

## 7th Sunday of Luke

The Gospel According to Luke 8:41-56



Healing of the Bleeding Woman, c. 4th century.  
Catacombs of Marcellinus and Peter, Rome, Italy.

From today's gospel:

..."Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping."... But taking her by the hand He called, saying, "Child, arise." And her spirit returned,

**Antiphon III** - Orthros today

*In the Holy Spirit, as in the Father and the Logos, is the principle of life; from Him is every living being endowed with a soul.*

## **A death well planned.**

From outside, Rita's death may have seemed a long-overdue event, that she suffered for years, finally an end to a meaningless set of end-of-life circumstances. Her desire for independence crushed, she lived an ever-greater impoverishment of faculties and a heart-breaking dependence on everyone for everything. She lost her hearing, her mobility and her vision. In the last few months, a stroke also "gifted" her with a partial loss of speech. She struggled with God over some of these losses. Her end was what she feared the most, dependence, and therefore she became apparently just a passive victim of a cruel set of circumstances.

From common-world sense, this was nothing she wanted, and why the prolonged suffering? What good did it serve?

Yet the tears of all those who held her body were not tears of relief but of loss and gratitude.

I remember this feeling on the day of her death that we on earth had lost something very precious.

Stories emerged almost at the moment of her death that, even up to the days before her death, Rita was helping, guiding and carrying people. The many non-family members who refused, it seemed, to leave her body, weeping at her leave taking, were not just sticking around out of a sense of pity for a broken woman but because they had clearly received more than what they gave.

Rita's death was holy, and for all evidence, wilful, intentional. Every breath willed with intention. This is what struck me each time I visited her. Bones with no flesh and flesh with no bones, as people often remarked. Clearly it was her soul keeping her body alive. A nurse commenting on how Rita (now blind/ deaf and unable to speak well) the last few months had "changed my life, helped me to start living again".

Rita's death was intentional and free. She prayed the last few days after receiving communion almost constantly to the Mother of God. Only after the priest spoke the final absolution and anointing did she freely accept to give up her spirit. No one even noticed that passing. In the moment of death, apparently utterly free in a way that most of our so-called free decisions are just foggy.

She entered life lucid, freely, not drugged up and not giving up. Even after death, she remained present, warm to the touch for hours until, with Mary holding her hand, she surrendered the warmth of her presence, and the cold of death took over. Her presence after her "death" was felt and continued until the day of her burial. Her burial was more a celebration truly of a Holy life, lived well in the presence of God, for her families and anyone who came in contact with her. I always left her bed with a sense of having received something precious for me and Mary. I know she prayed for the mission and the church.

Given Rita's strong will and determination, it would be difficult to say that the last 3 years of her life were simple passive moments with no meaning and no willful participation of her will. Her desire for independence clearly was not the deeper energy that kept her alive. More alive, it seems, as her body became more almost transparent.

She continued the path of her death clearly because she loved, she willed the good of everyone who came to her and needed something from her. Mother, sister, friend, she was to all. That is how she lived and in the end that is how she died. Not defined by her blindness, or stroke or even cognitive capacity.

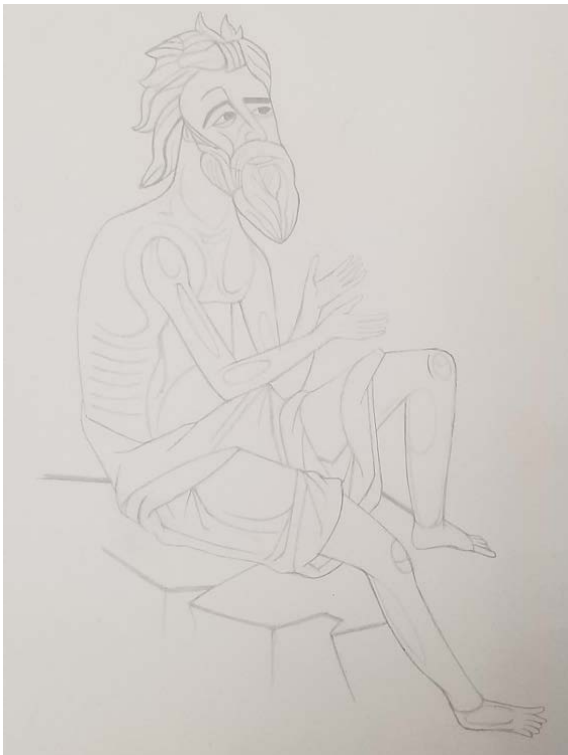
Rita was defined by love. Over the years, this shaped her and planned her path to "life". No one improvises a good death. It takes years of practice. Rita planned well her death over the years of her long life.

Throughout her long life she learned to love more and more until the moment where to love meant to step on the other side of this life.

This is what we pray at the liturgy every time we say: "And let us ask for a Christian end to our life, peaceful, without shame and suffering, and for a good defence before the awesome judgment seat of Christ."

Let us now start planning our death.

Fr. Roberto



"...do not despise one of those little ones...in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 18:10).

*But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. (from St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 2:2-10)*

### **Prokeimenon.**

Arise, O Lord my God, for You reign unto the ages.  
I will give thanks to You, O Lord, with my whole heart.  
Arise, O Lord my God, for You reign unto the ages.

In the Sunday Prokeimenon at orthros, we get a glimpse of the weekly gospels. In order to fully understand when we hear the gospel on Sunday. We see today where God encounters us if we keep just a little bit from our heart away from Him. Where He touches our hand if all His desire does not encompass fully our life. If we come within this inviting, creating love by keeping something for ourselves. Something to waste. Something for later on. Later on is just a regret of what we don't live today. If we cannot find our honesty that's what will happen "tomorrow". We cannot worry for tomorrow, no hope would come if we forget our honesty today.

