

Forgiveness Sunday

“O Master, Prudence, Guide of Wisdom, Instruction to the foolish and Defender of the poor, strengthen my heart and grant it discernment. Give me words, Word of the Father, for behold, I shall not keep my lips from crying out to You, “O Merciful One, have mercy on me who has fallen.” (Kontakion of Forgiveness Sunday)



The kontakion we sing today for the Forgiveness Sunday asks for a Word from Christ: “Give me words, Word of the Father ...”. As Adam and Eve are leaving the garden of delight crying and with a sorrowful heart, they ask for God to speak to them. For nothing is worse than the silence of the one we have hurt, who does not speak to us anymore. The abyss of silence is harsher than the words that chastise us. Especially if it comes from the one who loves us. The gospel today is the answer to their prayer, the answer to our prayer. God is not silent to us when we sin. He speaks to us: *“If you forgive ... I forgive also ...”* The first word given to Adam and Eve is forgiveness. If you forgive each other, I will forgive you also. Adam and Eve enter the desert today. A life of extreme vulnerability. With the reality of death ahead of them. Forgiveness is the light that heals the past, strengthens the present and keeps within the heart the glimpse of the resurrection. Because for us there is no future, but the reality of the resurrection that today breaks into the heart through the glimpse of forgiveness. The first word given to us as we prepare to enter Lent is forgiveness. Entering the desert, Adam and Eve are going to resemble God more and more, through the experience of being hurt at the expense of those you love. Cain and Abel were about to be born.

“But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ...”

A question was asked on Friday about what this means. A volunteer who hardly speaks English, just a few words, explained it to us. She is Muslim but she wants to listen to the scripture. During the reading of the gospel on Friday, we heard several Muslim volunteers listening. “Messy... It means messy ...” and because she did not have other words to explain, she tried to show with her hands. Pointing at her face and her hair and her clothes. She is herself a refugee from Iran, with no job here and no real perspective of it. Living on welfare, she almost lost her small room before Christmas. Yes, fasting from all these good things, her face was washed, and her clothes were clean. Her hair was neatly attached.

Adam and Eve leave their home today, becoming refugees in a desert, hunted by death and sorrows without number. The word given to them is to have a shining face, not a messy one. To

keep things clean. Because there is purity of heart left in them; to love, and care and forgive each other, and their children, who were going to grow up.

The reality of this fast is very much present within the community, through the reality of refugees, who fast from home, native language, culture, security and food. How can the word given to them be about keeping your face clean, when everything else around you is messy? To smile when you need to cry and to keep your clothes clean when you live in a shelter, when you don't know if you'll be allowed to stay in this country in the end. It is the same with the people who have been homeless in Toronto for a long time. How can you keep yourself clean when your clothes lie with you on the ground at night? When you have to use the washroom in a hurry at the mission because you know others are waiting in line? How can you be light when you are hungry or how can you be shiny when your disability took away the best portion from your life?

On Friday, when talking about the gospel, Mary shared with us the conditions of her own living. After the snowstorm, the place where she lives lost electricity, heat, gas and hot water. "Not even TV", Mary said ... "It is not pretty ... I am telling you, it is not pretty ..." And yet, Mary spent all day at the mission, never complaining about that. We had to find out about it at gospel time. Only her can really show, in poverty, the dignity of being human. Her taste for simplicity and beauty is shown every day in the way she is, the way she talks, in the way she rejoices when we receive sandwiches at the mission from the neighbourhood. She waits until the end of the day to ask if she can have one too. So, she can break the fast. Mary makes poverty shiny because everything she wears looks beautiful with her.

It seems that God is not reasonable when he gives his word to the poor. And yet, many are listening to him within the community. Many faces are enlightened and others just about to learn, as they listen more to the Word of God visiting them in the desert.

It is precisely to the poor that God talks. Adam and Eve have become very poor today and so has the world around us become poor because of our sins.

God speaks forgiveness to those who must forgive much in this time and world where communion between us is hurting. He talks to those who lost the most because of their love. He talks to those who have hurt because of caring, because of being open to the Truth as they were open to the enemy as well. Forgive, God says ... It is forgiveness that we hear from God, at the beginning of lent and at his resurrection. In Christ, the Son of man forgives those who crucify him. So, the Son of God, can ask his disciples to proclaim forgiveness of sins.

We look in lent for a place of rest and refuge. When the heat of the desert scorches us or when we rediscover the aridity of our own heart. In lent we look to be close and listen to the heart

who is forgiving much. To the heart that reveals purity, to the face that is enlightened. To the poverty that hurts and yet smiles to Christ for us. We'll discover that this heart is very close to us. We'll discover that we are also forgiven. Through forgiveness we are not longing for the resurrection, but we remember it as we encounter our own poverty and our own death. As we become aware of who we are and of what we lost because of our own sins. Through forgiveness, Christ touches our heart with the light of Pascha. The light that becomes for us the real treasure and the measure of our faith.

FROM COMMUNITY LIFE:

A WORD TO HELP US IN LENT

E. comes to church often. For all kinds of reasons. Her life is not pretty at all, if we were to use Mary's words. However, unceasingly, day after day, and week after week, as she spends her life in the desert, she is trying to follow what she sees in her life as being good and truthful to her honest heart. This week she gave us a word about keeping away and protecting our heart from things that bring to us the spirit of divisiveness. From the spirit of argument and excessive debate that hurts us these days more than before. It comes in different ways. But especially from the fact that we think we are right most of the time. This lent, we are invited to welcome within the heart the possibility of being wrong at times. The possibility of discovering the truth in the scripture, within the prayer of the church and within the sorrow of our own heart. Within the heart that has forgiveness for us. Let us accept that we might be wrong for a little while so the Word of God can work in us with dynamis and the power of truth. To ask for mercy from Christ because we realised that we cannot even care for our own soul. To give up on the influence that makes us strong and infallible and to discover the poverty of our own knowledge so we can meet in humility the Word that is searching for us.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Michael was baptised on Saturday morning in the presence of all those who come regularly for the Saturday program. They all prayed for him, singing and asking for God's mercy. They prayed for Michael, for his parents, Nikita and Marria, and for his sponsors, Yuri and Anna. Jenny's voice was loud and clear and mirrored many others. Michael was brave and he went into the waters trusting the new life that was bestowed, through him, on all of us.

May God grant them many years, keep Michael on the path of salvation and draw him and his parents nearer to Him. For the sake of His love for all mankind.



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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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