



From the 8TH SUNDAY OF LUKE 10:25-37

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, **leaving him half dead.**"

*"Thieves have risen up against me,...
They are the sons of fools and dishonoured men,
Whose name and fame was extinguished from the earth.
They rose up against me by the right hands of their offsprings;
And directed against me their paths of destruction.
My paths are ruined, for they stripped off my garment.
For I know death will destroy me,
For the earth is the house for every mortal*

From Job, chapter 30

How much life is left in a half head man?

We heard last week in the gospel how Jesus would tell the pharisees that they were empty tombs laid down so people would step on them. Maybe, having this inclination, both the priest and the Levite see only the half death of the person and they go by. Thinking everything was done. Everything looked fine, according to them.

Don't we hear that today, through their silence, that half dead means no life to care for? The same indifference, the comfort in being with yourself, the same triumphalism, declaring that the half dead has to be with the dead. Maybe it's just my opinion, but I don't really see people rushing or "divine-human" institutions having compassion on the "half measure" of life. On the contrary, wherever you look you see only quality and need for "perfection" according to an evidence based approach.



However, there is the silent prayer coming from the man who fell among the robbers. And for those who “appreciate” life, even if only half of it was left, a time taken to listen to this prayer would be well spent.

From this perspective, the parable amplifies for us how the essence of God’s command is fulfilled when the heart of a marginalised life is noticing the life who is perishing. “Poor helping the poor”. There is something mysterious happening. The silent prayer of the man reaches the heart of the Samaritan. The half dead man is praying to God and God let the Samaritan hear the pain in this voice.

That’s possible, because the Samaritan would have been praying to God. He can relate with the person in pain because probably he prayed to God like that before too. Being a Samaritan, he would know what it is to be at the margins. To bear a worthless life (according to the system). To have compassion though, in this moment, means that in a similar situation he did not fall into despair completely. But somehow, he remembered the mercy of God. Or the mercy of God was spoken to him without words. He knew, from within his own prayer and life that half dead means life restored in Christ. So when he approaches the half dead person there is no sentimentalism or disgust for the wounds but only compassion and a powerful strength in looking for life in the man. It looks like he knows what he is doing. There is this natural way of caring which cannot be taught by workshops or a PhD.

Another detail from the parable that brings us to believe that the prayer of the half dead man encounters the Samaritan, in the presence of Christ, is related to the length of time. The encounter took place in the time of compassion where nothing is rushed. Only prayer teaches you that. The Samaritan spent almost one day and one night caring for the person. And he promised to come back. It did not change his journey, it just gave it meaning.

***Would that I might lay hands of myself,
Or at least ask another, and he would do it for me.***

The prayer of the half dead man is a beautiful mirror in Job (see chapter 30 and not only). When the thieves leave you half dead you cannot distinguish who is who. Where is God in all this? Why am I still half alive? The temptation of giving up completely. Even for us today it is scary to see how old is the temptation of the assisted suicide. It is a moment of despair and abandonment where everything seems to be against you. Yourself included. Doubt takes over. It is not only the pain and rejection of others. But the doubt in God. The doubt in yourself. Doubting the reason for being alive. And yet you are.

We’ve seen this so many times at the mission that we sometimes abandon the thought of compassion. When life looks more half dead, the doubts start running wild like the grass fed chickens. And yet, we see in Job and in the parable, that only compassion

brings you back to your senses. People in despair in these moments are looking for a sign that their life is worth living. They know that in their heart, but the despair spares no energy in trying to silence the voice of kindness.

They look for people who have enough fear of God so they can distinguish in them the presence of life and talk to it. In order to uncover in their souls the unblemished desire to live. The unblemished certitude that their life is, even when stripped down of the surface, but beautiful, in its depth and mystery. Christ is preparing for this life a place in His kingdom and they need to hear and see that now.

***“Yet I wept over every man without strength
And groaned when I saw a man in distress. ” (Job 30:25)***

Distress is the place where people meet in prayer to learn something new about compassion and to love the gift of being alive. The distress of the poor, kept within one’s heart, becomes light taken from the basket (see the gospel on Friday) that breaks away the darkness of those who look for quality to justify it. This gives you faith not to despair when being stripped out and also it opens your heart to another life that finds itself cornered.

When a baby chick falls from the nest the bird cannot bring it back.



It needs help to rise back. So it is with the flower . It needs rain and light to grow. The earth cannot do all the work by itself when the flower dries because of lack of water.



It is not so with the Sun. It rises by itself from the depths of the sea.



The Levite and the priest - Whom did we pray to?

Looking at the prayer of the man in distress and at the one of the Samaritan one cannot help but pay attention to the one of the priest and the Levite as well. Whom were they talking to? At best, to themselves or to each other. It does not seem to be God anyway. This reminds me of a story from a Romanian monastery told by a visitor who was part of a discussion during dinner. This visitor is considered a saint by many in Romania nowadays. The discussion was about a monk who was told by the staretz to take care and visit an older monk who was sick. During dinner, the monk confessed he did not have time to visit the monk who was ill because he was too busy. He continued by saying that, even though he did not go, the monk who was ill was not alone, he was with God. The other monks from the table agreed with him. "Yes, he was with God. God was with him". The visitor concluded in his book: the ill monk was with God indeed, but where were the other monks? Because they seemed to not be in the same place as God. Many times at

the mission I felt this temptation. A way to take your thoughts away from the distress of those who are not comforted here, by reassuring yourself that Christ is present in their suffering. But let this truth not keep us away from where God is manifested. So by embracing each other in church - our own kind mainly - we don't leave aside God and the poor.



What if the Samaritan, coming down the road, does not see the half dead man? But he needs to search for him because he disappeared. Because of too many priests and Levites who would have gone by him too many times.

The suffering of the poor is often hijacked by the thieves who become doctors and operate quickly on the patient. With no time to talk to him. This appeared to me when I read a commentary of a poor man from Nicaragua on the gospel of today. He saw, at his time, the

communists as being the Samaritans. They were not religious, he thought. And they thought and fought for the poor. We know how that ended in some parts of the world. Today the same happens, because of too many priests and Levites going by, the capitalists teach us compassion and how to make it profitable at the same time. They harm the man, they take care of him. Everything is going to be fine. It also creates new characters that argue with each other how they could be doing that better. Sometimes the church is invited to be part of the discussion.... Just for more opinions on the table and more quarrel.

It is not the prayer that keeps you away from the people in distress. But the system. The man was unclean at the time, therefore could not be touched by the priest. Today he is not worth thinking about because that's the job of the social services. It is the prayer that takes you closer to those in need. It is the prayer that gives you the time and the heart. It is the prayer that keeps you honest, because through prayer we learned that we are all unworthy of care but yet granted mercy by God. The prayer teaches you everything you need to know in order not to be afraid to let your heart see the distress of others. It pours

more oil on your own distress too. At times we feel unworthy of such a gift we have within the community of the poor. We find ourselves unworthy of the gift of prayer and of the distress of the poor entering our doors. Many times we do not know how to receive it and make mistakes. At times we feel we have learned nothing and rush in taking care and end up being too busy. As the gift of Prayer is given to those who pray, the gift "to care" is given to those who are in need for care and love in their own life. Those who are at the margins who love because they lacked. Those who care because they were uncared for. And all this, just because when they were half dead themselves, they were seen by Christ within the light of His resurrection.



It happened many times at the mission when a man in distress coming for comfort ended up comforting us. Because we would not know how to do that well. Because we were farther away from God than they are. And they understand that. Sometimes they bless the mission too and the people working here. Especially the volunteers. They have a special love for them.