

Synaxis of the Twelve Holy Apostles - 30 June 2019

Tone 1

The feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul

The strength of life lies in its fragility. Life can be harmed. And it does get harmed. Instead of being nurtured, life gets wounded at times. And its scars are visible. However, they do not take away its beauty; on the contrary a scar reveals more the fabric of life. What life holds personal, unrepeatable and genuinely creative, is shown forth through a real wound. As death became in Christ a path to resurrection, a wound in a human being becomes a sign that reveals more the healing that we receive in Christ. The more forms of torture from around this world a life receives in its body and in its soul, the more the gift of life strikes us with its truth: it cannot be taken away, it can receive and it does receive suffering, but its beauty can never be hidden.

Joanna called me this week to come out and see a baby. A two year old child who was born prematurely because her mom was on drugs. She was with her father, who had a particular appearance. As many other people who come in the morning for breakfast. Joanna knew him pretty well and knew their story too. The little girl was not able to walk or speak. She was in the stroller having in front of her eyes a cellphone with youtube videos. It was, as somebody said on the spot, a pretty sad image. Her life was wounded before it started. This little fragile soul was bearing the brokenness and struggle of her parents.

However, with all this sad image, with all the struggles for now and for years to come, with all the suffering that this little vulnerable soul undertook from an early age, the truth of life was shown forth on her face with dynamis. The beauty of life, the gift of God for us was so present in this little child, that somehow you could behold for a moment the love of God for us. I learned at the seminary how the uncreated energies of God can be contemplated by monks who undertake the path of asceticism. Here, in our broken community, the love of God for us is shown forth in the life of those who suffer with innocence. But just as the gift of life, the love of God is shown to us in order to be recognized, received and nurtured. We see it so we can partake from it.

St. Peter and Paul (June 29) from Matins gospel:

“At that time, Jesus revealed himself to his disciples after he was raised from the dead, and he said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go." (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.) And after this he said to him, "Follow me."

Kontakion for the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul

O Lord, Thou hast taken up to eternal rest and to the enjoyment of Thy blessings the two divinely inspired preachers, the leaders of the Apostles, for Thou hast accepted their labors and deaths as a sweet smelling sacrifice, for Thou alone knowest what lies in the hearts of men.

Fioretti

Today I was sitting at the table for breakfast. I saw an old friend, and asked excitedly how he was doing. He gave me a sheepish hug then said he was quitting this place and going to Fr. Paul's Church. I turned to the other side and asked another man how he was doing. He made a shooing motion with his hands that expressed he didn't want to talk. He wanted instead to listen to the conversation across the table where two men were heatedly arguing about politics. We continued sitting together for quite some time. I didn't know what to say.

Br. Luke

Important announcement today. Please stay after the Liturgy so you do not miss the news!!!

July is a month spent at the refuge for us. Taking care of children. Praying, working and eating together. There will be Liturgy back home on Sundays. Do not be disturbed if you don't see most of us here. Just come and pray. At the camp or back in Toronto, let us pray for each other.

All Saints - 23 June 2019

From Psalm 67 - *"Wondrous is God in his saints"*

"Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered, and let them that hate Him flee from before his face...

And let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice in the presence of God, let them delight in gladness...

And let them be troubled at His presence, Who is a father of orphans and a judge to the widows. The Lord said: I will return from Basan, I will return in the depths of the sea....

Wondrous is God in his saints; the God of Israel, He will give power and strength unto his people."

I remembered father Roberto saying that we believe in Christ's resurrection because we trust the apostles. We trust what they are saying to us. They were there. They saw the resurrection. And they confessed it. And we believe them. Their witness became for us the truth that enlightens our hearts and scatters the doubts. The more you rest your mind on it, the more sense the resurrection makes. It becomes the Reality. The only certainty we have in this life. Our world is good at providing illusions and killing the hope. But there is one thing to which they cannot bring any harm. The truth. Because He is everlasting. The truth about the resurrection, the truth about our daily life. And the hope for us to live with Him. In a context of false nihilism and bitter skepticism, the saints go against the mainstream of our days, in order to share with us what they see. They live a life as in the gospel, as the Holy Spirit leads them to live.

