



The third Sunday of Lent
Publican and Pharisee Luke 18:9-14

"He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast ..."

On Thursday morning, a younger brother sitting at the table during breakfast time with his head covered by his hoodie, bent over on his chair, was hitting his head. There was shame, pain and self-inflicted violence. Even with his face covered, one could recognize him as a young man who has been coming regularly at the mission for a few years now. The following day, a young person struggling with addictions remembered where to come with her friend when hungry and shivering from cold. She could not move or speak, but she remembered to ask for a cigarette, a jacket, socks and shoes. As we clothed her, before leaving she was trying to speak saying: "You know that I am not like that all the time ... I do not come here every day ... only when I remember these troubles ... You know that I am not like that all the time ..." Despite her suffering and her struggle to stand up, shame manifested in her heart and soul more vividly than anything else. And the love of the Father is talking to her in the secrecy of her heart.

If we do pray this Lent, we pray that the harsh poverty of Toronto may give words of prayer to those who are bent over, to pray for mercy. This is what hope is for us: that those who suffer in these days, bent low, from across the seas and from within the closeness of our own lives may find words to pray for mercy. From the north, from the east and from the west, from the sea, the Galilee of the Gentiles.

The harsh poverty of the city of Toronto leads people to despair, and even to self-inflicted pain. The hope of Lent, and our prayer, is that the Word of God would visit them as it visited the prophets and give them a voice that teaches them to pray for mercy. The mercy that today flows in abundance from the cross we behold.

May the Word make grace flow from their crosses too, so that we may be washed and sanctified as we see and behold them within the community. May we be touched by the peace that Jesus promised to those who are crying without tears today. We are in need of hearing this prayer from their lips, so that we too may be justified. Because we want to learn not to despise others.

The pharisee cannot pray for mercy. How can a human heart be so different? The parable reveals to us a heart that could not live without God and a heart that rejects Him violently. Because mercy is God. It is the way He relates with us, the way in which He speaks to us, the way He feeds us, the way He is clothing us covering our shame.

The eyes of the tax collector teach us to see the world without mercy. Like the older brother of the prodigal son. Because the eyes of the tax collector are restless when encountering mercy. It is the eye of the heart that is blind. The blind eye that cannot cry for the sake of his own peace and forgiveness becomes the eye that despises the other. And this is where our betrayal starts, that leads to the suffering of the innocent.

The heart that becomes violent with his brother is the heart that does not seek mercy with God. That cannot accept that God is merciful. That's how God is taken out from society. By removing mercy from our own heart. The gathering of the people creates a structure in the image of a human heart that cannot pray for mercy. And we see the result of that evolving under our eyes today.

Mercy is personal, kind and truthful to the one who is despised. It is the garment of the resurrection, generous with light for the human body and its wounds. It is the mercy that makes rain fall over both the good and the evil. Because even when it is despised, mercy looks upon every human heart from below and from above. It gives words of prayer to the one who cannot speak because of pain. It colours the creation with joy and makes the eternity empty itself into time. It is the returning home of the sinner and the voice that raises us from a deep sleep. Mercy does not break our silence but always invites us to speak first. Never alone, it welcomes life within its very being, so that the human soul may sing a song and leap for joy within its womb. It is the mercy that shapes the face on the human person, so that in its image we may all be made. When we cannot see it and think we have been lost to it, mercy encounters us through the wounds of our brother. It is the mercy that teaches us to fall in love with him again and again. Out of mercy a Son is born, and through mercy a Son is given. Before the morning star, mercy has begotten him.

We enter lent with the desire to find mercy. To see in our brother the hunger and break bread with him. To discover him not as one who breaks the fast but as one who is hungry. To see in his nakedness not a sign of a shameless soul, but a soul who needs covering and does not know how to ask. Not to see in him a robber, an evil doer or an adulterous (parable today Luke 18:9-14), but as one who has not yet received the gift, even though he has loved much. But before the burial, his good deed will be revealed to all: *“For in that she hath poured this ointment on My body, she did it for My burial.”* (Matthew 26:12)

Somehow, the goodness of our life has made us insensitive to it. This is the paradox of our existence because everything good we do is moved by it and done for its sake. Lent teaches us mercy through prayer, through food and by sensitizing us in the way we see and greet one another. The way we live either brings mercy closer or chases it away. The search may lead us through the desert of our soul and make us weary and in need of a drink. We feel lost at times, and for good reason, because the walk often happens in circles before we meet the one who greets us from below. And then we hear the story that we heard today. And we understand where mercy is waiting for us to touch our soul. And we come closer and closer, and we discover the faithfulness of faith. It is true that suffering in many hearts today is silent and without words, the suffering that has not yet remembered mercy. Today, the parable gives us the good news: the one who is crying today without tears is about to pray for mercy. And that is our hope and our salvation. And tomorrow he will be called by name to eat bread with the Son of God and then become a witness of the resurrection. He is the one who sees salvation, as Freddie reminded us on Friday, because he leaves the temple being justified and forgiven.

“At that time, as Jesus passed on, he saw Levi the son of Alphaios sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. And as he sat at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him. (Saturday gospel - Mark 2:14-17)

Continuing our reflection on Pat. Bartholomew’s letter to St. John The Compassionate Mission of Jan 12/2026

“...In turn it is with much paternal joy that we give thanks to the Lord for the 40 years of faithful ministry, witness and sacrificial love offered by your blessed community.

*Your ardent commitment has embodied a living **diakonia-an ecclesial testimony** for the gospel that the Gospel is not merely proclaimed in word but manifested in daily acts of generosity, compassion, justice and solidarity with those who suffer....”*

As a true Shepherd and father in Christ, Patriarch Bartholomew not only describes the life of the mission during the last 40 years but also calls us to live the Gospel more each day . These are not just words of support and endorsement. They challenge each of us to become more so.

Today there is tendency to see the life and work of the mission as a kind of religious hobby, a kind of optional, social sandwich run for the poor.

The call for us is rather to be a **Diakonia, that is an ecclesial testimony of the Gospel.**

Witness the Gospel through word and deed, because this is the essence of the Church!

What a beautiful challenge, what a beautiful call to live out for all

!



Please listen to mission stories on ancient faith radio, share this with your friends.

<https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/parables/>

St Silouan Chapel at St John's Mission

155 Broadview Ave. Toronto, ON M4M 2E9

T: 416-466-1357 E: info@stjohnsmmission.org W: stjohnsmmission.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

