



*“Brethren, Christ is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, ... for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”* (from Ephesians 2:14-22)

Tuesday morning, during breakfast, a young homeless man was acting out, making it difficult for people to approach him, to put it mildly. Some of those in the room became afraid. Food helped a little bit but not too much. He liked the sugar in the cereal more than anything else. Sprinkled all over them. He had no socks on his feet and was wearing only light clothing, which meant the night hadn't been kind to him. When he received socks it helped a little more, so did a sweater and some other clothing. In the end, a cigarette made him settle down on the front stairs and share his emotions. And he cried, revealing a deep distress in his soul. It seemed that among all of us in the room he was the most afraid. Afraid of his own life and of what was going to happen with it. On the stairs he confessed that his mother had died a couple of years before, and he talked about his struggles living on the streets, which bring shame to his soul. He confessed the pit that buries his soul, leaving no hope for a breakthrough. It was a miracle on Tuesday morning that he was able to find faith for confession, given the state he was in. We pray today for his forgiveness and for the peace that touched his soul on Tuesday to come also to us. To touch us as a gentle breeze so we can also cry and confess our sins. We pray that we may find faith, during St. Philip's fast, to speak to God about our pain. Not to live with it alone, making it difficult for people around us to relate with us.

The entrance of the Mother of God into the temple, as seen in the icons, does not show much distress on her face. However, the entrance into the temple, some people speculated, might have been for her the time she became orphaned. And so, God became Father for her. Like the scripture says that he does. “The entrance” is the time when we discover that life is holy. Because we entered in communion with the source of it. It is a personal encounter that discovers the personal holy presence in our life. This happens at a time when we are the most alienated, when we feel that everybody has left us. “I called everybody I knew, relatives, friends, everybody, and nobody came” - somebody was confessing this week in a psychiatric unit. However, we can ask and question how it is possible for any peace to touch the distress of the people today. “I forgot who I am, I forgot to pray, I could not even remember my name, I abandoned everybody”. We see this distress today, we hear these words and there is nothing

human that can break through, because it was humanity in the first place that created it. And yet, at this time and at this hour, life reveals itself as being holy. Because the personal presence of the gentle breeze is touching the life of those who are in distress. "I do not know what happened, prayer relaxed me. My face was all tense and I could hardly speak. Because of fear and lack of trust in the doctors and nurses and the medication they give me. I don't know what happened, but something relaxed me. I don't feel my mouth tense anymore." And she could smile.

We see at times at the mission people in distress touched by grace that brings unexpected and unexplained peace to their souls. For a little while. It happens thus in other places, where the church is present, close enough to the distress of the suffering soul. It happens also in the alienation of the human heart that desires communion. The holiness of life is revealed in the personal presence who becomes, for the soul tormented by alienation, the Father whom the soul begins to learn to love.

"What shall I do ... And he said, "I will do this: ..."

There is no understanding for the rich man in today's gospel. And, it is not necessarily easy for us to understand the logic of it. Why sudden death without time for repentance? However, the gospel shows us today the struggle that the rich Canadian society has with assisted suicide. When man has the certitudes of his own decisions, when there is no need for discernment, when there is only my own will, then death is the final resolution. And in the end, the rich man actually has to give up on his own soul. He has to hand it over because it is God who waits to receive it from us. What we cling to so tightly throughout our lives, fearing to share it with others, we must finally give back without freedom. And so we lose, in death, the freedom of offering ourselves to the Father. What type of torment might that be?

The soul of the modern Canadian society (as it is with other rich cultures today) will never find out that life is holy. Because it does not live with the expectation of the encounter. Because it sees no goodness outside of itself and has no desire for it. Holiness is the fruit of the Holy Spirit experienced by the lonely soul through communion. It is a basic act of hospitality that enlarges the soul because it desires the eternity of God, it desires to love and to be loved. And so it becomes obedient to this even unto death, which, in this way, has no more power and dominion over the soul, because it has already tasted the fruit of communion. It has been cleansed by it and sanctified by it. It has been transformed.

The tendency of the modern rich society is to keep the soul captive within itself. Using the illusion of autonomy and self determination. The call for the church is to become today a place of communion where people freely discover themselves encountered by the peace that moves

through any barrier. We are called to be present to each other and to all. To be present to those who are captive. Because peace comes through it and so the presence of the Father is revealed to the lonely soul. And there is no place where the soul can hide away from it. Because once He is seen and encountered He is forever desired from within. To be loved with all our soul and all our mind. With all our being as we love the neighbour who is so close to us.

### **Community reflection on today's gospel - Luke 12:16-21**

What have we all stored up in our barns, that as our fortunes (or misfortunes) require even bigger barns?

Those who have been stricken with the tragic illness of hoarding OCD are terrified of letting go of the most insignificant things, trash even.

And even when their homes are inhabitable, when pestilence infests their dwelling places, they are brought to hysterical anxiety of letting go of what they protest they might have need of one day. This is a mental illness we must have empathy for, rather than be horrified and judgemental when we can't but not look away from the stigmatizing television shows humiliating these people, while we too ought to have the doors to our own barns thrown open to the scrutiny and horror and shame of all of our possessions and idols long amassed, and which, as the rich man in the parable feverishly continues to reap, and to stow away.

