



Sunday before Holy Cross

Jn 3:13-17: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son..."

Kathisma II. Mode pl. 1

"After You had risen on the third day, O Lord, and after the Apostles had worshiped You, Peter cried out to You, "Women stood courageously, but I acted cowardly. The Robber stated Your divinity, but I disavowed You. Will You ever call me Your disciple anymore, or will You again appoint me as a fisher of the deep? I pray You to receive me in repentance, O God, and save me."

We easily disavow the path of the cross. Especially when it is carried by others. We do not know what to do. The exaltation of the cross is a moment to remember in eternity - so we do not forget where forgiveness is coming from - Christ does. He took the stigmata into heaven within his resurrected body. It is a moment of lucidity. And revelation. The gravity of our sin and the love of the Father and the obedience of the Son humble us. Historically, when the cross was found in the basil field it should have been a moment of victory and joy (we take their word for that). When we come back to the community and see the cross of the others we are humbled by their own broken unfulfilled and betrayed love and by your own disavowment.

It keeps our feet grounded on earth so we do not daydream about going to heaven too soon. The signs of the cross, as the Holy apostle Paul says today, are always visible in the body. Whatever is touched by the cross becomes visible and cannot be hidden anymore. It is more like a revelation of what happens underneath the surface. It brings the venom from the community on the outside. Here, the signs of the cross are not beautiful. On the contrary. But in heaven they give intensity through the garment we will be wearing. People are often scared about their garment, if they make it to heaven. How shiny will it be? I heard people in church speaking about that. Who shines more there as well? I think we see that here already if we dare behold the signs of the cross on the bodies of people who come through our doors. I have a hidden desire: to see the garment of light of those whom I know to carry a heavy and visible cross here. Those we know by name. For instance S.

We found out that S., our homeless woman, is going to have a child. She spends most of the time at the mission when we are open. She sometimes yells on the street at people we don't see and we don't know. S. does not have an addiction problem. She lost her office job 5 or 6 years ago. When she came the first time to us you could talk to her just like you would talk to any other person who has an office job. I remember her hope and my hope that somehow everything was going to be fine. Living on the street left many scars on her soul and body. She will take them to

heaven as well when her time comes. To make us remember that forgiveness is coming from somebody we neglected too.

On Friday, Joanna and sister Penka thought that S.'s water had broken. We stopped everything and got organized so they could take her to the hospital. We were still within the feast of the birth of the Mother of God. We organized well only that S. did not want to go. There are moments when you cannot reason with her. We tried but we could not convince her. Then we panicked and called for an ambulance. I panicked more. They came, they talked to her and they left. Not before telling us that there is nothing they could do!!!! If she doesn't want to go to the hospital they cannot intervene. And we should call the police because they have trained people to deal with mental health patients. I thought we could just call 911 and ask for help, for a pregnant homeless woman with a mental illness whose water had just broken????!! The paramedics left right after a member of their team told us that S. was afraid that they would take her baby away from her at the hospital.

S. left the mission right after the paramedics. She probably felt betrayed by us and walked away. We remained with no hope. She was alone on the street, too afraid to go to the hospital to check on the baby and or herself for fear of losing him. She thinks it is a boy. Within a few seconds everything became much heavier at the mission. With no signs of hope. We scrambled to pray. And to look for something hopeful. It was like a heavy curtain had just fallen on us. We could not find anything. Only Mary, our little friend who takes care of everybody praying for S. So God would protect her and the baby.

I talked to some people during the day who have experience with situations like this and they confirmed that S.'s fear was correct. Her baby would probably be taken away from her even though she does not have an addiction problem. Not that any addiction would justify such an intervention. Someone told me that wherever she will go, they will take the baby first, and afterwards they might work with her to find a place to stabilize her.

I did a practicum with Children's Aid in the past. I met good people who did really good work and I saw situations where families or parents could not really take care of their children for all kinds of reasons. Probably S. would struggle as well. She would need help and a lot of support. I am just thinking, we live in a rich society where a homeless woman abandoned by everybody wants to keep the baby. She loves when love is rejected. She wants to care when she is without care. She wants to live when the life from her womb is about to be taken away. She is terrified of the world but she is not afraid to love. And then, everything we offer her is more reason to be afraid and less and less to love and live. Mary, our little one from the mission was telling us: "I was asking and telling everybody. Do not scare S. Try to comfort her. She needs to rest and eat well. She needs more peace." I was thinking she was right. S. had a place at St. John to rest, being hunted by the system outside. And I, in my rush and panic, brought the system in, thus taking away from her the only place where she could rest. When you see the cross of others, instead of giving comfort and a glass of water (Matthew, 10:42 " *And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward*) you panic and you give vinegar to drink to cut the thirst.