In our community, being at the frontier of a civilized world, we get to see things out of the ordinary, definitely not mainstream. Both for the worst and for the best. In this ocean of despair, you get to see and rejoice when people are faithful in small things. Like this week, when the poor made donations to us, or gave us something to hope for. On the same day, one person brought tea bags from her personal collection, wrapped in a small plastic bag; another one gave me a dollar, and another 20 dollars. An old friend, being hunted by fear, shares with me what brings peace to the soul: the psalms, and now the prophets. Especially Hosea, because it reflects more her life. It makes more sense... Those who like reading the prophets know why.

Another person, without being religious, keeps repeating and helping me understand today's gospel. The saints are people who do not suffer from claustrophobia. They open up to God. We, the others, we close within ourselves and we become claustrophobic. Opening up means to receive everything with hope in Him. Everything life brings about. To make me understand better, he gave me an example: you can become closed within yourself by overusing technology, which keeps you captive.

"Do you watch movies?" I asked. "Yes, sometimes, but I don't watch them twice. There are a few, maybe ten, that I watched more than once."

These are but a few of the gifts of faith we receive here. I think they are precious pearls, in this ocean of despair. Found by those who are not afraid to swim at the bottom of the ocean. It is true, the dragons lurk there, but they do that to make us turn away and stop looking for the treasure. Buried in our forgetfulness, it does not lose its light, but rather overwhelms you with it, everytime we remember to go and swim deeper, and not float on the surface looking for somebody to rescue us ...We have been saved already! We just need to remember that more and more, so that others can be reminded as well.

From Today's epistle (Acts chapter 11) :

"Brethren, all the saints through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated - of whom the world was not worthy - wandering over deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth. "

Fioretti

A man comes into the drop in after lunch. He's a young man who looks like he's from Ethiopia. His eyes seem glassy as though he's suffered a great deal. He seems guarded. He's greeted and given food. He eats quietly amongst volunteers who are quietly highlighting the names of saints in giant binders. Around him there are different conversations happening at nearby tables. They are engaged conversations about religion and society and all kinds of nonsense. At the end of his meal he says abruptly that he has to go but then gets a coffee and returns to the table. He starts asking about what this place is and who the people are. He says the community reminds him of a village, and tells us about growing up in a refugee camp in the Sudan. Gradually he starts radiating warmth and expanding as he talks about Islam, why the Koran teaches it's unnatural for men not to get married, asking bolder questions about the people around him-- "wait, you don't work?" When he leaves he looks us squarely in the eyes and promises to return for more chats.

Br Luke

Prokeimenon. Mode 4.

Psalm 67.35,26

God is wonderful among his saints.

Verse: Bless God in the congregations.

Kontakion of All Saints

Plagal of the Fourth Tone

The world offers You, the author of all creation, as the first-fruits of nature, the God-bearing martyrs. O most merciful, by their intercessions, through the Theotokos, maintain Your Church in perfect peace.

Holy Pentecost / Father's Day

16 June 2019

From today's Gospel

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now this He said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

From last week

Holiness is more personal to us than we think and it makes more sense than anything else. On Thursday we talked in the chapel about St. Anna (celebrated on June 13). Ana was born in a poor family and after a short time she became orphan. She got adopted by her future parents in law. Something did not go well in the marriage and Anna ran away. Being pregnant she ended up on a deserted island. Being alone, she gave birth to her son of whom she took care for 30 years. The story does not say, but probably both of them got really sick. Anna prayed to God so her son would be baptised. A boat went nearby, and a priest visited the island. He baptised her son, they had liturgy on the island and took communion. Both of them, mother and son died soon after...

I always thought that single mothers in Toronto are the most vulnerable people. It is the same everywhere, here though the experience of a deserted city does not leave you alone, but is watching your lowliness intruding in a life they abandon. I am thinking here about all the statistics I read about single parents, while working with Children's Aid. And all the other programs that make you captive. Treating you always as an eternal client. However, the story of St. Anna, makes us look at this "social reality" as it is often described, through the eyes of the Gospel. In social services, people try to remove the stigma of a certain "social condition", ending up by reinforcing it more. Just because the social reality does not go away. And we people are the way we are. We see each other according to the purity of our heart. The Gospel does not get stuck in the stigma, even when this is real, but in any human condition reveals the real hope, and a path to holiness. So that out of any heart can flow rivers of living water. Since we all are, before anything else, thirsty. This is what I saw, reading the story, in the eyes of those who listen in the chapel to the life of St. Anna. Among them, there were three single mothers and

Shawn, whose father died a long time ago. The story spoke to them about their own “social condition” and how this opens you up to God. How, what is social, becomes holy through God’s grace.

It is good to remember, on father’s day, about single mothers, just so God would bestow on us all rivers of the holy water.