It is not for us to peer into the barns of these people and judge them, not with the motes in our own eyes, it is up to God alone to judge the rich man, without this dreadful illness, and to warn him sternly.

The man in the parable, and if we all admit to ourselves, has been blinded by the lie of the evil one, eating, drinking, and making merry, while what is stowed away in his barn he does not share with the poor, and rather than seeking the Kingdom, sets himself apart from God.

We all have amassed so much of the meaningless, and often evil things of this world, expensive possessions, but as well what we lay up on earth that these very possessions spark within us envy and covetousness of our neighbour who has had to build themselves a barn far larger than our own.

A lack of Faith also gathers dust and the moth, we forget that all we have been blessed with has been bestowed upon us by God.

We box up our misguided anger at God for not blessing us with more, more, and more.

This resentment is as well shelved in our barns, while we do not offer our heartfelt gratitude for our treasures, and rather than sharing these things, we realize we are not at peace. We will not have this peace and joy (and the "joy" of eating, drinking, and making merry while our fortunes increase, while our despondency, worries, fears are stuffed away in our barns is a false and fleeting "joy"), true Joy flows through us as we embrace Christ, and the only Treasures that will sustain us and that we shall, by the Grace of God, through Christ giving up His life for

us, through faith and humility, through sharing our bounty of our wheat, wine, gold with the poor, and giving up our miseries we harbour deep within our often hardened hearts, will we give up for the sake of The Lord, with the hope that as unworthy as we are, we may surrender our possessions both material and immaterial here to inherit the Glory of The Kingdom of God, where we will know True Joy and Peace for all eternity, while all our stored up earthly material possessions and sins are sent to decay in the pit.

However, those afflicted with the mental illness of hoarding OCD need our prayers.

That they too might be freed of their terror of letting go of the material and living in ever increasing squalor.

And pray for ourselves, that we have the courage to let go of all the plastic things of this world and embrace the riches of a life lived solely for God, striving to live in Holiness every single day, and then for our own inner squalor to dissipate, replaced by nothing but Love.

By *Elisha*



**Bishop of Melitene:**

**The Poison of Moralism**

**by Maximos Pafilis, Bishop of Melitene**

Sermon on the Gospel according to Matthew 9:9-13.

Above the stone-paving of the market, are heard the words of Jesus towards Matthew. The vibration of this address can be a simple whisper, it is, however, capable of re-arranging the molecules of an entire life, that is, an existence which was forbidden to calculate the debts of others.

Matthew, seated at the tax-office, the throne of his individual shame and of public alienation, rises from his place and immediately follows. This happened simply and only because the voice that visited him saw the hidden corners of his soul, his human nature which thirsted for something beyond the price and the exchange. And immediately then, is born the scandal: the table, the proximity, the common gathering of the Teacher with the sinners.

In the margin, however, of this image, stand the Pharisees, the observers, that is the eternal condemners of grace, wrapped inside the sterilised covering of their certainty. They perceive only the filth, the pollution of the interaction, the event of the unscrupulous sharing of holiness, which is offered so generously and harmfully to

the unclean, to the sinners.

The symposium, the unbearable proximity of the Sacred with the profane, causes them to withdraw, as they whisper to the disciples the question that poisons every expectation of encounter: «Why does your teacher eat with the tax-collectors and sinners?» (Matt. 9:11). At this exact point of perplexity, in their robust refusal to grasp the economy of love, we also belong, trapped in the meticulous calculation of our reputation.

We are terrorised by the simple idea of sitting on the soiled pavement, of touching the pain of the homeless person or of listening intently to the silent agony of the abused woman. We tremble chiefly at the mischaracterisation, that is, those bad «brotherly» tongues, the meticulous guardians of external cleanliness, who will tear us apart. The fear of the label, the suspicion, the identification, emerges as our true prison. The criticism of others seems to constitute the monotonous sound of a hammer that finally seals our spirit inside the rotten coffin of hypocrisy.

The consolidation of the respectable gatherings is our choice, those worldly or religious meetings where our presence is reckoned as virtue. Our piety is confirmed fully by the environment, while our distance from the raw, the real sickness remains ensured.

With meticulousness we turn our back exactly at the point where the need for the love of Christ constitutes an open, festering wound. There, our silence gives space to obscurity to continue its work. We become experts in theological terminology but remain beginners in the mercy that soils our hands. The call, however, is addressed exclusively to patients who recognise their fever, bypassing the theorists of health. It is a surgical operation, the moment, that is, when the Physician identifies the illness and offers the treatment, overcoming the limits of a comfortable invitation to a social event.

This special call, as Saint John Chrysostom insists, has specific content and purpose: «For I came not, he says, to call righteous ones, but sinners to repentance; not to laughter, but to tears» (Gr. Οὐ γὰρ ἦλθον, φησὶ, καλέσαι δικαίους, ἀλλὰ ἁμαρτωλοὺς εἰς μετάνοιαν· οὐκ εἰς γελοῖα, ἀλλ' εἰς δάκρυα).[1] This calling, we would certainly say, concerns the recognition of the trauma, the breaking of the mask, demanding something deeper, more essential and beyond our polished shoes and our expensive clothes.

