



"Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" "... let us put on Christ and thus keep warm."

Friday liturgy: St Anthony's feast (Luke 6:17-23)

"Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied."

On Friday morning, at the liturgy for the feast of St. Anthony, as the gospel was being read, just behind the chapel door people were hungry, waiting for breakfast to be offered. They came to eat. All of them are poor, and among them there are homeless people whose ascetical life resembles in reality the life of the saint. Just a couple of days before, at breakfast, a young man looking just like St. Anthony came through our doors from the cold and dark night. If we had taken a picture of him at that time, it would have prefigured the icon of the feast. His whole body, including his head, was covered by a black mantle, that had kept him warm during the night. He was sharing his thoughts from the previous night, while he was riding the streetcar. "Many things we do are a distraction from being with Christ ... I just realised that ... They seem like small things, but they take you away from Him. I feel overwhelmed at times, because I have too many thoughts ... I have to learn to slow them down ... One at a time. Life is like a ladder ... I have to learn to take one step at a time." It was 8:00 am. After our talk, he apologized that he needed to take half an hour to rest before departing. He sets himself apart and closes his eyes for 30 minutes. Johan's voice is already warning people that the end of breakfast is near.

The same day, another young homeless person talks about his thoughts on the street. He is light and he has a good demeanour. He came a few years to Toronto from the reserves up north. He needed to leave familiarity and find new life. He shares his hope with generosity. "What do you see here, in the city? One thing worries me these days: that people, because they feel betrayed, they look and listen to the wrong person ... You know, it is just like when you have a "mental illness or an addiction, it makes you vulnerable ... You want to do something to get away from it, but you end up worse. You look for protection but then you find the opposite. That's what I think happens now ... Things are not good, people are hurt, but they listen to and follow the wrong person ... As for me, I stayed away from addictions for the past three years, you know, coming here ... I am learning." The feasts of saints of the church are prefigured at times in the community by the lives of those who are hungry, naked and poor. It feels like St Anthony

always has new disciples that live an ascetical life for the sake of the goodness they desire. For the sake of being with Christ. For real and quite practical.

Tuesday gospel -

“At that time Jesus returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil.” Luke 4:1-15

Early in the morning, an older brother rushes in the office. He needs to talk, or rather to confess. He is in crisis. A long life of addictions brought him now into a pit he says. He is tempted with the same thoughts, like in the gospel. He is cornered. He thinks of some solutions that would make him big or others that would make him small or even disappear from the face of the earth. In the end, he realises he needs to change. It is very hard. But the solution is his own repentance. In his case that means detox.

“It is good to give praise to the Lord Most High, to proclaim his love each morning his faithfulness at the night fall.” (orthros)

Jesus is tempted but God does not repent. His love for us is always the same, from the cross. It never fails. When we are in a crisis, and tested, repentance is the path. Not for L. though. She resembles more Christ. She was in the hospital all week because of pneumonia. However, on Saturday morning, when asked how she feels, she shares her thoughts on another battle. “It was hard last night. I was tested. Sometimes, you know, it is like that. I am tested, because some mental illnesses don’t go away. They have no cure.” Her face is enlightened now, in the morning. At night it is not the same. She cannot change because her illness has no cure. But with every morning when her face is enlightened after a battle at night, something more changes in her heart. And she does not seem to keep the change for herself, but instead, she shares whatever goodness, whatever kindness, whatever inner beauty she has, with all those she meets early in the morning, when she asks them if they want a coffee.

“At that time, as Jesus entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said: ...”

Leprosy at the time was an illness without cure. Just like the one that L. describes, that keeps testing you. Today leprosy does have a cure but there are many other illnesses that don’t. It is just as with many other things in our life. There are moments when we can change things, like our brother, and go to detox. When our will can act in accordance with the treatment and its prescription. But sometimes, the only thing that is given to us to change is our heart. L’s heart, every morning, is more enlightened. Her body is weak, and her mental illness does not go away but her spirit is strong. The ten lepers pray to God together. There is a unity in their prayer. They have a community that prays from a distance. They are marginalized and isolated because of

their condition. We know from the life of the saints that a marginalized community gives hospitality to the stranger who has no place to lay his head. They know Christ from within their midst. And they pray to him together. We remember here, historically, how the community of people with leprosy gave hospitality to St Francis when he was hiding away from his family. That's precisely where he sees St Damian's cross. Within their community, within their gathering. Without idealizing such a marginalized community, we can confess that Christ is in their midst, because suffering brings them together.

In a way, L. is a witness of this change of a heart when being tested by an illness that has no cure. The communion prayer and the distance from which the people with leprosy prayed (reminding us of the Publican's prayer) reveals a personal knowledge of Christ. Their hearts would have been changed. And they were asking for his mercy. To have mercy poured upon their bodies, that would flow filling their broken hearts.

But as they walked and are cleansed, they forgot about God: *"And Jacob ate and was filled ... and he forsook God"* (Ode two - Deut. 32:18).

We look for repentance in our life and for a changing of the heart. And that, through grace, happens at times. We don't ponder though on the possibility of a reverse. A change of heart that turns its back on Christ. That comes after a great gift and a great encounter, after a great healing within our own life. It might be, as Eliana was saying on Friday, when we reflected on the gospel, that Jesus healed them and sent them away to the priests to test them, to see if they would come back.

"Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

On Friday morning, before starting the day of work, at teatime, one could not stop noticing that most of the volunteers that day were "foreigners". People who came recently here. It has been like that for the past two years. Probably eight out of nine are new in Canada. The proportion at the mission is reversed compared with today's gospel. They give praise to God through their generous work.

Later, during the reflection on the gospel, it was revealed that those who were praising God during the day, had a great love and understanding for those who were absent. More precisely, for the eight lepers who did not come back. They thought that Christ did not condemn them but rather was asking about them out of love. As a father asking the youngest son about his brothers. He wanted to be with them. He was concerned for them. Without judging.

The Samaritan gives us a witness for being with Christ after the great healing happened. There is a witness of Christ within the community, with a loud voice, a kneeling at the feet of Christ and a personal encounter with Him. There is a new faith that has been born, that brings about salvation and triggers in us a new way of being well. Better than the healing itself. This new way of being well resembles the light on L.' face early in the morning. While we are tested with good, she is tested with struggles, and yet she wants us to give thanks to God together.



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, January 19, 2025

4 of 4

©2025 St. John the Compassionate Mission

www.stjohnsmision.org