



***“The longing for God
is unceasing in those who dwell in the desert ...”***

Does the older brother know that the father loves him?

The parable ends with the father seeming to answer this very question: “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.” It was the older brother who was complaining to the father, asking him for a goat to sacrifice.

This frustration was with him before the returning of the prodigal son. Would this be the scape goat, to kill so that he may justify his struggle in loving his father? “Something has to give ...”, his friends would have told him, “Something that is not yours.” The older brother does not receive a scape goat to sacrifice with “his friends”, who are mentioned in the story as an outside influence that aims to break the communion of the older son with his father. The friends who want to trick him in believing that this sacrifice would solve the problem of his heart. “If you had given that to me, everything would have been fine.”

Unlike Cain (who, without speaking to God, kills Abel), his silence is broken at the expense of the repentance of his brother and the forgiveness of his father for the prodigal son. It is not the love of the father for himself that breaks the morbidity of silence but the feast of the resurrection of his brother. That’s where his self-imposed mutism ends. He is able at that very moment to open his heart to the father. What comes out is not pretty, however, it comes out of his heart. He does not lie to him. This is already a breaking through from his friends’ influence, from the voices that ask for sacrifice, for murder. Unlike Cain though, the older brother is faithful to the father. He stays with him and does the right things. However, his heart was with “his friends”, who affected him in an evil way and with whom he had a relationship that takes priority. Like a marriage to the one who divides and does not desire communion.

In the end, we don’t know if the answer of the father touched his heart. Does he believe now that the father loves him? The older brother does not answer to his father. What does his silence mean now? The parable does not tell us. It leaves us with hope and prayer, that the love of the father and the new honesty of the older brother would bare good fruits.

However, during lent and in our life, if we are trying to be faithful to the work that the Father has prepared for us, faithful to the acts of mercy, the parable makes us attentive not to become evil by doing good things. It is the joy that helps us discern. The presence and/or the lack of it.

J. was a real prodigal son looking to return to the home he never had. He made a journey from London, Ontario, looking for his family, or what was left of it. He grew up in foster homes. He literally got lost on Friday. He walked all the way from Scarborough where he had a bed in a shelter where to lay his head. Walking on the streets, he got lost and slept outside. The next day he found himself in the neighbourhood and people directed him to the mission. The city seemed very strange to him. Restless and uneasy. It scares him altogether. He came to talk to his brother and sister, but they wanted him to go to rehab first. He's been clean for a month. He made a commitment to leave addictions behind. By his looks, J. seems much older than he is, which is why he thinks everybody around him is younger. He spent all day in the church. When he left, he was thankful for having experienced a peace which was new to him. He spent time in the chapel praying together with us and by himself. J. had a light sense of humour, eyes that have seen so many things and a profound and joyful quest for an encounter with a father he could now love. He was ready, he looked ready, he had no regrets about his father, even though he himself might have been the very goat that others would sacrifice. J. shared at lunch a loss that he experienced. He lost his girlfriend to kidney failure. His life on the streets was rough for him. He did not complain, he did not blame anybody, he just reminded God of what his eyes had seen and his heart had experienced. He is ready to return to the father. To be embraced and have a feast on his behalf.

J. was lucky enough on Friday. He remembered somehow half a name of the shelter where he stayed. "Something with a church he said". He called them and, fair enough, they had not kicked him out. "Why did you call us?" a voice with authority asked him. "To see if I still have a bed to sleep tonight." "Yes, as long as he does not lose another night, if he does not get lost again." The second time there will be no mercy.

We don't know if J.'s luck endured over night. With all the maps printed and tokens in his pocket, he seemed overwhelmed by the complexity of the trip. He would have happily walked back, only a 3-hour trip, the map said. But that seemed more complicated than the TTC trip itself.

In the end, he plunged into the streets. Not before saying: "I am coming back. I found peace here." J. is not the only prodigal son who, on his way back home, got lost in the complexity and superficiality of our life in the city. He may get lost either because he does not remember the place where he was born, or because all that is left of his family are righteous and moral brothers and sisters, and no forgiven father. Where would they go? They will forever be walking without the experience of a forgiving rest and joy of encounter? They will always come across upon all kind of judgemental hearts that look for a sacrificial goat while they fit its perfect description?

