

Matthew 4:12-17

On Galilee of the Gentiles, on the region of Zebulun and the land of Nephthalim, as the Prophet declared, a great light has shone, which is the Christ. Dark-dwellers have seen a radiant dawn shining out of Bethlehem, rather out of Mary, as the Lord -- the Sun of Justice --breaks His rays o'er the whole of civilization. Come then, all unclothed offspring of Adam: let us put on Christ and thus keep warm. For, as a mantle for the denuded and a beacon to the be-darkened, You came and shone forth, O Light unapproachable. (Oikos)



“... let us put on Christ and thus keep warm.”

How can Christ, who is in need of clothes, keep us warm? Entering naked into the Jordan, the One who is stripped of His garments, keeps us warm. Very early in the morning, this past Wednesday, before the raising of the sun, a homeless brother, dressed in several layers of clothes, was sitting on a chair with his eyes closed, sparing some light. He was resting after having spent the entire night outside. He is in his 30's, and he seems rather young. At least his appearance makes him look young. In order to keep warm during some of the coldest nights we had this winter, he wears several layers of clothes, including a thin, silk cover underneath his jacket, the type used for packing a sleeping bag. “It is light and it offers protection for all of your body”, he explains. “It stretches so it can cover your hands and your head. It catches the cold if you wear it on the outside, but if you wear it underneath it does the opposite”. He's been on the streets for three years now. “It is better to plan your nights in advance”, he further explains. “I try to teach other people how to survive at night. If you plan well, it is better. For instance, I take the last trip on the Queen streetcar, which brings me here (*to the mission*) before 5:00 am.” We talked more about his life on the streets, about his nights and days. He spends most of the day at the library. He realised that learning new things makes everything better, for his mind and for his soul. He used to work for a company collecting iron. It was a fast paced environment. Now things are different for him. He takes his time, being a homeless person. He takes things in, he processes them in depth, he does not just live them on the surface. He ponders, we could say, in his heart, on what he sees, what he lives, what he experiences. He describes how he came to learn how to conquer the cold. “I learned that you need to try not to fight it. You need to open to it. To let it come into your body. And with time, the body gets used to it. The only thing you have to watch for is when your body starts shaking. It means it's time to look for shelter.” He meets many people on the streets during the day. But people generally don't see the homeless. “They never take time to see their face. They are always in a rush. They don't think much of us.” We somehow ended up talking about

a saint, who was listening attentively to this young man's confession, from the wall just across the room. It seemed like St Xenia was looking at him with curiosity. She was homeless as well. And she tried to help people on the street too, I informed my friend. "You know, this made me think, maybe this is my call ... I never thought about that ... I'll think more of it", he responded. Our young brother was very open and light, coming from the street where he had conquered the cold, he seemed to bring warmth inside the church. With all his layers and with the experience of coming out of a freezing night, he brought warm hope to people around him. A young woman sitting at the same table, was in distress because of her schizophrenia, arguing alone with an enemy we could not see. She was calmed down only by his presence. He did not need to say much but only to pay attention to her. Because his attention was genuine.

When the light comes into darkness today, He takes time with the people who are oppressed by it. It is not come in a sudden manner, swiftly chasing the darkness away and leaving people to stare at the empty bright sky, forcing them to deal, instead of darkness, with a blinding brightness. No, the light looks for the depth of our being, to kindle the fire inside, while it gently rests on the outside: on the face, on the hands and on the whole body of the people. Christ looks for the face of the oppressed man to look him into his eyes. Darkness makes people lose their purpose, wondering in loneliness, touching things they do not see, at times being harmed by them with fear. The light warms the soul with the humility of the servant. It brings those who were oppressed together, it makes them to desire unity with each other. And it does all this after inviting them to repentance. The light warms the poor person, calling him to repentance.

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (today's gospel - Matthew 4:12-17)

On Friday, a sister came to visit the church for the second time. Her first visit took place sometime before the summer. She came with a desire to change her life, repeating many times the same word:repent, repent, repent. She knows what she is saying and she means it. She had a reason to ask for repentance and she had people she loves that give her the assurance of forgiveness. She wants to give her life to Christ and she wants to find out how. As she talks about forgiveness, streams of Jordan flows down her face. In today's gospel, Jesus only says the word and people come running to church, looking to repent. It is because we love Him greatly, no matter how big our sins are. And we desire to repent for the sake of being with Him. Face to face. His light warms our hearts to repentance.

