



**15 November**  
**Beginning of St Philip's Lent**

*Christ is drawing near. Make ready, Bethlehem! Let the salvation of the nations shine forth! Prepare the manger and call the shepherds! Call the Magi from the East! The choirs of angels cry out: "Behold, the King of Heaven appears on earth!"*

## Preparing the heart for Christmas

### Why Phillip's Lent?

Forty days before Christmas, we begin a time of fasting, prayer, and works of mercy. It is commonly known as Phillip's Fast, or Lent. We often overlook the significance of this name for the fast, and prefer to call it by other names such as "Christmas fast" or Advent. Without embarking on a campaign to promote "Phillip's Fast" as being the correct title, it would be good to look at how this Apostle may give us a way to live this particular time before the feast of the Nativity of Christ that leads to His Theophany.

Phillip is called directly by Jesus; he is one of the first three Apostles. Like Andrew and Peter, he was from one and the same town of Bethsaida. Both Andrew and Phillip are called directly by Christ. All of them are invited by Jesus to "Come and see." Like Andrew, Phillip is a missionary. He does not just enjoy his Apostleship; he goes out and looks for and finds Nathaniel and uses the same words of invitation as Jesus: "Come and see."

So the first thing about Phillip's Fast is an invitation to live this call to "Come and see," to draw near to Jesus, and to be with Him where He is. This means for us at St. John's Mission to live in a more sober and attentive way, seeking Him especially among the poor. It is an invitation also to read the Scriptures, which point us to where He is, and help us to recognize Him.

To "Come and see" is also to draw close to the Mother of God, who during this fast holds in her very self, in secret – *Mysticos* – the Word made flesh. To "Come and see" is also to become aware that He is also mystically – in secret – desiring to be born in us, that each of us is called to become this place where others should be able to "Come and see" Him.

"Come and see" is also a movement of our heart. Enflamed by love, we want to find, reach out to others, and bring them face-to-face with Christ, to "Come and see Him" in this community, in the sharing of bread, and in the shared joy and forgiveness of each day.

"Come and see" is also an invitation to live in us, in our souls, the joy and freshness of these early encounters with Christ that Phillip lived with Andrew and Peter. A renewal of joy and excitement versus a dreary, weary, and cynical holiness.

Phillip is also the one of the Apostles whom Jesus challenges to feed the five thousand hungry people. Phillip's reply is pragmatic. The Gospel shows us a unique familiarity that only Phillip had with Jesus. During Phillip's Fast, Jesus asks us: What will satisfy your hunger? How will you feed my people? What is the bread to be shared at the Mission?

Later in the Gospel, it is to Phillip that some Greeks from Bethsaida go, asking him to help them see Jesus. Again, Phillip was not afraid to show that he belonged to Jesus, and so here he acts as someone who brings people to Jesus. (Judas also uses his status to bring people to Jesus, but to destroy Him and to gain something for himself...) Phillip shows us what pure love for Jesus looks like. Like clear water, he brings people to Jesus and steps aside. We tend to want to get something out of our church life. Do we really bring people to Jesus, or do we try to make disciples of others for ourselves, using Jesus as a means?

In the end we see Phillip's intervention at the Last Supper. "Show us the Father!" Phillip asks Jesus. He allows himself to be taught by Jesus. He is humble and asks questions that are clearly not very deep, but because he is humble is led to ask the deepest question that sums up all the Scriptures. Show us the Father.

So, the "Come and see" leads to this "Show us the Father." Phillip traces for us the deep work and meaning of this time before Christmas. We are going to journey with the Mother of God, and like the shepherds go to see the one who is the perfect image of the Father. And this will satisfy the hunger of our souls. "This will satisfy us."

pRoberto

## 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Luke 12:16-21

*"... 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you;  
and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'  
So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

**Gregory Palamas** challenged the wealthy in fourteenth-century Thessalonica:

"Like wild pigs and bloodthirsty dogs they seize the life of the unprotected poor . . . Rich and famous people seize power in order to do even greater injustices and sins. For this reason Christ said, "Woe to you that are rich and satisfied . . . and woe to you when men speak well of you." Christ will place the rich on the left, and will send them to the fire and will curse them because they were hard-hearted, merciless, and voluptuous in their life. The rich man of the gospel parable saw that his production increased. He did not take anything from other people, but he is condemned because he did not give to the poor. Much worse are those who not only do not give to the poor, but who increase their wealth at the expense of the poor."



*"... 'What shall I do, ...?' And he said, 'I will do this: ...'"*

In the parable, the enclosure of the rich man is hermetic. Nothing is going out, nothing is coming in. He is well guarded. He did not guard himself with strength but with his own will: self-determination. He is closed within himself so much that he can hear only his own voice. The only one that matters. The

only one that he replies to and enters into a "dialogue" with. The only one that influences his behaviour. His own voice. During the week, a confession of a person who lives with schizophrenia, revealed the intense fear and distress of the human soul when bearing that illness. For the rich man in the parable, talking to his own voice brought no fear to him, on the contrary, it brought him a sense of self fulfilling prophesy and comfort. A comfort that brings death. A trust beyond understanding. When we talk to ourselves, we are at peace, we are not afraid that we don't listen to and do the only word that matter, the Word of God.

Most of the parables Jesus taught reveal a gathering of people or people in relationship with each other. Action, good or evil. Most of them reflect a community life where things and people touch each other. Where God is present. The one that, in a way, reflects the action of one person is the parable of the Sower. However, even though it reflects in a mirror the loneliness of the rich man of today's parable, the Sower reveals an opposite action. He is alone but he gives life. He offers Himself through the act of giving. Whereas today, the rich man brings everything into himself. When God is alone without man, it is so because He loves and His love is not received and reciprocated but rejected. When man is alone without God it is because he rejects, and he does not reciprocate His love.

