

**Tenth Sunday of Matthew - 25 August 2019**

**Tone 1**

Go through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and many are the ones entering through it, because narrow is the gate and constricted is the way that leads into life and few are the ones who find it.

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I invite you to open your mind and heart to a “lectio divina”, a holy reading / reflection of this text in your personal life.

In this bulletin, I would like to reflect on what it means for our community. What is this “narrow gate?”

Before reflecting on the meaning of the narrow gate, we need to pause and take note that if we do find ourselves in the narrow gate, we will be few in number. Is Jesus calling us, then, to be elitist? Is the apostolic church only for a few who can be proud of their high standard? Is it an exclusive holy club that keeps everyone out who is not good enough? To be few is to carry a judgment. The world judges you because you are clearly not successful. Success is in numbers. But we can also judge ourselves? We are few because we think that we are either really bad or really good.

Yet none of the above understands what Jesus is talking about. The gate is of course the Lord Himself. The way is walked by going in and out of this gate. The “narrow gate” is this place of freedom we are called to live in Christ, each day anew, each day with fresh surprises. To walk this way through the narrow gate means revealing that truth and love are the only goals of our life. It means living in such a way that if God did not exist, our life would have no meaning. It means in today’s society giving priority to the face-to-face rather than “face-to-book” encounters.

To witness to the Truth today means living something for real rather than posting an impression you want others to have. Truth means describing what you actually live rather than making up what you wished you lived. It means making time for people that you can touch versus getting a reputation on line. It means accepting the limitations of the Incarnation and living, loving, praying in a place, in a time, with a specific group of people. It means living the truth of the Gospel not because it gets you followers on twitter but because it’s life. Of course, you will find only a few people interested in this anymore. The other reason why only a few people would walk in this way is because of the belief that in numbers there must be safety and truth. When Jesus was abandoned by all of his disciples, that proved that he was wrong, didn’t it? After all, 100% of his disciples could not all have been wrong, he must have done something bad.

So in this Gospel verse the point is not numbers, many or a few. The real call is to walk the way of Jesus. Walk the talk with Jesus! The gate of Humility, serving the least, not appearing to live something you don’t even know or worrying about a holy reputation. The narrow gate of community and silent prayer, of voluntary poverty and a real love that is concrete and self-effacing. Putting aside all desire to seek church or worldly success. Choosing to live on this earth with real people rather than living on a website. All this leads to life. This leads to joy. This leads to hope. This leads you ever closer to Jesus and his friends. This opens us up to real encounters and life.

We may look around the church at 155 Broadview and feel discouraged because there are few people. We are now few, maybe tomorrow there will be many, but that’s never the point.

P.R.

“We may study as much as we will but we shall still not come to know the Lord unless we live according to His commandments, for the Lord is not made known through learning but by the Holy Spirit. Many philosophers and scholars have arrived at a belief in the existence of God, but they have not come to know God.

To believe in a God is one thing, to know God another.” +St Silouan the Athonite

“A life based only on profiting and taking advantage of situations to the detriment of others inevitably causes inner death,” he said. “And how many people say they are close to the Church, friends of priests and bishops yet only seek their own interests. These are the hypocrisies that destroy the Church.”

## **Ninth Sunday of Matthew - 18 August 2019**

### **Tone 8**

“To preach the gospel, not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. 1Cor.1:17

“Feed my people” Mt14:14-22

One of the temptations of being at the Mission is to accept thoughts of doubt at the worth of what we are living. The hunger of people is it seems overwhelming, not just physical hunger but spiritual. Our own poverty, the evangelical poverty of means e.g. lack of money or support, or own spiritual poverty, our limitations, our sinfulness equally is all very humbling. Daily we are reminded that we are not enough, that we fail or are not good enough. Sometimes these voices are from outside, the ones most painful are the ones within the very church.

Common wisdom would say that it is best to disappear, or to step aside and let more competent, more efficient, and more intelligent, more endowed people as Monty Python said “more qualified people” take over. The temptation is not in believing that this is true, for of course all these voices are right. The temptation is rather to think that the gospel can be preached without sharing in the cross.

When you read the gospels and these words of St Paul it's clear that the power of the Resurrection **needs** our poverty to witness to it.

Yes, we are not enough, yes we are poor, yes we are not the brightest, or the most eloquent in preaching the gospel – “not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” Yes we can easily be dismissed as useless, yet all of this cannot be an excuse for not feeding His people. As we heard last Sunday Jesus say to His disciples “you feed them”...you with your pathetic (a couple of pita loaves and sardines) ridicules an insufficient supply of food. YOU feed them...

Any other CEO or NGO or Sage or social programmer or parish council would be embarrassed to be associated with such a inefficient and poor group of 12 men!

So the temptation is much deeper than just is what we are doing of any worth? It is the temptation to deny the cross and have a resurrection that has more to do with a resuscitation than redemption, by withdrawing from our experience of weakness and poverty we deny the cross to and take comfort in the illusion that after all, we are somebody and most of all that we are achieving something great. It may be a great success but not the Resurrection!

“We must always remember that the Lord sees us wrestling with the Enemy, and so we must never be afraid. Even should all hell fall upon us, we must be brave.” — St. Silouan the Athonite

History – Did you know?