The call for repentance is spoken to those who were in darkness. To the blind, to the lame, to the sinners, even to those who had a criminal life, as somebody was confessing this week. The Word of God comes to those who were oppressed by darkness in order for them to become prophets of this time. To repent, because their longing for light is now satisfied, where the longing for holiness is just about to start. And the first movement is the movement of repentance. As we were talking about the gospel on Friday, with people who

had worked all day at the mission, about repentance, it occurred to us that they had been living repentance throughout their entire day. Imitating the humility of the servant, all the volunteers were lighting the gloomy darkness of the city. The place at 155 Broadview Ave. resembled in truth to the place of Zebulon and Neftholim, where foreigners had gathered to learn from the light the humility of the servant. By becoming broken fractures of light in a gloomy city, just as the fireflies play in the dark summer nights at the refuge. They are a joyful icon to the stars in the sky at night, who point ever towards the Sun of Righteousness.

“... for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

This is the purpose of the fireflies who light the night with their little acts of mercy. To build the Body of Christ. Repentance is the rhythm of life for those to whom Christ was revealed. Just as Steven insisted to tell us from his corner, on Friday: every day. (Steven is a man whom we had to ban from the mission in the past, on account of his failing to do just that). Within the light we do not have the excuse of the darkness but only the opening of repentance towards life, through a life of service that is looking to touch the humility of Christ. Daily, until the community, through its people, may attain the full measure of the fullness of Christ.

Weekly scripture at the mission;

“Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! for it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” (Saturday gospel: Matthew 4:1-11)

On Tuesday morning, one of the volunteers who has been doing dishes at breakfast for some time, took a short break and started to chat about the cold outside. It was a very cold night in Toronto. This did not impress her much. She grew up in Siberia, where you get used to the cold. She remembered how on year in August, on her birthday, she could not get any flowers because the land was still frozen. People learn how to live in cold weather. Cars need a special oil. You have to change it in October. After that is impossible. If you pass the deadline, you cannot use the car. The schools close only after -40 C . But only the elementary schools, the other ones stay open. She had many other winter stories from Siberia that make Canadian winter look like late spring. “But the people are good ... You know, most of the people are good there. I live with this hope now, that the goodness of the majority of the people will

prevail one day. And nobody would be afraid. That there will be a different way of living and peace ... You know, she confesses, I don't believe much in God, but I know that everybody, at some point in their life, is tempted with power, money and glory. Everybody is. " "Like Jesus you mean ?" "Yes, like Him."

Theophany this year

Peter died on Thursday at St Michael's hospital. Almost everybody at the mission asked about him. It is hard to say how much he was loved. Because we love with a small measure, we cannot really relate to the love that washes all things. At the hospital, on Thursday, when the machines were stopped, Peter resembled Christ on the cross. Many people around him were making plans and beholding him immobilized on his hospital bed. The streams of the Jordan this year were mostly invisible. A tiny presence of holy water came down from Peter's eyes as we prayed, with Br Luke and Nichita, beside his hospital bed, just before the Theophany vigil last Sunday.

Peter repented, on the hospital bed, for all of us who knew him. We remembered his joy when Br Luke gave him the bells to ring at the mission on Saturdays, when we sang different feast tropars, during the year.

The life he shared with us over the last few years was a consolation and a witness of the love that Christ has for the people who labour at the mission. He entrusted Peter to them. And Peter touched the lives of many. Because he welcomed everybody to push his wheelchair up the ramp and into the chapel. He humbled himself so we can taste the sweetness of the humility of the servant.

We'll speak more about Peter in the days to come. Even now, disconnected from the machines, it still feels that his presence is real within the chapel, where he used to sneak in at times in the morning and pray, "for his girlfriend" or for his mom, whom he remembered dying when he was young.

Somehow, Peter died in the place he loved with all his heart. Close to Johan, who wheeled him up the ramp almost every morning during the week. He died close to the one who cared for him the most. This is something for us to ponder on.

Peter's funeral was not yet scheduled. But we can all pray for his soul, now and forever.
Memory Eternal to Peter.