PN

Fioretti

Yesterday, at Good Neighbours in Scarborough, we saw something very new. There is a man there who is always wearing heavy, winter clothes in all weathers and a toque. He has very worn looking eyes and a set mouth. People call him "Pepsi" because this is what he drinks at bars. He's been at Good Neighbours probably since its beginning. Standing at the doorway, talking on his phone, pacing restlessly before the storefront, his eyes scanning the horizon. When we invite him to sit and have coffee with us he tells us he can't that he's "waiting for someone." Yesterday he sat down at a table by the window flanking Jonathan and another man. He wasn't talking but he seemed at ease. When he got up to leave some of the ladies observed aloud to him that they had never seen him sit here before. He looked down, sheepishly, and smiled.

Br Luke

Troparion Tone 8

Blessed are you, O Christ our God, who filled the fishermen with wisdom by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit. And through them You have caught the whole world in Your net. O Lover of all, glory to You.

Kontakion Tone 8

When the Most High came down and confused the tongues, He divided the nations; but when He distributed the tongues of fire, He called all to unity. Therefore, with one voice, we glorify the all Holy Spirit!

Alleluia verses Tone 1 (Psalm 33)

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made; and all their host by the Spirit of His mouth.

The Lord looked down from Heaven and saw all the sons of men.

Holy Fathers First Ecumenical Council - 9 June 2019

From today’s epistle:

"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears”.

The church at the margins, where our small community is dwelling, is witnessing the hope brought in, through the open doors, by those who are sentenced to a social death (sometimes not only social), by the community at large. When we say we learned from the poor, one could think what we mean is that we learn about life in Christ, within places where life is tormented by violence, abandonment, neglect, lack of care and so on. In His ascension, Christ does not let us orphans, but brings us closer to the Father. To become, in Christ, one with Him. He is the gate, as Ben said on Friday, quoting his favourite truth from the gospel. This “adoption”, by our true Father, that is universal and touches human life at its very core, cannot be undone by our tendency of looking to be abandoned and to abandon. Rejection of life brings about suffering and tempts you with death, the light of resurrection though, penetrates any darkness, and those who made a home or were housed there, do not cling to light, but let themselves be embraced by it from within. So when darkness, together with the complexity of sin, makes them surrender, they remember to be and stay alive, in Christ, and moved by the Holy Spirit, to let themselves be embraced by the Father.

That’s what we see and hear during the week from the people that come to us. For instance, this week, a person who was under threat wakes up in the morning, in total abandonment and complete lack of trust in everybody, with the thought that the church is the only place for him to be. When offered some solutions, he answered “We are big boys father, we all know what we need to do. I just wanted to be here this morning. To be in a safe

place, and to be listened to and not to be alone". Or when a homeless woman who once came to us barefooted asking for shoes and left only with socks, came back to thank us (for not helping her actually) and join us in prayer, after she confessed that she tried to pray every day, but because of her being homeless, her prayer suffered from inconsistency. Or Ben, who continues to come every week sharing with us his daily gospel readings. And when asked what he would like to do when he visits us he says: "I want to pray in the chapel". And then he goes in the chapel to pray more.

This is what we feel we need to witness and protect. This is the Truth who meets us here daily. This is the church being alive. This is what, the scepticism of our times is trying to hide and neglect. The wolves are real, and they visit us in many ways, trying to make us believe that the faith of the poor is only an idle tale. That they can be used, bought and idolised, but never be taken for what they are: different "lights on the earth", chosen vessels of Christ to bestow upon us hope from the bottom of a broken human life.

PN

Troparion of the Fathers of the first ecumenical council

Thou art most glorious O Christ our God!

Thou hast established the Holy Fathers as lights on the earth

Through them Thou hast guided us to the true Faith

O greatly compassionate One, glory to Thee!

Fioretti

Two men came to the drop in before lunch. One is familiar, a visitor to Good Neighbours from the distant past. He has returned because he has again fallen on hard times. He has just met his friend at a homeless shelter in the basement of a Christian Church. Both are Muslims. His friend is silent but a casual question starts something. He talks with great intensity and articulateness about how there are no Muslim shelters in the city and that even the shelter where he is staying, though in the basement of a church, is secular. "Atheists don't really help people", he says, "they give people things to satisfy their basic needs but they don't feed the parts that are more important. They mostly look after themselves" he concludes. There are other Muslims in the shelter he says, new arrivals from the Sudan. They, he says, "at least know what life is about, but they are not open, nor are they open-minded". He describes himself as a Muslim and criticizes "innovations" he's detected in the mosque across the street. Yet, he also says he loves Jesus and that He is like someone he has known his whole life. He speaks very intelligently and at great length about the Bible. When the prayer bell rang, we all go into the chapel together.

