

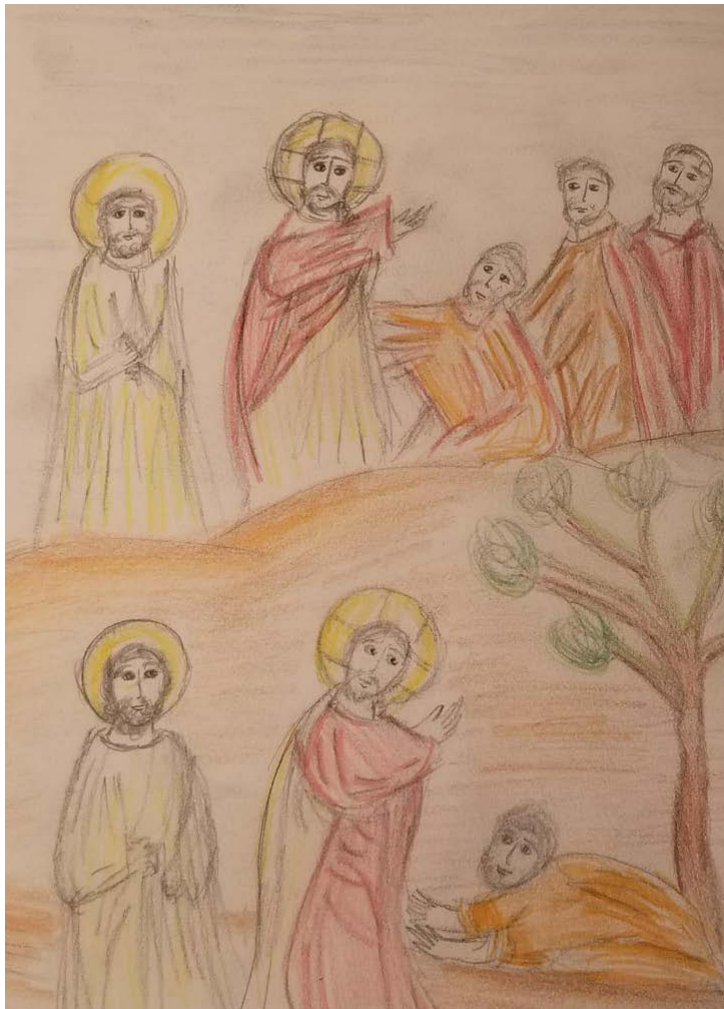
THE TEN LEPERS

From The Gospel According to Luke 17:12-19:

"At that time, as Jesus entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests..."

From Colossians 3:12-16

"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you must do."

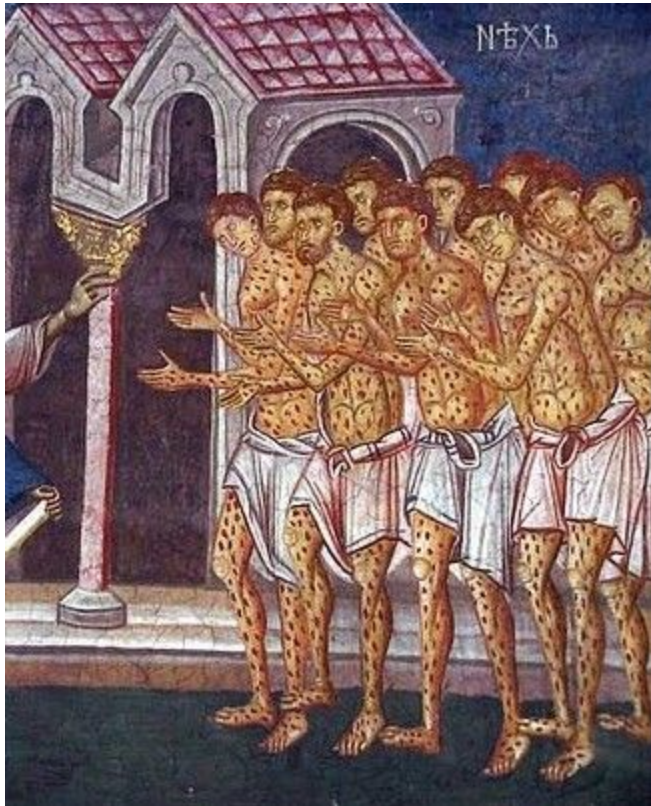


The crying voice of a suffering community is always touching the mercy of God. This truth is for us as sweet as the taste of water. One might say, the water has no taste... not if we taste it with our heart and not if the water is holy. There is so much sweetness in it. The water is always sweet, just that we have not cleansed our senses yet.

