us; he comes there and plants a seed of love, and we're surprised to find it growing there.**

Today, through the cross, we see the disciples forgiven for betrayal and abandonment. The cross reveals a love which the mind cannot comprehend, and forgiveness that goes deeper in the human soul than our own sins.

By the cross, we listen to the blasphemy of the criminal, and we also witness the change of heart of the one who yesterday took a brother's life. Today he repents and prays: "God, remember me when you come into your kingdom." We see the victory of the heart's purity when it is left alone, abandoned and without hope.

By the cross we see the piercing of the heart of the mother who cannot be consoled. We see the beloved disciple's loss and pain as he witnesses that the One who loved his innocence is crucified. Who now is going to look at him with similar eyes? By the cross we see the gift of sonship, as we see the adoption of the sorrowful mother who lost her son. "Woman, behold your son..."

By the cross we see abuse by the authorities. They take his clothes, mock Him, and cast lots for the little he had. Was it not enough for the soldiers to do their job? Did they also have to contribute to the madness, to be creative in evil and make their own contribution to it? The corruption of power is on display.

Through the cross, we see a thirst unquenched – given vinegar and fed gall. We see what happens with nakedness that is ridiculed and mocked. We see by the cross the conversion of the foreigner. The cross changes his heart: "This was really the son of God."

The cross reveals the religious authorities' lies and their bribery in corrupting the multitudes to ask for Barabbas, a criminal who meant nothing to them. The cross reveals the change of the community that welcomed Christ on Palm Sunday with hope, only to condemn Him ferociously a few days later: *His blood on us and on our children*. The weather changes less often than the many hearts of one community. But the madness does not last forever. They come to their senses at the end. They beat their breasts and cry, understanding only too late...

We see in the cross what abuse of the innocent heart does to the community. It touches all, in many ways. The cross today brings us close to the one who is abandoned, hungry, thirsty, and naked. We recall our sins and as a community we make a pledge, praying that the naked one will teach us how to cover Him, that the thirsty one will teach us how to keep the water fresh and bring it to Him, that the one who is stripped will teach us how to care for the innocents who have been ridiculed and mocked.

Today, we make a pledge and we pray. We make a pledge to be obedient to this teaching that comes with the glorification of the cross. We dare do so, because **Christ's Cross magnifies itself not in the great community, but in the small, humble one.** Christ comes in humility, and His cross looks for the simple life of a community that is not great but small.

Today's generation is marked by the sign of the cross. People are on the cross today. What we see tonight, we see in the community's life. We see it on the streets, and we see it in the world. **Today is the time of the cross.** But it is a cross that knows suffering without hope of the resurrection. It knows abuse without knowing forgiveness by the abused one. It knows blasphemy without knowing the conversion of a heart that has persisted in doing wrong. It knows the sorrow of the parent without the consolation of the gift of sonship.

We have been witnessing today the effects of our sins, and the love that is crucified and forgives. Being obedient to the teaching that comes through Christ's cross means we are called to speak about the forgiveness and love that come from the cross. There is no resurrection without the cross, just as there is no cross without resurrection.

Let us all today, from the youngest to the oldest, from those who kept vigil all night to those who are half-asleep, become witnesses of what we have seen, heard and experienced within our own hearts, in Jesus Christ, the reason for our hope and the pledge of our future inheritance.

Holy Saturday, “This impostor”

Kali Anastasi! Have we not been longing all year to utter these words? Kali Anastasi!

There is a saying that tells us we should not speak ill of the dead, because we are all human. It is not so with evil, which tries to destroy the credibility of goodness on which it has been feeding itself the whole time. It tries to spread ongoing lies hoping to destroy and take away the memory of goodness, because it cannot use it anymore.

It is not so with men. When we bury someone, we try to remember all the good they have done in their lives. At times we struggle with that, but we try.

After the cross, something changed. Today, by the tomb of Christ, a change has already happened with humanity. Today humankind is kind. If yesterday we rejected and abandoned the one on the cross, today we take Him down with care. If yesterday we cast lots for his garments, today we clothe Him with a new linen cloth. Christ is not ashamed of His nakedness today because we cover Him. Today He is not ashamed of humankind. If yesterday we left Him alone on the cross, today we came in bunches to beautify the tomb. His love has been

putting roots in our heart. It blossomed by the tomb. It was given in vain at the cross. Beauty is the garment of love.

If yesterday we were afraid to say we were His friends, before the cock crowed three times, today we ask for the stranger. If yesterday we were afraid of the power that was threatening us because it struck the shepherd, today we go and ask with boldness for His beloved Body. The resurrection has started to kindle our hearts and the fear of death has lost its case.