There are situations at the mission when you see despair but somehow you are not abandoned by hope. On Friday, it felt at times that we are like orphans who do not recognize their Father.

That we lost Him by walking too much in darkness -(from John 12: *“Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light”*).

I realized the cross makes the only sense here. The Cross of the Son. The cross of S. The cross of the baby. It is through this cross that God and only Him meets us in our despair. In a world that we mess up so much, He comes in humility to redeem our lack of love. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved”.



P.S. The following day, being late, I was going in through the back gate of the mission, while S. was coming out. I knew from George she had come early in the morning. As we met at the door she stopped to watch the basil plants we are going to use during the Vigil on Sunday night. She told me that we should plant marigold beside the basil. It keeps the basil healthy and drives away the bugs.

I thought to myself maybe that's how they found the cross in the basil field. Maybe there were also some marigold flowers to keep the bugs away. Only that in time memory becomes selective. And people do not remember the homeless who live in the field and what they say. Even though they are the first to find lost things because they walk all day and all night looking for a place to lay their head.

Mark 5: 39 *"When He came in, He said to them: "Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping". And they laughed Him to scorn..."*

Before being conquered, death is trying to mock life. That's when you know the path is for real. Those who try to live a life with dignity for the sake of a clear consciousness experience humiliation more intensely. Like a child who in his innocence is denied his love. The child would not know what that means. Not to love is a bitter fairy tale for him that he gets to listen to for the first time when his love is not returned. And the damage starts to happen. It would be the same with a mature soul that is looking and working to live a life in honesty and integrity. The more faithful you are the deeper you experience humiliation. The purity of heart does not make you immune to spittings and mocking, on the contrary, it makes you more vulnerable and extra sensitive. It hurts you more. The difference is that when that happens to a child, when the love is not returned - the sorrow pierces his heart and produces damage. Scars that look for healing for a lifetime. With the mature dignified soul, when the sorrow happens through humiliation and mockings, no damage occurs. On the contrary. A deeper thirst for truth and beauty enlarges your heart. A new evidence of the purity of the Truth. And the beauty of the gospel. If you had any doubtful thoughts before now they are gone. This is a certitude you don't ask for. Like a gift you did not deserve, but rejoice greatly when it is received.

This is part of the road of the cross. As much as the endeavour to love opens you up to suffering, it also opens you up to humiliation. It is what it is. We cannot choose one and neglect the other.

In Jeremiah, God reveals Himself like a wounded husband betrayed in his love. Who is willing even to break his own law in order to receive the fickle partner. Against any common sense, being broken hearted by our refusal to love, by our unfaithfulness, God was willing to take us back, seeing our death produced by self destruction and sin. However, he does that only in his own terms. No more mocking. He does that with sorrow, pain and love, asking in return integrity and seriousness for his proposal. No more games.

Antiphon III

On the house of David are the fearsome things to be fully accomplished; for therein will be fire, burning every shameful thought.

Nick came back to the mission this week to reconnect with us. He took a break from distributing the flyers on Wednesday to share a coffee, pray together and reflect shortly on the gospel. He had a question about how to silence the voices. I thought it was well connected with what he read during vespers: *"Let my thoughts be pleasing to Him. I find my joy in the Lord."* He was not the only

one who was troubled by intense thoughts and voices this week. Other people shared with me the same fear. The one of the thoughts that cannot be silenced.

That's why they came to church, to take refuge where peace surpasses any understanding. The comfort is real. Beside the cross no more intrusive thoughts trouble the mind.

The path of the cross brings both together, the suffering and the mockings. Both lead to the cross. When God is glorified, any human shameful thoughts are slowly perishing. The Truth is revealed and beheld. And humankind starts to wake up from every form of idolatry and comes back to its senses. You see what it means to say no to God's love. To say no to Him.

There is nothing in between where you can hide. The tree is barren and God is crucified on it.

You need to behold the cross and listen to forgiveness. No other way around. No way back.

In order to receive forgiveness from God, somebody was saying we need to see the reality of sin.

Not to hide it. To pretend it did not exist or that somehow it is relative because his love is eternal.

God loves eternally but in His own terms. He loves us from the cross. From the tree we used to

hide. No more hiding, the tree is planted by the streams of the water. Within the center of the

universe. You cannot hide now but only behold it. So Christ, in His own terms, can take you up

from hell to heaven, from death to life.

Resurrectional Kontakion.

You descended to Hades, my Savior, and shattered its gates, as the Almighty. As Creator, You raised the dead with yourself, and smashed the sting of death, O Christ. You freed Adam from the curse, O Lover of humanity. Therefore we all cry out to You, Save us, O Lord.