



First Sunday of Luke

"I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the womb of hades I cried, and you heard my voice"(Jonas 2:3)

On Saturday morning P. came to the mission for breakfast. He is an old and yet ever new friend in Christ for all of us who look at the gospel with hope and joy. This time he was talking about his medical problems. He never speaks if not asked. And when he does, he never complains. Answering my question about his health he pointed to the box of medications he has to take every day. "It's very large (like the stone of the tomb)." He likes to joke about it and, as he describes it, he laughs at his situation. A lot of medication but with no help. "They don't make any difference. They change nothing", he says. "At least here we are still good, since we don't have to pay for them", I reply. "Yes, but that's why you don't pay, because they are no good", he answers with a laugh.

P. has diabetes. And it is not because he is careless about his diet, he is actually very careful. He has medical knowledge and he knows how to do the right thing with the little income he makes, being on ODSP and living in a rooming house. Diabetes is hereditary in his situation. Everybody had it in his family. "And they all died", he said. "My parents (both doctors). When it starts, there is not much you can do. And it starts when you get older. Maybe you can just slow the process". "What happened with your parents, how long did they live after they got it?" I asked. "A couple of years", he answered.

In the gospel today, Jesus enters the scene, changing all the surroundings into life. With abundant life. The fishermen are working in silence, feeling defeated after a night of hard work with no catch. The boats are empty. And until Jesus preaches, nobody seems to interrupt this almost depressing atmosphere. He moves everything. Br Luke noticed this on Friday when we read the gospel together. People gather to listen to Him, the fishermen go back to work and the abundance of catch overwhelms them, who are not dull, tired and defeated anymore but afraid of God (as a volunteer who read the gospel on Friday in Turkish noticed). They also discovered the prayer and the reality of their own sins. And they leave everything, following Jesus based on a promise: "You will be catching men".

The whole scene was dull before Jesus entered it. And when He enters, it gives it colour, taste, energy and beauty. It becomes mobile, and no longer static as before. It gives it what it did not have. Even given by God, the life of man, the way we know it, lacked something before God became man.

Any moment of conversion, any change of mind and heart comes through the glimpse we get of the mercy of God. Several conversations during the week reflected this need for a radical change of perspective that the people experience in their lives. Expressions like daydreaming or focusing on a wall from which we are expecting a light to come to us. Climbing a mountain and falling again and again because you cannot see the face of the person who testifies the life in you for the sake of your communion. All these expressions, used by different people during the week, were praying for the

moment we see today in the gospel. When God enters our life, and we discover in us the fear of His presence. A presence that brings an abundance of life. When we are being taken out from our daydreaming, from our thoughts, from our work that cannot produce anything more because we have done everything already ... and so on. When we realised that beyond death and life (even in its eternity) there is the mercy of God.

The fishermen were not people of inaction. On the contrary, they cared for life, and they work hard to provide for it. They work in difficult conditions. On the surface of the lake that hides within the monster that lurks in darkness with no mercy. They toil on the edge of life putting their lives at risk every time they go to work. We remember how terrified Peter was when he started to sink into the waters or the disciples when the wind started during the night, shaking the boat while Jesus was asleep.

However, with all this fear, they try the best they can to get something out of the abyss, toiling on the surface. They try to get everything that is good out of an abyss, to care for life, through the food they provide. It is the best humans can do. To toil the land after the fall, in the sweat of their work. To care for the fragility of life.

But no matter how much man works at the end there is something inevitable. Just as P. was describing, talking about his illness. There is the reality of death that man cannot escape. The monster of the sea eventually gets the best of life. In the gospel today, Jesus takes the abundance of life out of the abyss as a testimony of the authority He has over the living and the dead. Because His mercy is deeper than the heart of the sea and the ends of the universe.

They that observe vain things have abandoned mercy for themselves. Jonas 2:9

It is hard to say why today we are still on the surface of life, being terrorized by death. Even the fish caught are dying before they reach the shore. It is hard to say why we are tempted by a reality of death that has no roots, and we failed to make the truth of the resurrection the heart of our existence. Being surrounded by such a witness of life, we are seduced by the shadow of a monster that has no teeth left. However, it is His mercy that we miss to encounter when we remain on the surface.

Although deeper than the abyss and the ends of the universe, the mercy of God stops at the entrance of the human heart. Where there is no monster. But just a conscience that has not yet been fully touched by neither the abundance of life, not by the power of death. Because the mercy does not force itself upon us and does not take away our freedom. Because in His mercy, Jesus gives Himself over and over and over again to those who are rejected. Because the mercy never lies in order to win over a conscience that is in need of cleaning, but only shares its truth with a kind generosity.

“Thy mercy is better than life” (Ps 63:3)

Something though in P’s eyes and in his sense of humor when looking at the monster tells us that there is hope for all of us. Because somehow, he can see beyond the world that is falling apart today. He sees the mercy that embraces us all.

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*“There can be no such thing as a
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*(Is this a Christian Orthodox
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***“Let us commend our whole
life unto Christ our God”***



*“Most of the problems in the Church are due to
ignorance of the Scriptures.” St John Chrysostom*



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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 22, 2024

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