If yesterday we were scattered, trying to find a place to hide, today we make a new home for the One who is homeless. A new home, made of rock, never used before, becomes the source of our joy. From it, life is about to flow and cover all humankind.

That's why today we should not spare any tears, because His body is anointed with spices. In the tomb Christ receives our tears today with gratitude, even if they are not of joy and are mingled with sorrow, even though they come from eyes that have not yet seen and do not believe in His resurrection. We can cry over Him because they are a beautiful fragrance for Him.

Today we can bring all the sorrow to His tomb because we know that here, change happens.

If evil is trying to destroy the remembrance of good, we try to remember, but we are easily distracted and forgetful, with short memories. We are sorrowful that we will not hear again real forgiveness and real love without deceit. We are aware of the loss and try to keep the memory. We have lost the One who feeds us in the wilderness, with whom we like to go fishing, the one who cures, and speaks beautifully to us, the One who

moves us to tears, the great prophet whom we thought was going to save our community, to save Israel.

It is not so with God. **Today Christ is not lost. He establishes a new reality within the tomb.** What we thought we lost is actually burning within our hearts and starts to grow.

The cross and burial have changed us already. In the resurrection, we are starting to act with a new life. **Jesus is not a memory.** He is not a memory we try to hang on to, but a new reality in which He teaches us to walk. The way Christ walked on earth is going to become the norm and the new human reality. It is not an accident of history, but is magnified through the small work of the community that walks in humility: the church.

It was the same with the saints that followed Him. They did not become inspirational stories or nice memories. Through Christ, **they changed the fabric of community** until it became the kingdom of heaven on earth. It will be the same with us. Most of us would probably become memories, hard to remember, but the little steps we take behind Christ on the path of the cross will change the fabric of the kingdom. The more we walk behind Christ, the more the truth we live will always be eternal.

After the resurrection, Christ revealed Himself in the simplicity of life, so much so that He was mistaken for the gardener, as Enzo Bianchi says. But so also was He mistaken for a traveler, or for one who was interested in fishing and knew how to do that. He was mistaken for the cook, who prepared breakfast on the shore for the apostles. Mistaken for the one who tastes food and enjoys eating for the sake of those who are sorrowful and hungry and have forgotten to break bread and eat.

It is so, because all these simple parts of human life are going to change forever in the community. They are going to be sanctified. People would not need to steal because of hunger, they would not need to cheat because of lack of money, there would be gratuity of love and work in the new kingdom, within the community that lives by the gospel.

In the small human realities of our daily community life, the Word of God becomes incarnate. We take time to walk with the stranger and ask Him to stay with us longer, because our hearts have been burning from within every time we get to listen to him.

Kali Anastasi!

Pascha Sunday morning

Christ is Risen!

Let us not chase away the angel who brings us the good news, because of our sorrow, lack of faith or disbelief, or because we have no wedding garment.

Christ is Risen! Let us not be afraid of the sorrowful heart, afraid of being touched by new joy today. The joy of the resurrection is looking for the sorrowful heart.

Christ is Risen! Let us not be afraid of the doubt, disbelief and lack of faith in our heart. The truth of the resurrection is simple. It is the foundation of humankind. It is so simple and so truthful that it does not require a faithful heart to believe in

it. It is looking for the doubtful heart. It manifests itself for the sake of our disbelief. It has become natural to human nature.

Christ is Risen! We cannot stay back and lie in our sins. There is new forgiveness even for the last sinful heart. Today, I am not afraid to be the last one welcomed at the beautiful banquet. The food is abundant and the best part is served at the end. I can taste it with thanksgiving.

Christ is Risen! Let us not be ashamed that our garment is not without blemish, because the resurrection has made the human heart beautiful. In Christ, the fear of the resurrection has become deeper than the fear of death. It has found the new depth of human being.

Christ is risen! Today we bless the food so that no one will go hungry again and no person will be thirsty. We bless the food so those who cannot give up on fasting and have forgotten to eat today will have no defense. **Today we break food together in the joy of the feast so that no poor man will eat alone and in secret ever again!**

Christ is Risen! The resurrection bridges sinful human life with eternity in the kingdom of God.

Let it ring out from us. Let the angels hear it. Let the saints hear it. Christ is Risen!

Holy Week 2024

© St. John the Compassionate Mission
155 Broadview Avenue
Toronto Ontario, Canada

Sermons of
Fr. Nicolaie Atitienei, Spiritual Father