



ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE NEWSLETTER

Summer 2007

Whose Feet Do You Wash?

On the occasion of the Mission's 20th anniversary year Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia broke bread with us and delivered an inspiring talk on the life and teachings of St Basil the Great.

Bishop Kallistos was met at the door of the Mission amid the ringing of bells by the Mission staff and volunteers. A 8kg loaf of bread baked especially for the occasion (by our Bakery) was offered to His Grace along with salt in the traditional sign of welcome. Sandy, the president emeritus (or as she calls herself, the president el-dente) together with Jack and Jeannie read greetings of welcome to Bishop Kallistos. About 200 people crammed our tiny Mission that normally sits 60. Lenten soup that had been cooked slowly throughout the day by Fr. Roberto (cook emeritus) was served to the gathered guests by neighbourhood volunteers. Sitting with His

the life of hermits and he challenges them saying, "whose feet do you wash?"

At the end of the bishop's talk an informal session of questions were answered by Bishop Kallistos. Bishop Kallistos concluded his talk by saying to the people of the Mission, "But you are doing it all here, so well...."

The evening ended with brief prayers in the Mission chapel.



Grace Bishop Kallistos was also His Grace Bishop Christophoros of the Greek Metropolia of Toronto and priests. Different Orthodox dioceses and Catholic and Protestant Parishes in the city were represented.

The talk by Bishop Kallistos centered on the life of St Basil and his understanding of the Christian life as experienced in the monastic life and his famous Basiliad. For St Basil it is part of being human to be in community and to love. He wonders about



Recently Bishop, now Metropolitan, Kallistos sent us a warm note thanking us for the beautiful time he shared with us.

A DVD of the visit of Metropolitan Kallistos will soon be available to anyone interested. Details will be posted on the Mission website.

A special thank you is extended to Fr. Constantine Serapis, of St George's Church in Toronto, for being instrumental in the planning of this event.

F.R.



One of the Best!

Caicedo Ramirez is from Colombia and has been here since 2002. Always a generous, punctual and warm volunteer he has now found full-time employment. The Mission provided Caicedo with work experience and whilst we are sorry to see him go we wish him well! Caicedo's dream is to become a Canadian citizen. He came to this



country as a refugee and even though he missed Colombia he is very grateful for the opportunity Canada has given him to start a new life.



Ayda Swaidan from Bagdad, the smile behind the telephone



Mohammad Malik from Pakistan, a loving, gifted cook

Jose is from the Philippines where he was born in 1981. He has two children, a son who is 15 and a daughter of 18. Jose is an electronic technician. Jose comes to the Mission every week to help clean the building. He enjoys this activity because no-one pushes him but just gives him directions. Jose dreams only for his children that they will get a good education. He doesn't dream for himself any longer. Jose won the national dart award in 2006 and is also a passionate musician. His dreams somehow continue through his music.



Jose Policarpo

A Vignette from the Thrift Store

A woman came into the store and dropped off a dozen of her husband's shirts saying "Please take these shirts and sell them. I can't stand seeing my husband in them any longer." Being excellent quality shirts Wayne marked them up for sale and displayed them prominently in the "New Arrivals" section of our Thrift store.

A few days later a man came into the shop, saw the shirts and exclaimed "Wow what fantastic shirts. I'm looking for some good shirts and these are just perfect." So he bought all the shirts and went off a happy man. Later the same afternoon the woman who had originally brought the shirts reappeared carrying the same shirts. She said to our manager "Why did you let my husband buy back his shirts? Please take them back and **this** time, make sure that my husband doesn't buy them back!" W.L.



Gloria & Gerry Dwyer, Old Time Residents of South Riverdale

Bestowing Life

The French writer Olivier Clement wrote recently,

"In our civilization, so rich in knowledge and in power, we can no longer offer any reply to the enigma of death. We want only to forget death. Yet it meets us again and again in the form of hatred, oppression, separation, illness and the disappearance of those we love. This is why the message of Easter, of Holy Pascha, resounds today with such renewed strength."

Many sociologists, and others, have commented on what can almost be called the cult of death in modern Western society. Not so many years ago suicide was a taboo. That taboo is fast disappearing. Of course, suicide is not recommended for all but only for certain categories of people. Among those categories are included the old and the sick for whom suicide is politely renamed, euthanasia. Some countries have even introduced laws that allow assisted suicide even for those who are suffering from mental illnesses. Suicide, or assisted "easy death" (euthanasia), has become society's answer to despair. We even have a new popular "hero" in the person of Judas, for centuries the symbol of betrayal and suicide. He now has his own gospel available in a nice classy edition in all the best bookshops. The marketing works. Recently John, a homeless man with no money for food was pleased to let us know that he had never the less his own copy of the gospel of Judas.

At the Mission we often meet with people who come here precisely because they have come face to face with despair as result of being betrayed (often by their own family) and been stigmatized and rejected because they do not fit society's definition of success. In the 1990s we saw the term "ethnic cleansing" appear during the Balkan wars. Very soon after, the phrase "social cleansing" was used in Britain to describe how the police removed undesirables from popular tourist areas. Perhaps we now have a twin for the culture of death, the culture of "if we can't see it, it ain't there." If you are poor and "unsuccessful" please have the decency not to be in our face. If you are poor, unsuccessful, depressed and suicidal you are in real trouble.