Father spoke on Tuesday about this unconventional need of being "bluntly honest with God". To meet the tenderness of God we need to find our honesty. The mercy of God is beheld through the honesty of the heart. *"They that observe vain and false things have abandoned mercy for themselves" (from Jonas 2:3-10)*.

To abandon mercy, to leave it behind means to trade away the Word of God for the unnecessary worldly noise. There is a constant pressure to "make peace" with those who love vanity and to compromise with God. But to rely on God's "understanding" for our frailty means to march unto the "womb of hades". Where it takes so much more courage and faith to cry to Him.

The lack of honesty towards God brings us closer to hades. However, one thing that hades cannot silence is the remembrance of Him, who becomes tender mercy when the spirit becomes honest.

We see in the gospel on Monday what honesty could bring about... Why would we postpone the encounter? When Jesus is talking about the Queen of the south who came to meet Solomon. Her desire was to search for wisdom. She had come to him with hard questions only to pour out, eventually, all her heart to him. It almost seems humanly impossible. To have a heart that gives itself totally to God. A radical form of prayer. And yet, this is what we are asked for. But we are asked in order to be amazed and see for ourselves. ( "Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possessions. " - Ps 2:8).

"Blessed is the Lord your God who delights in You" says the queen of the South after this encounter. Her heart is changed so much so that she is blessing God. The story goes further to reckon that there was never such abundance of goodness like the given by the queen to Solomon. As for the queen, she received everything that her heart desired. She received everything from his hand. (Genesis 12:2).

The honesty of searching brings about the encounter. The honesty within the encounter when seeing the face of God brings about blessings and dominion for man over everything on the surface or in the depth. When honesty is forgotten, and a part of the heart hidden, the encounter becomes one of sorrow. When we do not render unto God what God renders unto us, the sorrows of man become unnecessary to God because they are not desired by Him (Jeremiah 7:30). And so, a generation who forgets its honesty pierces with death the innocence of the other one.

That's why, the only sign given to a faithless generation is the sign of Jonah (see the gospel on Monday), in the belly of the whale, because there the honesty is recovered and the face of God remembered. In Christ's resurrection, His face is the only one we can see in the belly, because there is nothing else that can pierce that darkness. : " I am banished from the sight of Thine eyes...Yet my life comes up out of corruption unto Thee o Lord my God. ...When my soul was fainting within me, I remembered the Lord" (Jonah 2:4-6)".

Here, the remembrance of God keeps you honest. Everything we can do at times in a dying generation is to become honest. It is a form of prayer that does not ask anything in return, because everything is lost. And if you dare to, the others will mock you. It is though an honest prayer that opens the heart of a dying generation to the tenderness of God and His mercy. The tenderness of God. The God of the living.



## **About the hand of God.**

There is something about the touching of the hands. We see in the gospel that with the finger of His hand Jesus drives out the evil spirits from man. The hand of the daughter is held today by Jesus, as we see Him doing with Adam and Eve, in the icon of the resurrection. Death is sensitive to both human and divine touch. It cannot overcome them. While being alive though, man and God embrace themselves from a distance. God is blessing the man and the man receives everything with open hands. Being honest with each other, love does not need reassurance. Even from a distance when the eyes meet, the love is kindled, shared and multiplied.

## **The story on Wednesday**

is a short one with some honest humor. K is a poor honest man who does not like to talk about himself. I do know that he has one of the most caring hearts I've ever seen. In the past he told me bluntly, I mentioned this before, that he cannot come on Sunday to pray with us because the church is for rich people and he had to make money in order to come. That's what he thought. Now, he keeps telling me that he is not a religious man. He just tries to live a little bit of faith as he is trying to understand what faith is. I tried to explain that we are not religious either. Just like him, we try the faith to see what it is like and how we can have more. However, K was not convinced, so he told me a story about a conversation he had with some of his rich friends from South Korea who told him not to despair in Canada (he lives in subsidised housing with a broken foot) and to pray to Jesus and to the Mother of God. "I told them, he said, I've never seen them. How can I pray to them?" He was not mocking his friends. He was honest. From what I know about K, I believe that he is one of the people who live by the gospel in the most concrete way. I say this in all honesty, as I've been talking to him for a few years now. Everytime he came to pray with us, I felt his presence as a blessing.

On Wednesday, I did not give up so easily on the conversation with him. I asked him to come to the chapel. Just to tell me what he sees. I knew that being always honest he would tell me frankly. We entered together and we venerated the saint of the day. The morning light made the icons beautiful and welcoming. After a few minutes of silence I asked him: "What do you see? He took his time to answer and replied: "Forgiveness". We stayed a little bit more in that silent forgiveness and prayed together the hours with Br Luke. I thought to myself, that's everything we need to see.



## Open doors: You never know what you are going to get

It was early Sunday morning before the sun had risen. A few of us were inside the chapel preparing the services. As I was walking by the front window, I saw a tall figure in a dark hoodie shuffling up the steps of the church. Thinking that this could only be father Nicolaie at that hour, I went to the door, unlocked it, and flung it open. Instead of Father Nicolaie it was H. from the breakfast program. He asked if the church was open and if there was any food. After he got some stuff, he asked me if I "wanted to see something." He was wearing fingerless gloves over his long fingers. At my assent, he reached into the concealed front pocket of his hoodie and pulled out a sealed, clear, plastic jar. The jar was filled to the top with neon lights-- pink, yellow, green, blue--- all mysteriously aglow. I was stunned. He held it between us for a few minutes, smiling, then he plunged it again into the fold of his black hoodie and continued down the pre-dawn street.

br Luke



The silent honest forgiveness - in the chapel early in the morning