

Sunday after Holy Cross

Mark 8:34-38; 9:1"...And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."



Faith comes from listening. To listen to the Word of God who, like a seed, searches for your heart to open it with kindness. To die like the seed in order for the plant to grow and bear fruit. But yet, dying does not mean perishing but growing life. The man is made out of dust so it can nourish and feed the word of God. The earth is not good for the plant when it is frozen. So, we must be careful with the cold heart. It needs to be warmed up. That comes from the seed also. It must be warmed with good measure so it does not dry up completely. What plant is that who likes only the heat and dry climate? A cactus? Maybe, but yet, not everybody is a cactus, and if it were, that would be pretty sad. In general, any plant is good. There is nothing wrong with a cactus. On the contrary, it has its own beauty. The wrong appears when the plant exceeds its own number and takes over, and markets itself, as the recipe for success in a dry climate. In the context of globalized warming, the cactus becomes representative for adapting to what's new. But again, not everyone should be a cactus. That's why tears are necessary, to water the seed. They penetrate the surface of the heart so the plant can grow, not against the will of the dirt, adapting to the dry environment, but rather the environment becomes a natural habitat for any signs of life. And the signs are plenty. The dust becomes all of a sudden the place where the fragility of life grows robust roots. When that happens, dew is given by the plant to quench any unnecessary thirst from outside. It also replaces the tears, when joy becomes the roots of the plant.

"I direct my eyes to You in heaven, O Logos. Show me mercy, so that I may live in You "(Antiphon I. Mode pl. 2.)

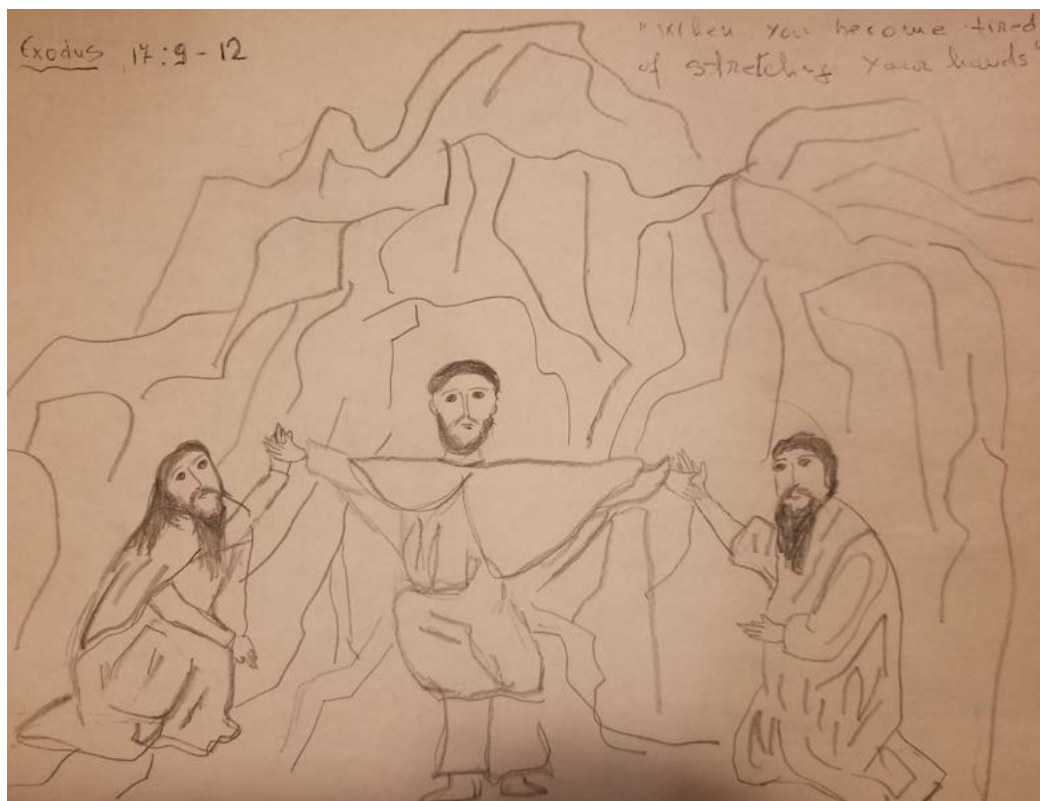
As faith comes from listening and doing, life comes from seeing and tasting. There is something to be seen and beheld when it comes to life - *"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. Therefore I depreciate myself, and waste away. I regard myself as dust and ashes."* (Job 42:5-6))

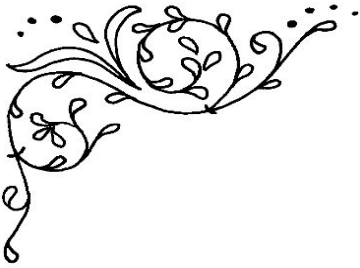
We behold the resurrection of Christ so we can worship our Lord Jesus. Holy Apostle John comes within the tomb and he sees and believes. Thomas sees the signs of the nails and the piercing of the lance. There is something given to the eyes to see when it comes to life. Everything we know and experience is through life. Everything we know is by being alive. That's what we know, that's what we remember. The beauty of life and the joy of being a part of it. And yet, with

the coming of the taste of death, life seems so fragile. So temporary. And then there is all the scratching that happens on the soul. You are alive indeed but wounded by sin. - *"You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he."* (from Saturday's gospel)