We live this double life, in agony for our «good name» to remain intact. And the hours, the years which were gifted to us by God pass and disappear, as empty, black shells, which creak under the wheel of death that ever approaches. We absolutely choose the hypocritical life, the convenient shell, the respectable silence and the good food. Our hiding place, however, constitutes simply a well-adorned tomb, inside which the immortal voice of love was buried forever.

The joy of Christ, we keep it for ourselves, taking care from fear lest it be revealed, lest it be interpreted wrong, lest it be soiled by contact with the world. This gladness, however, I am sure, when it

remains undistributed, is transformed into a rusted key that unlocks the chamber of self-condemnation. We convince ourselves that we are the healthy, the «ισχύοντες», those who consider that they need nothing, and thus, our last breath is transformed into a trembling bridge of time that connects the rot of the “good name” with the unused eternity.

This Physician, the Lord, defined His mission with absolute clarity: «Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick» (Matt. 9:12). He approaches the patients. And in order to not leave any lack of doubt about His method, He adds the terrifying declaration for the Pharisees: «Go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice”» (Matt. 9:13). He seeks mercy. Our own sacrifice, however, consists of a performance, an external achievement, a theatre of piety, at the time when the mercy of Christ demands the incomprehensible, the difficult and the disorderly recognition of the common disease, of the common brokenness.

There exists something deeply paradoxical and terrifying that we see daily in our lives, or even worse, we put it into practice. Those who have the greatest need for the Physician, are often those who maintain absolute conviction about their health. They think that they master the truth, having built an ethical life, impenetrable, and regard others with aversion or pity. The fraud of moralism is a diamond made from infected blood, which reflects only the fear of the revelation of the truth. Their certainty, this only certainty, is the illness itself. Their «righteousness» emerges as the main obstacle. They wear the pharisaical clothes, the expensive, the beautiful, the well-ironed, but these fabrics are heavy, official chains, which choke the flesh of the essence...

The self-diagnosis of health constitutes the fatal error, as it functions as anaesthesia that stops the pain and guarantees the necrosis. Rather, the logic of salvation begins from the acceptance of the wound, exactly as Nikolaos Damalas observes in his analogy about the sufferer: «if someone thinks himself healthy, he will certainly never seek a physician» (Gr. ἐὰν τις νομίζει ἑαυτὸν ὑγιᾶ, ποτὲ βέβαια δὲν θέλει ζητήσῃ ἰατρὸν).[2 But perhaps you deny the diagnosis and consequently the Physician, even though you stand in the first seats of the church? It seems that it is very difficult, for you and for me, to show the disposition to sit at the table with the various Matthews of this world. Rather these things happen because their sin is visible and exposed, while our own is insulated behind pseudepigraphal silence, social acceptance and theological terminology.

The Lord, however, let us not forget, entered the world for the sinners. There is no other truth. Only this one. It is harsh for us who passed our lives trying exactly not to appear as sinners, focusing on our image instead of the essence. We erected a fortress of virtue, and now it is made known to us that the fortress itself will fall and will crush our soul. Christ stands and waits, expecting us to confess that we live trapped inside the very structures that we erected for our protection, for our good, which

finally overshadow His glory.

The mystery of the «sinful» supper continues, whether it receives our approval or not. They will not ask us. It takes place in the dark alleys and in the wounded homes. On the dirty bench with the homeless person, on the pavement with the drug-addict, in a cheap taverna with those whom good society casts out. There will always be Matthews who will accept the hand of Christ, however much the modern Pharisees smile ironically like well-dressed vipers.

Let us have patience, we will all finally see, at our last breath, that undeniable, supreme evaluation of our life: how many times we dined with the respectable brother-Pharisees and how many in the poor house with Christ and the «sinners».

[1] Ioannes Chrysostomus, “Ta Euriskomena Panta” [The Complete Findings], in Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 59 (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1862), 566.[2] Nikolaos M. Damalas, Peri Archon epistemonikon te kai ekklesiastikon tes orthodoxou theologias [On the Scientific and Ecclesiastical Principles of Orthodox Theology] (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1865), 127.

### **Events for the coming week:**

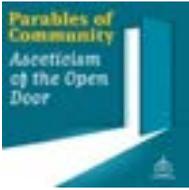
**Tuesday, 7:30 pm** - Do not forget about the psalm study session on Zoom. Please ask Miroslava to send you the Zoom link if you do not have it already.

Wednesday , 6:30 pm - Bridges followed by the Moleben

### ***Important event this week:***

***On Thursday - trip to the refuge for seniors and senior caregivers, as well as for anybody else interested in visiting seniors in hospitals or in their own homes.***

***There will be a school bus leaving from the mission at 7:00 am on Thursday (8:00 am at Good Neighbours in Scarborough) and returning late afternoon the same day. Please speak to br Luke if you are interested.***



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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, November 23, 2025

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