

## The last Judgement

Matthew 25:31-46



*“If the Lord had not been with us, who would be sufficient to preserve himself uninjured from the enemy and murderer of mankind?” (Antiphon 2)*

*“ ... I was hungry ...”*

The gospel today helps us to understand better why a little bit of honest kindness showed to those in need is the witness of Christ’s resurrection. In a way, the gospel surprises us with how little we are asked to do in order to partake of the food that God prepared for all those who love Him. It is precisely what St Gregory of Nyssa said, that after the persecution of the Christians ceased, the church can continue to witness the resurrection of Christ by caring for the poor. It is through these acts of mercy that eternal life is inherited by humanity. We see this today at the last judgement.

Is it because feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, offering hospitality to strangers are acts of mercy that do not discriminate? The gospel is clear in that regard. It is through these unconditional genuine acts of mercy that the church can pray for universal victory of life over death in every weary human soul. If those who do these things are indeed genuine and practice them with no agenda, as father would say, they become bold in prayer as the Apostle Paul (“Am I not an apostle”). We also could say: “...since we welcomed without discrimination and clothed without choosing, You can make your mercy touch every soul and forgive every sinner. We clothed all the naked without preference, we pray You resurrect the sinner. We fed all the hungry, we pray that You heal all sickness and divisions among us and violence that kills our children. We visited the sick that welcomed us, we pray that You visit all of us with Your mercy. We quenched the thirsty with fresh cold water, springing forth from the tomb of your Son, we pray that You remember us all in your kingdom and free us from ourselves. We practiced the asceticism of the open doors, we pray that You break the barriers of everlasting gates that keep us captive.

However, it is not man who initiates the prayer, but the movement of the Holy Spirit within us. That gives us the words. They are thus given to us, because of the resurrection of His Son. So that we may remember it and act and then pray. The universality of the resurrection asks for gratuity of mercy within people. It can only be received and witnessed without discrimination. Both are breaking up barriers asking for eternity of mercy and goodness of life.

There is also the touch of care of the one who was dead and now is alive. The father puts on a feast when he welcomes his poor prodigal son who was hungry. Because the one who is hungry

has experienced within himself the infinite rejection of others. He has experienced discrimination within his very being. Any genuine act of mercy done to a soul which is haunted by death brings about the hope of eternal life and heals a heart that was wounded. The intentional act of hurting a person is healed by a genuine act of kindness.

*Community life: "I was hungry ... "*

On Friday, an older brother returned to the mission for lunch. The day before he had come late and people at the door had told him there was no lunch left. It was the end of the day. He looked through the garbage bin and wanted to eat, being actually very grateful for the leftovers he had found. He was so hungry. Eventually, food was found and brought to him. This time he eats at the table. After lunch, he confesses he is a Muslim and Ramadan is about to start. There are no places where he can eat in the evening. He was asking us if we could help him with some cans. He could thus eat after sunset. The scene in itself was surreal. A poor person, a Muslim, would ask the church to help him fast. Hunger, if met with kindness, heals deep gulfs between us and brings about unity in a creative way.

On Friday, the day was unusual in different kinds of ways. At some tables, people were animated by different types of spirits, that bring about the seed of division within the community. We've been noticing that these spirits are more present lately. It appears that as our heart goes cold, the mind of others goes wild. Even though they sow divisiveness through their nature, on Friday at lunch they gathered at one table. One could hear the conversations and arguing that was taking place. Outside, these people would avoid or watch out for each other over their shoulder. Inside, at the same table, hunger and the dignity of a good meal, enabled them to stay close to each other for a little while.

Not only people who came through the door on Friday were hungry. So were the volunteers who worked hard in the kitchen. As we were attempting to read the gospel, well after 3:00 pm, Carlos was trying to eat his lunch. It was cold by now. He had been working since 5:00 am, mostly doing dishes and physical work. Just the day before, we ended the day late. Carlos had been doing dishes all day and he was told to leave some espresso cups to be washed the next morning, since we were in a rush. That day it seemed like the dishes never stopped coming, and Carlos responded with a laugh: "It does not help me. It is me who has to do them in the morning at 5:00 am ... Better I finish them now."

As we were reading the gospel, the words of Jesus made Carlos ask forgiveness from Kidan. During the day, they had argued about the best way to drain the leftovers. "I realised it is not my place to say that. I am here to help, not to have opinions how to make things better, please forgive me." Carlos is one of the several young people who work hard these days at the mission and are joyful and grateful for being able to do that. Their genuine generosity is humbling. And

a sign that the Word of God is written in our hearts in order to be lived and make us light and kind with each other. It really felt that Jesus was talking to them that day. "I was hungry, and you gave me food." And they had no clue who was talking to them. Because they were also hungry and without a house, because they were strangers in a foreign land and in need of human encounter and kindness.

**On Tuesday**, at the end of the breakfast, a young lady named Sarah, who could barely speak and walk, confessed that she had been left behind at the mission by her friend. She was bent over and could hardly walk. She was skinny and seemed exhausted, needing sleep. She could murmur a few words about her hands, that they hurt. It seemed that she couldn't sleep because of the pain, as well as for being on the streets. A basin with water and Epsom salt was brought to her so that she may try to defrost her fingers. She showed us the signs of frost bite. As she was helped to put her hands in the water, she murmured again that her doctor her given her medication because she is losing wait and cannot eat.

She does not want to go to the hospital. She has a place in a shelter hotel, she says. After getting a cup of tea which she had asked for, as well as some gloves and clothes, she asked for help to put on her two backpacks, one in the front and one in the back. She could hardly stay on her feet, and now she added even more weight. With a couple of tokens, eventually she departed. Michael walked with her to the streetcar and made sure she got in, where she collapsed on a chair, Michael witnessed.

It is the complexity of a rich society that makes the hungry, the thirsty and the poor to suffer from a strange illness. It feels, at times, that although we try to be open and embrace people, we often fall short, for different reasons. Either because we don't do it properly, or because the alienation between us is deep. That's why our prayer suffers at times in boldness and hope, in unity and universality of good news within the community. It is precisely what we pray and repent for during lent. For Christ to pray with us and to embrace with us. To forgive us for not being open to all and rather being selective. To make our heart young again as we see it at work in our young volunteers. To rewrite in us the Word of God during lent so we can live with Him and be kind with each other, with generosity and gratuity, with a new honesty and a new love. We pray to Him for something that looks impossible to us.

**To conclude:**

When the acts of genuine mercy become less present within the community, persecution of Christians increases again. Just a few days ago, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 70 Christians were beheaded. We pray at the liturgy and during lent for their souls and for their community and people left behind in fear and terror. In the last two years more than 600 people were killed for their faith in DRC. We were asked by their community to pray for the church in Lumbero as she seeks to bring physical and spiritual assistance to the families affected. We pray for her and for an end to the violence in the region. May God help us all.



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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, February 23, 2025

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