Everything we remember is about life and yet we were on the edge of dying in our sins. Because we cannot, we do not want to follow, to go where Christ goes. The cross was a burden for humankind when hiding on the ground. It was the most oppressive and shameful way to take a life without being able to offer anything in return. *"All the day long they detested my words, all their thoughts were against me for evil. They will dwell near and will hide themselves; ...even as they have waited for my soul."*(Ps 55:4-5)

When it is picked up though, the cross becomes light and life-giving. The burden of being alive while tasting the bitter taste of death is heavy; by following Him, we might give up our life, dying to this world, but the expectation is one of joy for His second coming. The yoke is becoming light because of His presence. It is not I, but Christ who lives in Me (Gal, 2). His second coming becomes an ongoing presence within the new man. And the gathering of the new community is a dynamis that keeps our souls and bodies united within the presence of the holy cross.





On a Thursday

John 8:21-30 (from Saturday's Gospel) "For what does it profit a man to gain I forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

"In God will I commend my words, in God I have set my hope; I will not fear what man shall do to me" (from ps 55)

On Thursday, there was a heaviness in the room at the mission at times. Especially when some people were inside. I think I counted three people in the room who caused different problems in the past. As I was counting I had to approach another guest entering the church. He was coming inside just to get on people's nerves. Or rather to deceive their soul. Two new people were caught in a conflict. One, a homeless guy from Sri Lanka, exiled from Scarborough by social services (one day before he prayed in the chapel), was the victim of blunt racism from a homeless woman whom I had not seen in the past. The scene was perfected when a person we had banned before, smiling, revealed to another guest what he was always carrying in his basket: baby mice. The scene did not stop here. One decent lady came in to complain about people smoking outside. As if this was the only day it happened...Wasted food was left around the room. People who took a lot and ate just a little. The reverse of fasting. This would have all been fine if it wasn't for a generalized feeling that this was not accidental. It seemed like it was done on purpose.

Even people with good hearts and good intentions were confessing having headaches without a particular reason. At that moment, I thought that was the scene of a generation. One to which we also belong.. What can we give in return for our soul? Is there anything we can justify with our intention to be alive?

I also remembered at times how, during the week, we read the gospel where Jesus gives authority over the evil spirits to the apostles. Also, how these spirits worshiped Him when they saw Him. And how Christ speaks openly to the apostles and the people about how he will go to Jerusalem and be crucified by men :"*...in God have I put my hope, I will not fear what man shall do to me."* (from Ps 55)

I thought to myself there is something strange about us; how much we can harm and how much we can comfort. This ambivalence is so painful and puzzling. The evil spirits would obey God and yet the people..."*...in God I have set my hope; I will not fear what flesh shall do to me (from Ps 55).*

But yet, this vulnerability of God when it comes to man is the result of His love for our own life. Where God takes human flesh for our salvation and never sells the human soul because there is no price for His love for the life we have within ourselves. Even when people die within their own sins, they cannot sell their soul because there is no price. Because It is from God, it is of God.

We see, within the light of the resurrection, the places where death has bitten deeply from the life of man. The resurrection does not erase the memory of it. On the contrary, it emphasized it through healing and forgiveness. He brings everything into His holiness, where Holiness allows the suffering to be seen through the eyes of forgiveness.

A new creation and a new life which does not forget the old one. The human life from the very beginning was good for God and pleasing in His sight. Any form of life. It does not need to justify itself. It has no right to do that. It fails to live under the good law, but it is forgiven, embraced and healed in Christ's resurrection, where Christ lives within us and He invites us to live with Him.

When all this scene from the room was awfully unbearable I saw Stephanie smiling. While just a few minutes ago she was absent and lost in her thoughts now she was smiling. The baby mice were still in the basket, the aggressive woman was still attacking another homeless man and Bill was trying to make it again in the room to deceive another soul. However, Stephanie was smiling as if she saw something we could not see. I was thinking, I hope that what she sees now is real otherwise we are all like poor lost souls here. What she saw might be true, because later on in the afternoon a child who came in with her mom behaved the same. She filled the church with her presence and with her curiosity to find and rest on what the church has to give. So much so, that when we went to the chapel for Jesus prayer she joined in with her mom. And stayed there for the whole time looking at the icons and talking to the angels. That was pretty obvious for everybody. We see this so often at the mission. The despair without exit. The cross left behind in the dust to bring heaviness to the land and on those who live in it. And the church, who becomes a place of the newest life and joy . A grace that is felt and embraced by those who look for refuge with an honest heart.

We can only see all this ambivalence through the cross. Especially at the mission. If we forget the cross, even for a moment, our heart falls into despair. The cross reveals the love of God and the value of human life beyond any limit. It reveals the resurrection on the third day and the forgiveness that comes from Christ. It is true that it would be hard to carry the cross or to stay in its shade by oneself. Maybe that's why Crist says that when two or three are gathered in His name He would be present within their midst. Maybe to help each other with the cross and lifting each other's hands in prayer when they become heavy. Like Moses on the mountain. When his hands became heavy and needed extra help (Exodus, 17:9-12).