Br Luke

Troparion of the Ascension of our Lord

Thou hast ascended in glory O Christ our God!

And gladdened Thy disciples with the promise of the Holy Spirit

Making them confident through the blessing

That Thou art the son of God and deliverer of the world.

Ben, from the mission (this is his prayer, that he shares with Joana on Friday. Ben never talks to you if you don't ask him a question. But if you do ask him, you find out that the most he likes to do is to pray):

Jesus Christ said: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me". John:14:6

Greetings in Jesus Christ

Father God, I ask you Lord to draw people closer to yourself. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

The sinner's prayer: accepting Christ

Father God, forgive my sins. Jesus Christ died once on the cross and shed His blood for me. Three days later you resurrected him. I accept that. I invite Jesus Christ into my heart as my Lord and savior. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Sunday of the Blindman - 2 June 2019

Is 35:4-6 “Be comforted, you fainthearted. Be strong do not fear. Behold our God renders judgement and will render it. He will come and save us. **Then the eyes of the blind should be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall hear. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will speak clearly. For water shall burst forth in the desert, and a valley in the thirsty land**”.

A beautiful thing

that happened this week was listening to Laura singing “Christ is Risen”. She sang many times during the Paschal Hours. It so happened that she came more often to the mission this week. Singing and ringing the bells, and smiling. However, the highlighting moment of all this was listening to her singing during Bridges on Wednesday. All of a sudden. Just like that. We were talking serious things, and she started singing. Not once, not twice, but three times. Just as I had asked a question, being ready to answer myself. Smiling like she knew something we did not, she started singing Christ is Risen. We’ve been struggling for a few years now to sing the Paschal canon, and Laura learned Christ is Risen just being at the Paschal hours a few times. For her this comes natural and it makes a lot of sense.

These moments are for us fresh air that keep us sane. Our community is so beautiful in its brokenness, and still lets you witness at times a lot of insanity. Which slowly starts to make sense to you:). That comes from our lack of faith of course. But still, as John says, this is not a manner of judging each other, just a fact of us being real and honest. And in this generalised nonsense and confusion and sometimes pain and suffering, you hear the voice of the poor singing, all of a sudden, Christ is risen. Not once, not twice, but three times. And then you start to sing with them. And smile. Because this is good news. That we forget to remember.

The thing with Laura is that we don’t even know if she is christian. What we do know is that she smiles like a child, she lives in subsidizing housing up the street, she is poor and when she has money she buys a coffee at Starbucks. I remember she once told me she was not Christian. But it’s hard to take her word for that because somehow she sees and speaks about life in a manner that reflects the truth of the gospel. At bridges, before singing Christ is risen, she spoke about forgiveness. How real it is, and how we just need to ask for it. How it sets us free. And I think, because she felt she did not convince us she started to sing. To prove it. Stressing the line about light being bestowed on those in the tombs, smiling all the way.

We listen and pay attention, all the time to people who have things to say. And that’s not a bad thing. People study for years, they do research, looking to figure out the puzzle. Helping you understand, knowing more than before. The poor have something to say too. From them we learn that life, being broken, is not a puzzle, but rather simple and healed in Christ’s resurrection. There is no formula about life we need to copy and memorize, only that forgiveness is eternal. Just dare to ask, and testify by offering it. Because they know who God is, and don’t cling to Him, like the apostles after the ascension looking at the empty sky, but meet Him in freedom and vulnerability, recognizing His voice which does not sentence them, but calls them by name. And they just cannot keep quiet about it, but they must share with us the good news, smiling and singing.

Lk. 4, 18

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,

Because He has anointed Me

To preach the gospel to the poor;

He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted

To proclaim liberty to the captives

And recovery of sight to the blind,

To set liberty to those who are oppressed;

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord”.

Christ, our God, Sun of Righteousness beyond all understanding, O Thou who, in touching him, didst open the eyes of the man born blind, open the eyes of our souls and make children of the light...

I come to Thee, O Christ, the eyes of my soul blind as the eyes of the man born blind, and, in repentance, I cry to Thee: Thou art the Light of supreme brightness for all those who are in darkness. (from Sunday Antiphons)