If the suffering voice is not heard, and the cry of pain is lost in the abyss, "the fool would say in his heart that there is no God". But this is who God is. His compassion has arms to embrace. If it is not for His mercy to answer then who else? Christ is present within the distress and suffering of people in a practical and real way. I remember one Sunday after Liturgy, before the pandemic, when we sat around the tables and asked people about the goodness of the Lord, when it was felt the most in their lives. The answer revealed moments of profound

vulnerability, of physical and emotional pain and distress. That's where the encounter was so real for them. If that happens on a personal level, how much more when the community is one made up of lepers, destitutes, people left to experience, through neglect, a living death - as somebody was saying about the life of the lepers secluded by the community outside the village, left to die within their own misery.

How much more though does the gathering of suffering and destitute people experience the presence of Christ among them?



The ten lepers are the living image of the suffering community. A living image who is listening to the words of St Paul. It looks almost like the church today. It seems St. Paul is talking to them when he says to the Colossians, "you are the elect of God, holy and beloved". You are asked to put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering bearing with one another, and forgiving one another. The words do not speak to a suffering that is perishing unnoticed within the abyss. But to a communal suffering that is touching deep on the love of God.

How could that happen and why do we have to wait for the kingdom to rejoice with those who are abandoned today? We don't need to. God doesn't.

For those witnessing today to the suffering of a community condemned to seclusion, God allows them to taste from that

sweetness of His presence too. You do not need to share in their suffering, God is pleased with your own, but by being present you can rejoice with those who cry and be glad with those who mourn.

Last Saturday at the mission it felt like a banquet with privileges for the poor, that others can only dream of now. Nothing special, everything was like before. A small gathering of people, keeping the distance between them, were being served really good food, while listening to the piano music played by Randy. It was a touching sight. I was thinking, this might be the only place in Toronto that was granted this freedom. And all this happened because even the government heard the distress of the hungry and the distress of the poor. To be part of that became an essential aspect of our life.

Debased and a living death.

Who are the other voices that speak to the poor in distress? If there is no witness of the presence of Christ among them, the community of the destitutes is vulnerable to the voices of those who condemn it. Those who see in their life a living death. We know where they are coming from...

The thing is, if the suffering community is made to believe that life is not worth living when it is not granted social value, that opens a black hole for the whole community at large to follow in. If the voices have success in debasing their life, then the life of many would follow the same path. For, to be honest, who has a perfect life? When the suffering community is left over to death, then no good would be good enough in the larger community and no life would be worth living among the privileged. That would be the understanding among many.

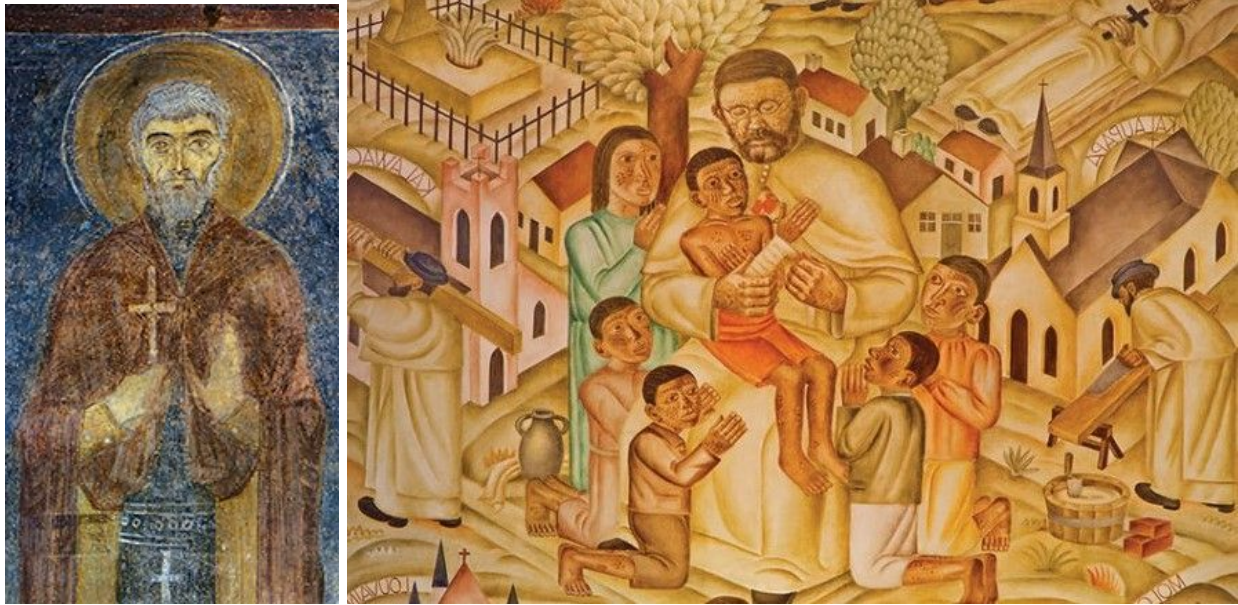
Is it not what we see today, when the distress is growing because the freedoms are oppressed? When life does not resemble the old, we have a hard time accommodating that. It is not like we are in touch with the suffering of those who suffer the most today and we cry with them when they cry and have hope with them when they find hope. It is a mourning that leads to despair because life does not look the same as we imagined. And this reality becomes oppressive within the communal body getting to new heights now.