The only thing that reaches the rich man is death. We could argue that even the voice of God that announces the inevitable does not touch him. He does not answer to this voice. The riches he is about to gather are echoing only the sound of his own voice. There is a direct relationship between the self-determination of a person and the riches they possess. This might help us understand the evil we struggle with today.

We hear many times in the scripture about the One and the many. The One who suffers and gives Himself for many, for the forgiveness of sins. In the parable today, the reverse is presented - the one who dies alone without loving. We receive this revelation in relationship

with the many for which he is absent. The poor and hungry, the thirsty and the naked. If through Christ, one man dies so the nation cannot perish (John 11:50), through the rich man, many die because one wants to live for himself only. We see that also in the drawing that Amelia made during the week, of the holy innocents, the children who were killed by Herod at the Nativity. Many innocents had to die because the reign of one king was threatened.

On Thursday, a young Muslim refugee who volunteers at the mission was fasting for the day. They fast, as he was going to confess, on Mondays and Thursdays. Why was he fasting? "I fast so I can remember my siblings. I have 11 brothers and sisters. When I fast, I remember them. It helps me to think about them. Not to forget them. The other time, when I do not fast, I don't think about them much".

During St Philip's fast we are called to become many from one.

We are called to move from a soul that is satisfied with itself to a soul that shares in the fragility and vulnerability of many. By fasting, we start to distinguish the presence of the other one who matters for us. Because we fast from our own self determination, we receive what is given and we do not buy our own gift. We place ourselves at the mercy of Christ, whose voice we started to distinguish as it calls us to prayer, whose indistinguishable voice mingles with the voices of many who pray today for mercy and peace. They pray more today because they lost many. The same voices who pray today are going to bring us on Nativity the good tidings: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men."

The will of man becomes good when he becomes the will of many, with Christ in their midst. And as our world goes deeper into self destruction, because of a rich will at its centre that wants more for itself, the voices of people who suffer multiply greatly, and together with them the prayer for peace and for the coming of mercy. So the rich man can hear again:

*"Drink of it, all of you. This my blood, of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins".*

*"Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous."* (Ps 112)

**November 12 is the feast of our Apostolate, St John The Compassionate (Merciful).**

The goal of our life is not an idea or program but to become Saints.

That is why we don't celebrate a virtue or a cause but a person, who lived many centuries ago and who was and is for us a model of life.

We don't celebrate just "a celebrity or a superhero" but we celebrate together with our saint the real possibility to be able to live the gospel today as he did many centuries ago.

At the mission we want to follow St John's example on how to live the gospel so that we can, like him, also become saints. We have a relic of our saint at the mission. A piece of his incorruptible body.

It has been exposed in the chapel to be venerated by all the people who came to the mission for the last few days. On Sunday, after the liturgy, we will carry his precious relic in procession, outside, around the church. After venerating it as a community, it will be placed back in its normal resting place.

Throughout the night of Nov 11 a few people, at different times, kept vigil by the reliquary of St. John, while waiting for the Divine Liturgy. This practice is called keeping Vigil. One person noted that he was awakened by a strange bright light. A light that shone more than just the two candles that were burning at that time. The light filled the chapel with a gentle sweetness and peace.

As the psalm, we later said: "Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous." (Psalm 112)

### ***Announcements:***

This past Friday the church started the fast before Christmas, called St Phillip's fast. Please read the bulletin on the meaning of this fast and why it is called St Phillip's fast. It won't be the same reason you will find on YouTube.

Please speak to father Nicolaie to ask his blessing on how to live the fast. Don't fast -self medicate or make up things à la carte. Speak to father and, with him, see what is the best way for you to live the fast.

Later in the season, there will be times for going to confession and special evening vigil services. Please see the calendar for these times that have been published. Take advantage of the many rich opportunities to pray with others that we have in this community. There is no need to starve spiritually here or to go the internet to look up YouTube channels....Here we have the real thing.

Another event you won't find on YouTube , this **Tuesday at 7:30 pm**, study of psalm 15 continues (through Zoom).



And another event you won't find on the internet and to which you are encouraged to attend in person:

**Wednesday, from 6 pm to 8:30 pm**, a special event is going to take place here at the mission - a retreat for people who have lost loved ones through euthanasia (MAID) or for anyone interested to learn more about this new Canadian phenomenon of artificially terminating life upon request. There will be a guest speaker, as well as time for sharing in small groups. It is a retreat open to all.

This retreat is a joint effort between St John's Mission and Compassionate Care and Euthanasia prevention Coalition. There is no charge for participating, but donations are welcome.

And another event you won't be able to live on YouTube – this coming **Thursday** is a very important feast, the presentation of the Mother of God in the Temple. Divine Liturgy at 8 am.

And something else that is better than just watching orthodox worship on YouTube....

**Every Friday**, as usual, we pray Orthros here in the chapel, among the people who come for breakfast at 5 am. This is a good opportunity to pray in church during the week and to hear hymns and texts that otherwise we would never hear by just attending Sunday services. We also pray for the people who come off the street and for all the people that come to serve them.

During St Phillip's fast we can sign up and take the icon of St John the Compassionate at home for a week. Please add your name on the list posted on the board and talk to Fr Nicolaie to receive the blessing before receiving the icon.



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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, November 17, 2024

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