

10th Sunday of Luke 13:10-17



***“O house of Ephrata the holy city beautify
the house in which the divine one is born!”***

We hear these words sung in the semi obscurity of our chapel as we prepare to renew in us the birth of God that renews our nature, during the “COVID times”!

The year of COVID is marked by the suffering of many, especially of the poor, in the countries we never hear about. The year of COVID is marked by the sufferings of those who are vulnerable, that we see everyday in this church building. It is interesting that in the midst of this pandemic the government has found energy and time to pass more radical laws in favor of M.A.D.!

This is not the only thing we have witnessed and lived this year.

This year of “COVID”, the chapel and the services are attended by just a few people, yet I watched how, with so much care and love, the chapel has been adorned and beautified. It has been, for me, very moving watching people bring in flowers, sometimes in the dark hours of the early dawn. To adorn a space where almost no one will see. Sometimes it was several hours later, as the sun would flood the chapel that one could see the colours and the beauty of the flower arrangements!

I pondered, each time I saw our women do this, how this was on their part such a deep act of hope, a real statement of faith, a humble gesture of love. Now, I want to say to each of you, thank you for the flowers!

I witnessed the care and concern deacon Pawel has for the arrangements of the liturgical colours and how not only now, before Christmas, but throughout this whole COVID year the chapel

continued to be beautiful and adorned. Thank you deacon for the colours in the chapel and in our life!

I heard father Nicolaie give witness also to this beauty that is at the heart of all things in his sermons. Speaking to us about the very dark and difficult realities of people he met during the week and yet, so eager to celebrate with us the joy and beauty of each encounter. Thank you father!

These times of Covid more than any other time in the life of the mission are also a time for celebration, a time of generosity and a time of "super-abundance", to use a Denys the Areopagite term.

The faith, hope and love that are manifest every week in adorning the chapel with beautiful flowers and colours, the care in serving of Christ and the angelic voice of Presbytera, the celebrated shared joy of each encounter, the care in preparing the breakfast for each homeless person, all these are silent but Spirit-filled witness (martiria) of this new life that God desires so much that it be born in us. "...come let us go and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." Luke 2:15

Come let us open ourselves to this new "super-abundant" life, to this renewal of our nature grown old and sick, not by holding on to the "little we have" and waiting for "better times". No! We rather beautify the house now,

Celebrate, now! give all we have, now! To live, now, the offer given to us now, of a super-abundance of richness of taste, of colours, music and life, that we have never known before!

"But as many as received him, to them he gave them power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12-13

Fr Roberto



"And there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity." today's gospel

Resurrectional Evlogetaria.

Mode pl. 1.

Blessed are You, O Lord, teach me Your statutes.

Very early in the morning, the myrrh bearing women were hastening to Your tomb lamenting. "

Why do you mingle the ointments with your tears full of pity, O women disciples?"...

Prokeimenon. Grave Mode.

Psalm 115.15,12

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

Verse: What shall I render to the Lord for all that he has given me?

But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the sabbath (today's gospel)

Is this the most precious thing for God? The death of the saints? Or is it the joy of the angels when a sinner repents filling up all the heaven? So much so that the joy is poured down a little bit on earth? So that we would not completely dry out lacking any good things.

The sinner repents on earth, but the joy is coming down from heaven.

"Who will show unto us good things?"

The light of Thine countenance O Lord had been signed upon us:" (Ps 4)

The beauty is the feast garment of suffering that you put on when you are invited to the banquet. It is the sign of hope in perfect healing. The bridge from earth to heaven. As long as repentance is needed on earth, precious things are handed out to God in heaven. *"The heaven of heaven belongeth to the Lord, but the earth He gave unto the sons of men."* (Ps 13:25). In Christ's resurrection, the loss of man becomes precious to God. This is how much we know about the touching of human loss in God. One thing we know, God who cannot be comprehended is not indifferent, but He is touched by what is missing dearly from the imperfect life of man. It is not the suffering that makes perfect though. But the beauty that points, like a star on a gray sky, to the place where the tears are changing into joy. So love cannot be misled and misleading. It is this love that can cover and heal anything. Any imperfection, as long as it does not appear as grandeur.

As we see in the psalms, God is touched by the loss of the saints, sometimes like a spear, other times like blunt nails. The women were mingling spices with their tears when coming to the tomb. They were heartbroken. The loss was everything for them and they cling to it with no hope. Only with tears and spices. It is the only way one could live the gospel on earth, where the need for repentance did not perish and the loss is great again. Not to open your heart to the loss of life. Not to open your heart to what is missing makes us "undesirable".

