Blessed is Laura who is kind to all.

Blessed is Harshani who persecuted for justice, had to flee her country and now volunteers.

Blessed is Joseph alone in this world is gentle and full of dignity.

Blessed is Jiji who has no work but sings beautifully to the Mother of God.

Blessed is Anne who is heartbroken for her parents in utter poverty but never loses faith in God.

Blessed are those who father children without receiving any recognition.

“Christ did not preach theology, His theology was written on the cross, in His own Blood, a theology of love and forgiveness. At the end, we will not be asked to voice a holy formula, but we will be judged on how we treated our neighbours.”

Metro. Methodios of Boston

We are an apostolate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Carpatho – Russian Orthodox Diocese
These days, there is concern among us at St John’s about how the community is going to come out from this crisis. We lived and experienced both evil and good things. There are prophetic voices who say that one cannot expect to come out of a crisis the same way they entered it. For better, or for worse, there will be change in society and in our community. We ponder and pray that we’ll go where the wind of the Spirit blows and not try to sail against it. That is why we try to daily reflect and understand how people were, and are, affected; what did we lose and what did we receive; how is the city changing around us; and maybe, most importantly, how are the most vulnerable affected? The pandemic showed us the wounds within our communal body. The wounds we are all suffering from. It was like a painful picture of a patient living on life support. What we see around us are real signs of healing. We see an invitation for life and change, in our life, in the life of the people we serve and in the life of the people who support us. There are many signs of hope and joy yet to be discovered, within the reality of our own struggle to be more honest human beings. This is what we know so far, that the crisis is asking for our honesty. Courage to be honest and see who we really are, what we are really struggling for and an honesty and boldness in receiving the goodness that everybody around us is looking for.

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Finding Words for Beauty

Life at the Mission can be very delightful. It is sometimes difficult to express what can be so beautiful about it. Today, it was a very cold Saturday. Snow was drifting down slowly outside, arriving at the Mission there is a sense of warmth and people coming to see each other. I want to share one moment with you. The main activity of the day was painting signs in the main hall for the summer camp. The signs will eventually be nailed in the forest deep in the woods of northeastern Ontario to mark trails and landmarks at the refuge.

In the main hall of the Mission today, there was a well-spaced group of guests and volunteers working on this project – symbolically "doing good and throwing it into the sea," as I suspect few of them will ever make it deep enough into the woods to lay eyes on "Beaver Marsh," for example.

I took my sign outside onto the red steps of the Mission and began to paint. The paint in my palette was getting thicker and thicker as it began to freeze. A young, sensitive man from the breakfast program who lives in the woods near the Don Valley Parkway approached and asked the volunteer at the door for some food. The volunteer disappeared to bring it out to him and we stuck up a conversation. We were both sitting on the steps to the side of the main action of the door and the conversation was very natural. At one point I asked him if he needed anything and laid the painting aside to go get him a couple of packages of socks. I learned things about his family and his situation but the details seemed less significant than the easiness and sincerity of the interaction. I felt like we were together there, both sharing things with one another with a sense of gratitude. I tried not to talk too much for fear that I would disturb him with my presence - like an alien visitor to a forest suddenly becoming aware of the presence of a rare creature, very close by.

Gratitude, that's the word that comes to my mind when I think about my volunteer work at St John's Mission. I am grateful for the wonderful people I have met - staff and fellow volunteers, but first and foremost incredible clients: resilient, wise, knowledgeable.

I am also grateful that the service we provide is still available. I know, it's so different compared to pre-Covid times. But nevertheless, it's still a place where people can come by for a hot coffee, a warm meal and a good chat.

Last but not least, I am grateful for knowing a spot in Toronto with delicious bread and scones; where the money I spent is put to a very good cause.