One of these days, S. was looking for George at the mission again. That's the first question that he asks me when I see him. "Where is George?" They have their own relationship. S. is a homeless person who's been living on the street for a long time. He comes to us especially to warm up and to look for a coffee and for George. He really trusts him. At times he gets a pair of boots from us. In the past, he wanted to pay for them, and he did. Or he would sometimes trade his old pair for a better one. Among other things, he makes donations to the church, from the little he has. And this happens regularly. This week I saw him more concerned. He asked me if I knew what "debased" meant, because that's what is happening to the people on the streets these days. This is the general mood, the invisible spiritual illness that makes many victims. He said to me, that when you go out there now, you are already lost in your own system of values, with not too much self esteem left. In this vulnerable stage that people experience now, this illness debases you completely. It takes away any bit of meaning that you might have left in you. He told me that this is vicious. It is more powerful than ever. He tells me because I am a pastor, he says. That's the only reason he talks to me. Because, being a pastor, I need to know what spiritual illness is searching the hearts of people now.

I thought more about his sayings and I asked people around and others confirmed, using different words to describe the same spiritual fog that powerfully chokes people's lives. The suffering community in distress becomes a church when the presence of Christ is witnessed among them. The apostles were with Jesus when He healed the lepers. The apostles spread the word of God and built His church because they knew and witnessed the presence of Christ among those who suffer. Any church is built on this reality. When the church forgets to witness Christ among those who lack, their distress will take over those who are filled.

That's what happened with the lepers in the past, as it happens with the destitutes today. They were totally marginalized, being impure in the eyes of many. With the lepers, the old law allowed the priests to check on them to see if there was any sign of healing. We should not check on

people today in the same way. God might have made that happen in the past in order for the lepers not to be totally forgotten. The church was not yet ready.



St. Zoticos and St. Damian sharing in the same love

The church though is called not to check on them but to make them the honored guest at the banquet of God. When that happens, no heart of man remains untouched, but gives hope to all. Because this is a living sign that no life is lived unto death, but rather no illness can harm the love and the joy of Christ when we gather together. I remembered how our souls were filled with joy when we talked with people about St. Zoticos and his community of the abandoned lepers, about St. Damian and his life on the island, when we watched the movie at the camp with the children, when we listened to the confession of St. Francis about how the lepers gave the right measure of his soul. Just because no life is justified by our well being, but in Christ. And not by the way we dream or desire in a wrong way.

You know the evil times always look to sacrifice the many by starting with the most vulnerable ones. That is how wars happen and violence slaughters the innocent. This time, I am afraid that all this violence is internalized within the communal body. And this really is attacking from within ourselves. We don't see the enemy and this is making it hard to fight. And it looks like we are losing, because the oppression is growing. We cannot see the enemy because it is our familiar friend. However, we know the allies. And these are those who were pushed to believe that they experience a living death. They are ready for us to witness the presence of Christ among them. If we do start to see hope in them and stay aside, we'll never understand what really is harming life today.

This is the place where God is dwelling. Let us make ourselves a hut close to them. So we can be ready when He comes again. The people from the center need to be connected to the news from the margins in order to hear about the hope that is real when a life is viciously attacked by lies

that try to make it look unworthy. It is true that when they do connect, the story does not end well all the time. But it is not for us to judge:



Saint Zoticus was tied to wild mules, which dragged the saint over the stones. His whole body was lacerated, and the saint gave up his soul to God. A stream of pure water sprang forth at the place of his death, from which many received healing. (See the whole story on the homepage of St. Zoticos mission in Scarborough or ask and see how you could help).