In the gospel today we can have a glance at what hell is about. Not to be touched in any way by the suffering and loss of the human soul. *"Ask of Me and I will give Thee (from psalm 2)"*

A stage of the soul who does not ask for anything because it does not see and desire anything.

To be out of touch with the suffering of the bent over woman, who had been in pain for 18 years, losing the dignity of being human. Being looked down upon for 18 years. Humiliated and pushed aside because her fault was to live her life on a "sabbath".

How does the human soul turn its face in the opposite direction? How could one be so detached and lacking any form of compassion? One could say that somebody who never suffered would

No words needed



never understand suffering. Or others maybe suffered so much at an early age, they were harmed so much that they became desensitized: "they've seen too much".

It is hard to say how we end up there. Or maybe different roads take you to that cursed place. But beyond that, there is this reality of the human soul who cannot cry for another. Who is yet unpierced. Who does not know the love from the cross.

Like a world who lost the desire to live but has not learned to mourn yet. The sufficiency of your own sin that leaves no room for the suffering of others.

As we gather in church to give thanks together and praise the Lord, when praying for those who are suffering and for the gift of repentance as we pray for those who are lost, let us also pray for those who are untouched by the suffering of many so God

would teach them mourning. A prayer that asks for a radical change and for a precious gift. To pray for tears to shed not for our own sins, but for the pain of many. It is this prayer that changes the oppression of one's own soul. To shed tears, like Jesus when rejected by Jerusalem. Because we've been caught within these wiles of today and we need to learn together to see the wounds in our communal body and to cry for them. Even though having no hope of healing, but with tears for the loss suffered so we can foresee in it the hope of something new and fresh and real. .

This is the greatest sin of today's world: to be detached from its own suffering. It is detached from the suffering of many. Who would give us tears and be at rest?

Lack of repentance in the world asks for more beauty and piercing of the heart. At its very core there is not enough. We are at sleep. What moves to repentance is these two realities of life. Both will be perfected in heaven. The way they are now shows us the path of humility and invites the soul to come back to its senses.

No healing at all

We lost many things today and we keep losing. On the horizon there isn't great hope, and this has nothing to do with Covid. The virus just helped us see where we were and from where more pain might be coming. Just an invitation to care more for life, to protect it and to cherish it. The Pharisees or the religious authorities were not only unable to feel nothing for the poor woman, but they were exploiting and feeding themselves with her suffering. It is a system that understands well how to distort things in order to preserve its own evil influence. To keep the captivities

captive. It feeds on the suffering of others, thus creating its own comfort. On Friday, when talking about the Gospel of the day at the mission, the reflection slowly led to the captivity of those enchained by the "harm reduction theory".

The same day, early in the morning, the mission received an email from another institution asking us to develop a partnership with those who keep people captive. Joanna said bluntly that, in her opinion, those places do the work of the devil. I think she knows what she says. The system is keeping the "clients" in an eternal sabbath in order to ensure that these places continue to receive funding and support.

It teaches you how to cope and compromise with evil while becoming insensitive to your own suffering, as well as to the suffering of others. The evidence based approach is not used in this case. Since this approach became mainstream in dealing with addiction in Toronto and Canada in general, the numbers of those dying of an overdose are skyrocketing. And you can see this happening in the streets. But the belief is always that it could have been much worse if it was not for the system. Even though people die in their own apartments with no need of being more enabled.

It is also pretty ironic to listen to the system lamenting in the media that they are not making enough money and the profit cannot be shared equally between different levels of government. Everyday, you can read and listen to news about how the black market is stronger than ever and how the system did nothing but legalize the work of evil. All this, just like in the gospel, contributes collectively to the desensitization of many while killing the hope.

There is always a battle between those who think that people can change overnight through their own will and those who make the captivity eternal. In the history of the church these were seen as heresies. Today they argue more than ever, leaving no place to the silence of the church. The church does not speak so nothing can be used against it. This might be true, only that the movement of lack of compassion and desensitization is sneaking slowly but surely within our banquet halls as well.

