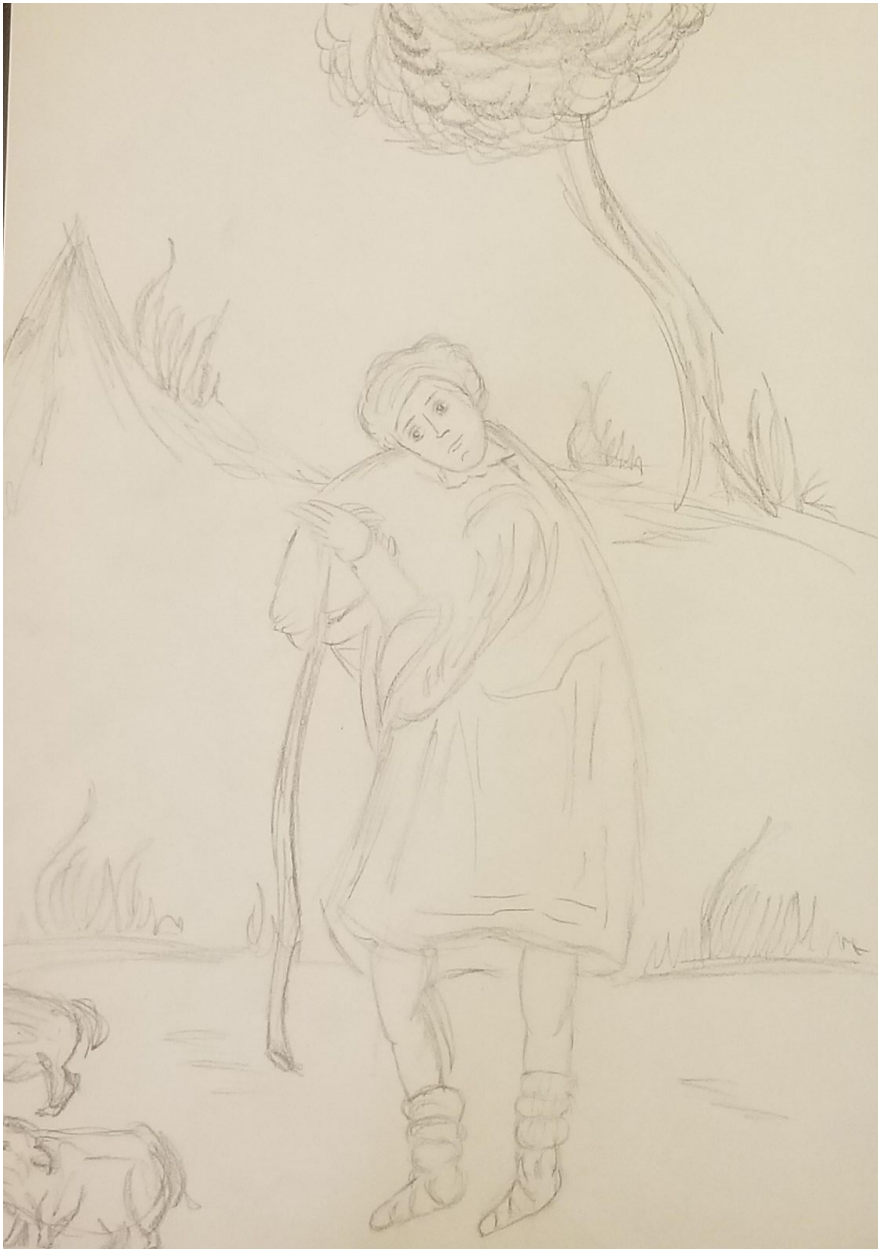


Sunday of the Prodigal Son

From the Gospel According to Luke 15:11-32

...And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine..."



"...and noone gave him anything"

Bill C-7, extends euthanasia to people with mental disabilities in Canada; The prodigal Son could be one of the beneficiaries ?

It took me a long time to realise that when relating to people with mental disabilities, it is not the mind or the brain that makes the narrative of the interaction, but their heart. Their heart is the same as it is for all of us, only more giving than receiving in their case. Most of the time.

