

“I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are mine; all mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.” John 17:1-13



*“... Thus too, we have an advocate, Jesus Christ, not indeed prostrating Himself for us before the Father ... but by what He suffered as man, He as the Word and the counselor **persuades Him to be patient**. I think this is the meaning of his advocacy ...” (St Gregory of Nazianzus)*

The patience of the Father:

This year, the lemon tree in the chapel yielded the first lemon after we brought it inside a couple of years ago. The fruit was produced right on Pascha. The tree brought forth flowers many times before. And they were a consolation for us in both winter and summer. Consolation and hope that beauty does hide itself even in evil times. Evil times not for us but for those who suffer these days because the church does not know how to bear good fruits. The lemon tree in the chapel budded many times before, and yet it was not able to bring forth fruits. Was it too young, or did it suffer from lack of light or heat or because of a disease that attacks its leaves? However, it was cared for by people. It was watered and the dirt was changed. It was moved at times so that more light could come to it through the small window in winter. We did not do much, but the little we did help. And on Pascha, we saw the first fruit. Which for us was no less than a kind miracle. However, in general, to plant fruit trees in Toronto is challenging, to say the least. In the neighbourhoods, people avoid fruit trees because they make a mess, it is said. To plant one from a seed and see it grow takes years. And if it does survive diseases, when the time comes for the first fruits, they are snatched by animals before they even get to be ripe. And because there are less and less fruit trees around the neighbourhoods these days, all kind of animals steal from the trees at different times. Until the tree remains barren. To fight with animals in Toronto is also problematic. They have rights and they are protected by law. And you will get in conflict with the law if you bring them any harm. Not that anybody would desire any harm to them. So, to be patient for the fruit to become mature does not require only work but also a certain type of faith that defies the reality of loss. And with a broken heart, on top of it, at the sight of that which you cared for being destroyed or stolen by others.

Christ is “the first fruit of the dead so he might be the first in all things”. The Father is patient with a broken heart because the Son has taken upon Himself the fruit that could not reach maturity on its own. *“And He continues to wear the body which He assumed, until He shall make me God through the power of his incarnation” (St Gregor Nazianzus).*

“And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?” (Ascension epistle)

If there is one thing we need, it is the direction given to us by the angels. By the cross we scatter. At the tomb, after the resurrection, we do not listen to them (in Mark - the myrrh bearing women say nothing

and in Luke the disciples go to Emaus instead to Galilee). And at the ascension, we end up looking at the empty sky, being spiritually stuck.

It is the emptiness that seduces us the most because it presents itself as being spiritual. Paying attention in our life to what is not real is the source of many troubles. In the desert, the stories of monks being tempted with flying are well known and they never end up well. In our lives, emptiness takes many forms. But it always leads to the same result. If we contemplate emptiness, we end up being emptied of meaning and purpose and become dissatisfied with life, with God and with ourselves. We become vulnerable to the deceit of today. And we personally contribute to today's loss when it comes to the value of the human being.

So, as we can see, not every wandering is the same. We first wander on untrodden paths out of a trauma, out of a wound inflicted on the innocence of the soul. This could bring us on the byways and hedges of existence. There is speed and a disregard for directions because of a lack of trust. And then there is a wandering caused by disbelief in the joy produced by healing and the good news of forgiveness within the soul. Before that, the fear of love makes the soul shy away until the love is proved to the heart and fully conquers it over.

It is the contemplation of emptiness that appears as being the highest risk because it causes us to be stuck spiritually. Jesus is asking Peter three times if he loves Him, because he knows that man loves God on his own terms. It is the highest risk because it is experienced by people to whom God revealed Himself through the cross and His resurrection.

"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (today's epistle - Acts 20:16-18, 28-36)

The empty sky that seduces us at the ascension seems generalized today and the lie that comes with it leads many astray. This happens when those who saw and believed gave up on listening to the angel and fell for the emptiness that takes deceiving forms. They are credible because they look healed and well-spoken, exhibit all power around them and a certitude that there is nothing else but the emptiness they are beholding. Being stuck in spiritual emptiness harms the branches of the vine and damages the fruits who are vulnerable to all kind of predators.

The Father is not patient with the spiritual stagnation that fell in love with its own emptiness. But He is patient with the intercession of his Son, who gathers all the fruits before and after maturity, because holiness is not conditioned by rules or canons, not even by time. And He does so through those he prays for today in the gospel. Those who share in his prayer and suffering, those who listen to the angel and come out of the illusion of spiritual nihilism to gather in holiness the fruits of his love. And this is done in spirit and truth. And if emptiness scatters many with the illusion of self determination, truth gathers all fruits around it in humility and finds a place for all, as immature as they may be, for within the Spirit there is communion and life for all.

Announcements:

Tuesday, June 18, 7:30 pm on Zoom - Last Psalm study before the summer

Wednesday, June 19, 6:30 pm – Bridges: "Gethsemane and the problem of suffering", followed by Compline.

Friday, June 21st, 7:00 am- Orthros

Saturday, June 22nd, 7: 00 am church open for silent prayer

8: 00 am Liturgy and memorial for the dead; please remember to make and bring Koliva and do mercy offerings for your dead

11:00 am - play on St Paul, written by brother Luke

6: 00 pm Great and holy Vigil (vespers with Lytia, procession and Orthros) for the Feast of Pentecost, the third most important feast of the year. Please make time to come and share in the Grace of this great feast.

Sunday, June 23rd: Feast of Pentecost

Church open at 7:00 am for silent prayer

8:00 am – 3rd and 9th hour are read

8:30 am - Divine liturgy

After the liturgy bring some sweets to share with the coffee.

The lemon fruit of Pascha. A sign of a harvest to come, and it has come already. The sign that we are about to reap what we have not sown.





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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

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5 of 5

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