The gospel tells us today that the changing of the heart happens before the encounter. It is the changing moment of the parable. The older brother is very close to his father and yet, in his heart, he listens to the voices that lie, continually asking for a covenantal relationship with him. A

bitter marriage. That's why they desire the goat, so they can have a banquet and feast together, breaking the communion with the Father. J., the prodigal son, experienced within the desert of the city the love that he has for his father. He finds a treasure within his heart. That's why he takes all the risks to go back. He is not afraid to be humiliated by a refusal, because he is approaching and asking forgiveness to the one whom he loves and desires communion with now. Within his heart the kingdom of God is here. And he brings the good news to his brother also.

Winter Fioretti

It has been snowing this past week. Heavenly, some might say. Driving to the mission in the morning took much longer. It was late, around 7:00 am. Cars were stuck on the side of the road. Only a few of them could keep their tires straight. On CBC radio all kind of warning messages were on the air, coming from police and schools. Everyone was urged to stay home and enjoy the snow, and that came as a relief. Down on Broadview Ave, the street looked paralyzed by a white shackle. There was no clean entry in any parking lot or school area. And no car moving on the road. Driving seemed illegal at that time and in that place. Everything looked blocked. And so it was. It brought back the memory of Covid times. A city with no people, a street with no open doors. On Broadview, just as during the Covid times, the doors of the mission were wide open. And the stairs had been cleaned. A volunteer was actually brooming them for the perfect look. An excess of good will, one might say, that looked unreal from outside. On the street, Angela was cleaning the entrance of the bakery, complaining that Br Luke had cleaned too much around the building and some snow had fallen on the basement steps. Inside, there was a lively gathering. Mostly people who live on the street. Some of them had helped brother Luke to clean the snow around the building, together with some other volunteers. Johan was at the entrance, he had walked all the way from his place to make it to the mission for 5 am. Brixton, who volunteers early in the morning, helping Johan, had come all the way from Whitby. "How did you make it?". "I got stuck on the highway a few times. I am doing the driving for the bakery after." In the kitchen, the cooks were not able to come at that time all the way from Scarborough. So it was run by volunteers and people from the community house, like Sidarshan and Carlos. It felt like the kingdom of God run by volunteers. And people who's hearts burst with kindness and joy. The room was filled with gratitude of the homeless people, who find the place open and food on the table, and gratitude of the volunteers and community brothers and sisters, for being able to offer hospitality. That they could offer food and coffee. The snow didn't stop any of them that day, it only got the best out of them. And br Luke eventually finding some time to pray in the chapel.

Do not forget this week:

To write the midrash on psalm 16 for Tuesday. Please read Miroslava's email on the topic.

On Wednesday, Bridges at the mission at 6:30 am: The open doors at the mission open the door of our heart.



His **Beatitude Anastasios Yannatoulatos**, Orthodox Archbishop of Tirana and Primate of Albania, died Jan 25 in Athens at the age of 95.

His personal history crosses various worlds - as noted in the book dedicated to him in 2022, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his episcopate, edited by Roberto Morozzo and Tommaso Opocher, 'Anastasios of Albania, man of many homelands'. Since his birth in Piraeus and his youth in Greece, he had been at the service of Orthodoxy in a variety of forms, including a mission in East Africa, and in 1991 he finally arrived in Albania.

He was proud, rightly so, of the resurrection of Orthodoxy in the country, fruit of his faith, his evangelical charisma, his missionary spirit and dedication. Yet he was not just the re-founder of a local Church. He was a personality well known internationally, and had become a spiritual and moral reference point for the whole of Orthodoxy, for his constant appeal to all to communion and fraternity, opposing any political or ethnic logic. He said he aspired to be oikoumenikos Anthropos - 'to be an ecumenical man, understood as a synonym for a disciple of Christ who embraces everything'.

In 2025 he hosted a peace conference in Tirana and said "The opposite of peace is not war, but egocentrism: individual, collective, ethnic, racial." He said on that occasion in his introductory address: "Egocentrism mobilizes the various forms of violence, which kill peace through various ways. This is the inspiration and instigation of both large and small conflicts; this is what bombards human persons and communities continuously with hatred.'



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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

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