You may be thinking that this article is not full of that Paschal joy for which the Orthodox Church is noted, and so it may appear. But the Resurrection is about reality and about real people in real situations and not as some cute social construct would have them be. And here at St John's people are real and if they are full of rage and vent

their anger at their own lives and at a society they see as unjust and unfair that is the reality. Take, for example, the reaction of Kylie to the Easter greeting Christ is risen!

"Well you can tell he didn't live in Toronto. He was poor wasn't he? If he had lived here he would have died in a shelter and been thrown in an anonymous grave and forgotten about. Do you know what it is like to be poor in this city? I worked hard all my life until I became ill after an accident at work. I lost everything. Do you think anybody cares? Do you think anyone will help you? You don't even have your dignity in this country. You are a nothing. Everyone looks down on you. My sister tried to help people, but did she get help when she needed it? No way, and that's why she killed herself."



All this said in a torrent of verbal rage with tortured eyes. Or Cyril, whose marriage broke up and who fell under the spell of an American guru and who now thinks that the way to solve pain and bring peace in the world is to be dead. Not to kill yourself, of course, but to "get yourself dead." Somehow one has to find a way to change the mindset, the way of thinking, away from this culture of seeing death as the only solution to pain and suffering and offering life. For some, of course, the wounds are so deep that the person is trapped and cannot help themselves. But first they need to come to the point where they recognize the need for help, recognize their own weakness.

The traditional icon of the resurrection is not of the resurrection itself, but of Christ drawing Adam and Eve out of the Pit. There is even a teaching of St Cyril of Alexandria that after Christ left hell the devil was left there all alone! **That** is the "good news", the gospel, not of Judas, but of Christ, a message of hope and of life, not of despair and death. It is not romantic, or easy, to stand by someone filled with negativity and even hatred. There are no quick solutions. Like those who waited in hell for a long time to be released by Christ, those trapped in their own private hells may be there for a long time, even years. The message of Pascha is that one can be delivered even from the depths of hell. The message of Pascha is the culture of life and not the culture of death.

"Christ is risen, and hell is conquered. Hell is angered because it is reduced to nothing. Christ is risen and life is liberated." (St John Chrysostom) E.P.

The Blessing of St. Mary of Egypt Refuge

This is what some people had to say about the day:

“Janice Bellmore's first visit and she thoroughly loved the experience; getting out of the city for the day, school bus ride and all the company. A lot of people told her about the St. Mary of Egypt Refuge, so she wanted the experience. There was a service and praying and songs. Janice had a terrific day out of the city and she wants to go back again. She says the visit was too short.” Janice

“Debbie St. Clair's first time she camped in tents because the original house had burnt down. She enjoyed sleeping in the tents. Second visit because it is really nice to get away from the city. Mary is really accommodating. She makes people feel at home. They planted trees on the weekend, Christmas trees. Sharon planted flowers in the front of the house. Next visit, all the grass should be laid and the basement finished. This is the most beautiful place to go!” Debbie



Children building a teepee by the “Jordon River”



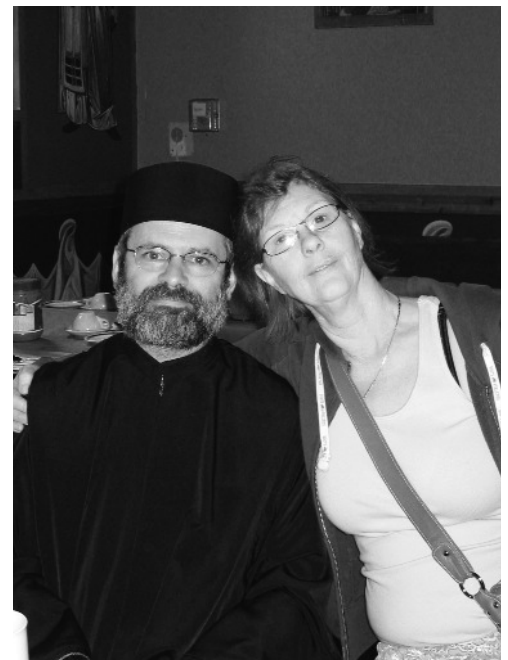
Archbishop Seraphim (OCA), blessing the new tree at the entrance of the property

“Our group on the bus ride didn't know the words of all the songs but we did a lot of singing, laughing just plain old fashion fun. Mary's house was breath taking, wished we could have stayed longer!” Deborah

**The After School Program
proudly sponsored by friends of
the Mission
At Groia & Company**

*“The Eucharist is
celebrated only at the
Altar of the Church
while Charity is found
everywhere in the
streets, in every public
place....”*

St. John Chrysostom



P. Philippe Cales from our sister community in Brittany, France, visiting old friends in May

✠ *Please remember us in your will.* ✠

**The mission is always in need
of the following:**

- ♦ good second hand clothes and household goods for the Thrift Store (416-698-9848)
- ♦ tomatoes in cans
- ♦ spices
- ♦ vinegar and napkins
- ♦ photocopy paper
- ♦ pens
- ♦ pan scrubbers (and similar cleaning items)

Divine Coincidence?

A few days after visiting St. John the Compassionate Bishop Kallistos was elevated as Metropolitan. Also, a few days after visiting the Mission Bishop Seraphim of the (OCA) was elevated as Archbishop. Is this part of a Divine plan or just coincidence? We invite any other Bishop to come and visit us and see for themselves!

St. John the Compassionate Mission

155 Broadview Ave, Toronto ON M4M 2E9 tel: 416-466-1357 fax: 416-466-3517 Charitable #89328 1832 RR0001
stjohnsmmission@sympatico.ca www.stjohnsmmission.org