From Friday's gospel Gospel According to Luke 12:32-40

The Lord said, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old,...and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks....

I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at a table, and he will come and serve them.

On Friday we were again given the joy to listen to Laura. reflecting on the gospel. I had to recognize that I personally missed her doing that. Most of us were thinking of what really stops us from keeping watch and how we might miss Christ when He comes because of our many riches. We need to empty ourselves, now... Laura reminded us instead of St. Anthony, whose feast we celebrate today, who exemplified that keeping one word of the Gospel opens to you the whole scripture, as father says. St Anthony heard in church how he should sell everything and give it to the poor and follow Christ, and he did.

Laura started with her own life. She says that she does not have money and things to sell because she is poor. But then, because she is poor, she receives so many gifts that her own house is filled with goods. And then, when she hears the knock on her door she opens and asks the guest in. And she has so much that she can share with anyone in need.

At times we forget the simplicity of the gospel and the Truth of it. We forget that there are people today who live it fully. One thing to keep from the gospel would open all the gospel to us and prepare us for the second coming of Christ. Within the community we are now trying to see which is that one thing... Please do not be shy in sharing your thoughts with us. We need to listen to each other.

Laura also said other things. One thing that I remembered is that God is probably not pleased with all the churches being closed today. And she was wondering what He was going to do when He came....

Antiphon II.

Unless the Lord builds the house of the soul, in vain do we labor; for without Him no action or word is accomplished.

As of the fruit of the womb, the Saints being moved by the Spirit, because of their adoption, produce His fatherly dogmas.

In the Holy Spirit does everything have its being; for He is God before all, and universal lordship, unapproachable light, and the life of all things.

From today's gospel

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus's feet, giving him thanks.



It was moving to listen on Friday morning at Orthros the story read by father of the encounter between St. Paul of Thebes and St. Anthony. Two people who have the experience of being alone with God, face to face, once met in order to witness this to each other, before St. Paul departed to the Lord. St. Anthony became sad because he had just met his friend and now he had to learn to let him go. But this was for the sake of others, St. Paul said. The ones that Anthony was taking care of: the people. The friendship of those who are satisfied with God alone has to learn to lose everything they love because in Christ's resurrection, we will all reconcile. Father Roberto will speak more on Tuesday about being alone with God who is alone.

In the gospel we see today that this does not happen through design. The leper who came back had to give up on those with whom he shared in suffering, those with whom he prayed to God, those with whom he shared in the joy of being made well. He did that because he stayed in the goodness shown to him. The healing opened a path. To see where goodness is coming from. To stay in that goodness brought the foreigner leper alone, face to face with God. Gratitude is indeed the first step on this road. Even in a community of destitutes, there are not many who look for the place of goodness. The thing is, that being alone with God is really seeing this eternal love for all of us. And you dwell there as a healed leper because nobody else followed. Every generation has this experience, of being face to face with God, through the elect, to witness to each other the love of the Father for man.

St. Paul and St. Anthony, through their encounter, became a witness to that. Moses was the one who saw the face of God, that's why he cared so much for the people.

When her sister Miriam was struck with leprosy, speaking against Moses, he interceded for her to be made well (See Num10-15). Even though she spoke against him and undermined his authority.

But the authority is not for men to give or to take. It is from God, who chooses the elect in every generation to see His face, so that these may pray and intercede for those who don't see and gossip and sin. Leprosy was associated with sin in the old law. Or the other way around. Sin was perceived and treated as leprosy. Sin had to be drawn out of the community and the sinful had to be destroyed. The elect knows the forgiveness of God because they see His face. His unblemished love for all. And they take time and patience to rest there in order to embrace with Christ those who are ungrateful and miss on the essential. Being in solitude with God, to embrace us all.



Starting this Sunday we are asking everybody to tell us the names of the sick people they know so that we can pray for them during the Liturgy. We have their names in the bulletin so we can also keep them in our prayer during the week as well. We become in this way like a community of the destitutes who do not pray to God only for themselves, but rather for others. Please send the names to Miroslava so we can have them gathered in the bulletin and ready for Sunday Liturgy.

Prayer request from Good Neighbours from Mary Padma

Seena Collins husband who has cancer

Legan,Raj, Sri homeless Tamil men

Robert and his wife refugees from Colombia

From St John's:

Colin, Michael, Peter, Henry, George, Kelly, Michael,