Hope to see you soon

Br Luke

Sarah
4:30 am. “A dreadful time to be awake” I used to think. I am now looking forward to it these days! What has changed my view in a year since I started work at St. John the Compassionate Mission? Almost everything has changed for everybody since Covid. A lot of people struggle to put food on the table and maintain a roof over their head. The people who come to the Mission for a warm meal and a kind word have known more about this struggle from times before Covid. There seems no way out once you stepped in the cycle of illness, joblessness, poverty. That “no way out” stayed stuck in my head once I entered the unemployment realm and was intensified at the view of St. John’s “customers” in my first days of work. I was terrified. It looked likely that I would be homeless soon myself without a job. But Saturday after Saturday, after meeting and talking to people, I began to look more closely so I could see beyond the surface of things. While The Mission helps with the most immediate needs from fresh, warm food and clothing to activities such as painting and poetry, The Bakery next door is a “next step” in getting back on the work market through its volunteer and apprenticeship programs.

But there is another place that links everything together: The Chapel. That is where I find solace. Like many other people in need of regaining the meaning of being a human. That is where one is reminded that we are not alone. That, in spite of being eternal prodigals, we are always waited and welcomed by our Father. The candles light the faces of those who dared to live as witnesses of God’s great love for us: His Saints. The cold chapel warms up with these candles I am so happy to light early Saturday mornings. They make visible “the way out”…, strange enough as “a way in”…a way of encounter with Christ in the heart. The prayer before starting work at the bakery brings together all of us: the ones who work and volunteer at the Mission, bakery, thrift store together with those who taste the hospitality of God, those who buy bread and bakery products. Together. My prayer for all brings me joy. And with the light in the candle of my heart I step into the bakery where I work driven by a one of a kind energy.

I am grateful that a place like this exists and helps people like me experience the sorrow turning into joy!

Mirela
There is no need to hide like Adam and Eve did in the garden, because we’ve been exposed. From here there are only two directions in which we can go: to get used to the shame and care less or to start to really care more, for the sake of life, so we can receive the good news of the Resurrection.

Lent is a good time to learn how to start to care; not for the goods we lost, but rather to care for the new signs of life that are fresh and fragile all around us, if we pay attention to them. This is what the fathers of the Philokalia describe in the word Nepsis. In lent, we give up on even good things, so we can be closer to the Beloved who did not have much on the cross. The same could be said of this difficult time: good things were taken away from us in order for us to be closer to those who don’t have much "to spare" all the time. We have learned to discover real Hope from these relationships.

Just when we thought we were at a loss; we were surprised to rediscover something new. At the start of Covid we could no longer sit around our round tables but we found ourselves instead spending more time "face to face", or better to say "mask to mask" with those whom we tended to neglect or ignore when we were too busy before.

We could not see the faces of the people much, but we looked more into the eyes and discovered something new about each of us. We did not see our regular people, but we rediscovered a new form of longing after them that is reassuring.

The experience of loss is profound and real. This loss helps to open up to the new life that will find all of us, unprepared and in disbelief on Pascha. A little bit of honesty will help us though to receive it fully and to rejoice like never before!

P.N.
Blessed are Mark and Ibo who work diligently for free.
Blessed is Paul who says he is “lost and looking for God.”
Blessed is Leon who has epilepsy and lives by himself.
Blessed is Eliana who reminds us to pray.
Blessed is Nick who cannot read or write but comes to the chapel only to listen.
Blessed is Colleen who lives within the narrow way of her condition, cheerfully.

Good Neighbours Drop-in

This Lent "while you fast think about the fact that we need rice and beans...

- Rice & Beans (arroz con frijoles)
- Juice, Juice Boxes, Eggs, Snack Bars
- Brown Sugar, sugar
- Regular & Herbal Tea
- Potatoes, Fresh Garlic, Apples, Oranges
- Jam, Honey, Condense Milk
- Canned Tomatoes, Sauce, Paste
- Curry powder, Italian herbs, Thyme
- Nuts, Raisins, Dried Cranberries etc.
- Dish Soap, Laundry Soap

"The shroud has no pockets, remember the Mission in you will."
Memorial Dinners offered in Memory of a loved one.

At St Marcina Chris, Father Nicolaie and Mary have also been available and very busy in meeting people for counselling. Many people are scared and feeling at a loss.

Atikaran

Every day we reach out to people in the Community, we do wellness calls asking how they are doing. Our list is over 350 people. Here Atikaran reaches out to the Tamil Community.

Memorial Dinners offered in Memory of a loved one.

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