



By the river of Babylon...

***How can we sing the songs of the Lord
while in a foreign land? (Ps 137)***

The experience of silence that suppresses the pain is deeper than the pain itself. Just like the Israelites who are not able to sing anymore, while having the experience of a foreign land. Singing is essential in tribulations. It helps one face the fear of death. It gives to prayer a beautiful garment that covers any nakedness with hope and dignity. It is the way in which the prayer becomes communal. After the last supper, the tradition says that Jesus would walk with His disciples, singing a psalm before praying alone in the Gethsemane Garden. It is not the fear of death that paralyzes the Israelites, not being able to “make any sounds in their throats”, but rather the land where they are taken, where the culture of death has become legal, and it exhibits its power because of their sins. However, it is not only singing that is taken away from them. Emotions are numbed and crying is repulsed. Where is the place where the soul can face its own honesty without the fear of being tricked or trapped?

The evil has become good and the revolt towards injustice is flattened out in time. You suffer without being taught to cry and so you lose the joy of being alive as well. By the river of Babylon,

the Israelites can still weep, but that’s because they remember Zion. They were walking into slavery, and they still had a fresh memory of what they had lost. There is only a little while before crying becomes a memory also.

"We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God."

John 19:6-11, 13-20, 25-28, 30 (Exaltation of the Holy Cross – Saturday gospel)

We see though that the law that gives the right to kill is not customary only to Babylonians. We hear the voice of the people while Jesus is brought to Pilate: “He ought to die, because He made himself the Son of God.” We see the same thing in Pilate who rules under the same law that justifies killing. Moreover, he has the discretionary power to apply this law :*"Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?"*

The gospel is alive today, when the same law rules, where killing is justified just as before. Either because the enemy took your land or your culture, or because he has become a threat for you and for himself. Or because you can't determine your own life to the extent in which you can

terminate it, the same way a child terminates a video game, by pressing a button. The death penalty is still legal South of the border. And so on... The examples are painful to remember. We would be terrified to know how many people are killed today, "legally justified", in wars, and in places where postmodern ethics and religious ideologies make the cards. And this is exactly what numbs your feelings and kills your voice. You cannot mourn anymore because if you do so, you have become a threat to the system. The legality of the system does not accommodate any emotions.

The reality of community life, the way we know it, somehow escapes this paralysis of soul, which is customary to the foreign land. Here the emotions are intense and diverse. And never lacking. There is prayer and singing. There is yelling at times and waking up of neighbours. The deepest fears and deepest wounds are exhibited together because they somehow know that here, in church, life does not hide, and death is conquered. The church is called today to feed the people and to nourish them. To care for life, and also, to prepare a place for them where they can come before Christ the way they are. Where they can find the honesty of their own soul, even if this puts one in touch with their own wounds, weaknesses or sins. To offer an open space where the soul of man does not need to hide but can instead cry and ask for forgiveness. It can pray and sing. With no promise of a better life but only with the reality of encounter with Christ who listens to us from the cross. The encounter with mercy.

It is the reality of the cross that changes the foreign land. At the cross emotions are fully exhibited: anger, sorrow, betrayal, weakness and weeping... Prayer and forgiveness at the cross are heard and received. There is consolation for the single mother who lost her son in the gift of adoption, there is a prefiguration of the joy of the resurrection and the encounter with the risen Christ.

There is a silence at the cross though. And this is the silence of the Father... Selah ...

It is the silence that helps us hear the murmur of the Holy Spirit. The outpouring grace that comes through the cross. The voices of many waters that clean us the sinners and sanctify the faithful. The silence of the Father is not the emptiness of our sins, but the washing of all creation that now can not only be experienced within the heart but also heard in the flowing streams of the new Babylon rivers that help us sing a new song.

Picking up one's cross is not a matter of personal vocation, where we sort things between us and God and try to please Him with our gifts. Vocations happen before the cross, where we can have the experience of God in a personal way within our own life. It leads to the cross because God reveals Himself and the more we know Him the more we fall in love with Him and we trust Him to follow. The cross is a community matter. Christ is abandoned and betrayed, naked and thirsty and yet surrounded by all. He is alone with God while God is not with Him. And yet, through Him

all can receive His forgiveness and hear the murmur of the Holy Spirit. Through Him all can learn to sing again.

Within the community, we can be honest with God because of the many crosses exalted through the life of the people who come daily through the door. Their prayer is the same, a prayer that comes from a naked body and a betrayed heart, a soul that experienced many times the abandonment and rejection of this world. They might not hear the voice of the Father they pray to, but we can hear, through their crosses, the murmur of the Holy Spirit. Because Christ is in all, and any life taken away by the rule that reigns has the print of the nails and the murmur of the Holy Spirit that cleanses all creation. As the rule that reigns with death is as present and powerful as ever, so is the reality of the cross. The difference is that the rule, as powerful as it may be, always stops at the cross. Whereas the cross itself opens the streams of waters where a beautiful song is heard again, and again, and again ...

To conclude:

Forgiveness from the cross today:

T. came very tired through the doors on Thursday morning. He needed some clothes. He had some fancy ones and shoes that did not fit him well. He joked that he dresses like that every day for an interview that doesn't come. He was very tired, and his body looked even more beaten down than before beaten down more than before. He would fall asleep while talking. Even so, hardly keeping his body straight, he shared a story about forgiveness. And he concluded: "I have to work harder on forgiving my parents... so much I know, and I learned so far ..."



This week at the mission:

Wednesday at 6:30 pm: Bridges – Introduction to: *For the Life of the World. Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*

Friday at 7:00 am: Divine Liturgy

Saturday at 11:00 am: Do you want to help Tatyana paint the myrrh bearing women ? Talk to Fr Nicolaie. A project to complete the icon of the white angel (see above)



St Silouan Chapel at St John's Mission

155 Broadview Ave. Toronto, ON M4M 2E9

T: 416-466-1357 E: info@stjohnsmision.org W: stjohnsmision.org

St Zoticos Orthodox Church at Good Neighbours Mission

193 Markham Rd Scarborough, ON M1J 3C3

T: 647-358-4105



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 15, 2024

4 of 4

©2024 St. John the Compassionate Mission

www.stjohnsmision.org