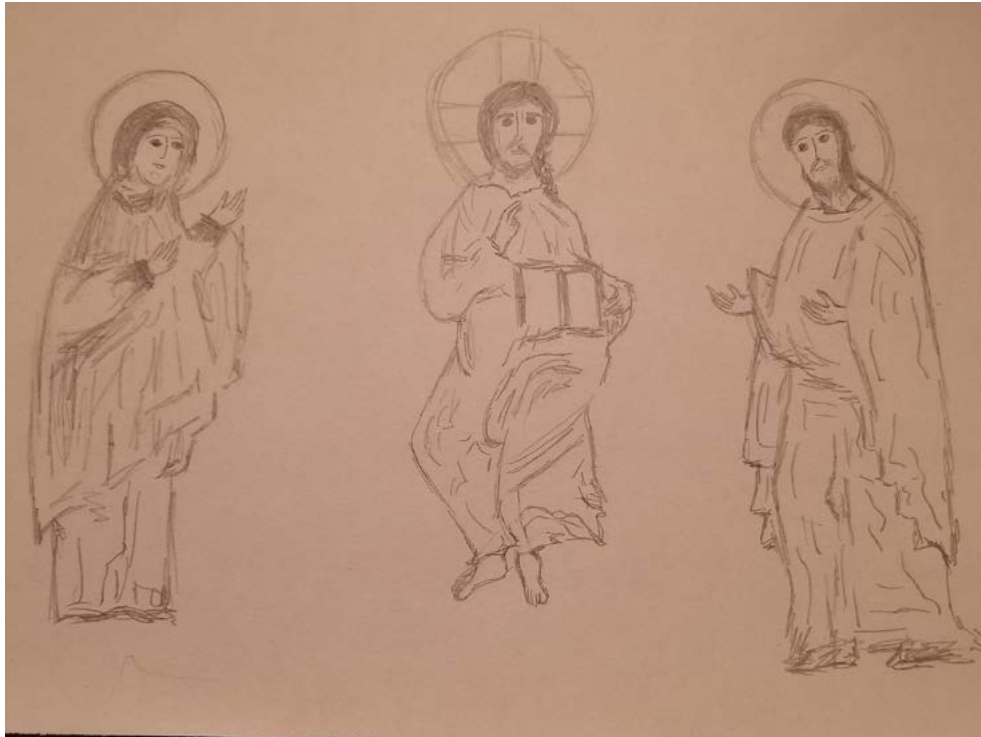
Modern sabbath

There is an interesting question coming up from today's gospel as well.

Taking the donkey to give it water would help with the piercing of a Pharisee's heart? Would that induced emotion help you in connecting with the bent woman? Or rather keep you more aside because of the lack of similarities?

It is the same in Toronto today, when one would religiously take the dog out for a walk every morning. Would that help connect you with the suffering of those who are dying unattended today, or it would rather satisfy your soul with the humble daily rate of emotion. Because your soul can only take so much at times? Does it decrease or increase your sensitivity? Or, as others would say, there is no connection between them. Because the world has been healed of idolatry many years ago.

We learned to be with each other by looking at Christ



In the gospel of the week there was a question about the authority of Jesus. Where was it coming from? Even though the question was not answered, the gospel revealed the reasoning of the religious leaders. The only time they would care about people was when they thought they might be stoned by them. You have to be careful how you dance on the wire.

However, the gospel revealed something else as well. The Pharisees were afraid to say anything wrong about John the Baptist, because they would have been stoned by people, but in the end they were not afraid to crucify God. They were afraid of men but they had no fear of God.

This speaks more about who God is and how He approaches us. The humility of Christ is so deep and honest that men feel they can act with no repercussions.

We see today in the gospel, as we see in the icon of the resurrection, that God raises us to come face to face with Him. It is His desire to take us to His place. We, the humans, either abuse or look for justification. We want to please or to be pleased. Either we would comply with Him as slaves who give up on their freedom for the comfort of a secure life or we would contradict and challenge Him through violence and control. Either we control or we want to be controlled. To tell or to be told.

God prefers neither. It is an invitation that comes through His humility to adopt His stature, slowly, in a perfect freedom. A soul that discovers goodness and follows Him because it is good.

The taste of life that never satisfies. It is within this reality that God invites us to step in. It is so hard for us because of the habits mentioned above. But it is the only gate .

In order to be able to look at each other we need to learn and to accept to learn to look Christ in the eyes. So we can behold each other, forgiving the ongoing movement of the world that pushes our souls to control or be controlled.



This fresco depicts Saint Nicholas tending to the ill. (Turgut Yeter/CBC)

St Nicholas is beloved by many because he fell in love with the suffering of people. Even CBC would recognize that today. He would not write or theologize but he left his heart unguarded to the suffering of many. His love for the poor is remembered today all over the earth because it was genuine. The distress of the world needs attention and care. Anyone who approaches it with an unguarded heart becomes a dear friend of him.