When the Mission opened on Blake Street in January 1986, the Mission chose three patrons, St John the Merciful, St Silouan of Athos & St Maria of Paris. All three Saints have been part of the life of the Mission since the beginning. Why then is only one named – St John the Compassionate? Because the other two had not been glorified by the Orthodox Church at the time the Mission started. Maybe some of you may not have even been born yet! J

## **Eighth Sunday of Matthew 11 August 2019**

### **Tone 7**

#### Dormition Fast - a time for closeness to the Mother of God

The time of the Dormition Fast is marked by a special sense of gentleness and the close presence of the Mother of God. This week as we prayed the Paraclesis we were just a couple of people but the chapel felt populated by the many people who through the day come to the Mission and the many others who ask for our prayers. The Service of Paraclesis that marks the fast is one of the most beautiful services dedicated to the Mother of God.

We confess to her our pain, our sufferings, even our sins and passions and in return we receive her joy, her tenderness and compassion.

The Mother of God makes present to the Church the very compassion of God, not as an idea or moral principle, but as a person, as a mother, as a woman. A Christianity that ignores the Mother of God becomes oppressive and a return to a religion of fear and judgement. The Mother of God helps to approach God's throne as the throne of Mercy.

During the service we pray at the Mission we take our time to pray by name all the people who have been part of our life including people who have hurt us or done us wrong. This sense of compassion and tenderness that the Mother of God opens us, helps us to embrace all those who love us and those who hate us.

During the Paraclesis you sense this grace of healing and gentle presence that the Mother of God brings. No situation is outside this mercy, no one is lost outside her embrace. Often times we feel heaven is closed to our prayers; the service of Paraclesis assures us that God is closer to us than we imagine.

Soon we will celebrate the Dormition of her who bore the source of all Joy. Even death will be sweet with her beside us. Let us not waste this time of grace. Let us go up to the house of the Lord and kiss the holy tomb where the Mother of God tastes death. Let us there discover not bones and decay but sweet smelling flowers but, more importantly, someone who because of her death is now really close to each and every one of us. The Mission chapel is one of those holy places marked by both suffering and grace. How fitting to celebrate in it these holy days.

The truth is not that she is closer to us than her Son; rather she helps us to know that Christ is even closer to us than she is.

PR

St. Silouan the Athonite: . . . the Holy Spirit, sweet and gracious, draws the soul to love the Lord, and in the sweetness of the Holy Spirit the soul loses her fear of suffering.

### **Seventh Sunday of Matthew - 04 August 2019**

#### **Tone 6**

From Sunday gospel after Matthew

At that time, as Jesus passed by, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord."

Eyes they have that cannot see

Ears they have that cannot hear

Evil is concerned only with itself and tries to take what it does not possess because there is nothing consistent in it. It feeds, as father said, on goodness, to devour it. Trying to offer a crooked form of reality, with the goal to annihilate it and destroy even the memory of it. One could say it is attracted to goodness. It is not really so. It rather hates itself trying to spread restlessness. Envyng any good thing, it spreads around deceit, for what it cannot stand is the Truth. Because the Resurrection is done in Truth. It lies to everybody and to itself, but it cannot lie to the Truth. "Let God arise and his enemies be scattered..." So much more with man who, in whatever form affected by evil, cannot but recognize the presence of God. In his blindness, man sees God without measure and desires Him with all his being. Because we do not feed only with bread but with the Word of God. We have depth and substance, hunger and thirst. We do not love God because we are blind and we want to see, we love God because we are longing to rest in His love. At the refuge, away from the smog of Toronto, you get an MRI of your soul and you are afraid to look at the results. You find yourself spiritually in a terminal phase, nearly on life support. You see and feel more of how much we got deformed in time, offering this as a model to the children, who seemed to be caught in a meaningless trap because we dug ourselves a meaningless whole.

However, feeling spiritually as damaged goods, you see clearly that the only desire for the children and you is to be with God alone and do His will. We are blind, but we find God in darkness because He holds our hand,

both ours and that of the children. You realise He has never been so close in your life before, for you and for the children. For your generation and theirs.

From Matins gospel after John

On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple...

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not know the scripture, that He must rise from the dead.

Fioretti (a wild flower from the refuge)

Integrity of work (Luke 3: 10-14)

I do not know how people feel in general about the way “business” is done here in Toronto or outside the city, but I personally have a continuous anxiety when I must do anything that involves money. Everywhere you go, there is a generalised mistrust in any transaction, doubled by a ferocious desire to maximize any profit at any cost. Personal or business profit. These days, people do not work expecting to gain what is right (whatever that might be), being guided by decency or integrity, but they are mostly concerned with the amount of profit they can make. The sky is the limit here. This temptation has always been present for people of all times, only that nowadays it has become a value for the modern world that few would dare to challenge. One does not feel ashamed at the thought of overcharging for a service, but rather entitled to it since this is now the norm. This is how people do business and if you want to survive you have to do the same. A powerful idol...

That’s why, at the refuge it was a real joy to see a local young man giving us a fair quote - for a heavy work that needed to be done (to cut and trim the trees on the electrical line in order to prevent a fire from happening) - based on what he thought was right and decent. You did not feel that he was making you a favour or that he was making a fool of himself. But just decency and honour in what he thought his work was worth. This has nothing to do with the price difference between Toronto and rural areas, as we have already had experiences working with local people who offered us quotes for services trying to get as much as they could from us. Idols are not images that we hang on the walls but non values that torment our life, because we do not remember that the gospel is given to be lived and not to be intellectualized in order to make us rich in knowledge.