Bill C-7 is about to euthanize the prodigal son today with no reaction from the church. And here I am not talking about emails and statements that nobody reads. The prodigal son parable, with whom we all identify, gives hope and warmth to any lost soul in need for love. It takes away the bitter taste of sin by bringing you back to your senses, because somehow, within your heart, the love of the father is reminded. And you know that it will never perish. It is there for you in every moment of your life. That's what really melts despair within the soul, the truth that we know of being loved by the Beloved, who takes away the sins of the world. And you know that you are a part of it, part of this broken world. And this is reassuring because you are not going to be left aside. You do not need to doubt that you do not belong because you are still alive (Daniel at the mission).

"...for this your brother was dead, and is alive;"

When you are dead, you know that His love and your desire for life encounters the mercy of the father. The Bill C-7,(extends the assisted suicide in Canada to people with disabilities), does quite the opposite. You are alive, so good enough for dying, if your life is not perfect enough, you can make it "perfect" by putting an end to it. So, the love of the Father will never again trouble your soul.

I am afraid it does not work like that. Love is everlasting and we will eternally be tormented by it if we do not receive it within the heart.

I do not know how we are growing so out of touch within communities where the word of the gospel is listened to. Maybe because we always see repentance as something individualistic, or something that never happens because we go on sinning. Or because no famine came yet to our land. Or maybe rather because we never really went all the way with our sin. We got stuck in the middle, with the temptation of going forward and with the fear of coming back. Suspended in space, wasting all the time with the noise of the clock ticking in our ears.

However, we always say and know, through the Orthodox tradition, if not out of our own lives, that sin is actually an illness. We are ill, through sin, in mind and in body, that's why we speak so much about a need of healing. We know this from within our souls. We know this from the confession of all the people. When you depart from the love of the Father or when the oldest brother tries to push you away, it is not like we go and come back the same. To waste goodness means to open up to pain and suffering and to different types of illnesses that affect your body and soul.

"Because I have kept silence, my bones waxed old through my crying all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy on me. I was turned into lowliness while the thorn was fastened in me. My sin I have acknowledged, and my iniquity I have not hid. I said, "I will confess against myself my sin unto the Lord." (Psalm 31 is read at the service of Baptism.)

In our communal lived experience at the mission we see so many people who fit the description of the prodigal son. Left totally alone, eating on the stairs, eating what is left over from others and with a deep pain in their heart, trying to remember the love of the Father. And when they do, they

realise there are no places to come back where they would be treated as human beings, if they choose to behave. Many of these people do suffer from different forms of mental illness, on top of all kinds of other illnesses. According to Bill C-7 proposal these people would now qualify for euthanasia .

If any prodigal son, departing from his home, makes himself more and more sick through his actions, he has a chance to get euthanized because this will legally erase the pain of not partaking in the love of others. I've seen so many people at the mission who ended up on the street for different reasons only to find themselves in a hopeless situation because of the way they deteriorated mentally, physically and psychologically. If you wonder too much outside it is not fun.

On Friday I talked to S a little bit. She was starting to yell within the room again and I had to communicate with her because she was scaring other mentally fragile young people who are working on the table. I was surprised to see how much she connected. It seemed like she was waiting for somebody to relate with her in a normal way, while she was behaving so hectically. We remembered about the first day when she came at the mission, 4 or 5 years ago when she found herself homeless because she had lost her office job. I asked her where she was going when she left the mission in the afternoon. She told me that wherever she went she found some bad side of the city. She tried both East and West, but there are bad parts everywhere, she said, and she could not settle there. When she spoke about bad things, she meant evil. We talked more about her family back in England, about London and other parts she travelled. She remembered one of her aunts who was good and kind with her and she started to cry because she realised she was dead. It was like a cry she had been longing for in a long time.

S will easily qualify for euthanasia. Especially that most of the time she yells on the street, without any particular target. If you become a voice arguing with her, there could be chances to convince her to sign for it. If you treat her on the surface and try to do her "good", it actually becomes evil in itself.

The prodigal son among the pigs is in the most vulnerable situation of his life. The love of the Father will always touch his soul, but if he has no place to return to, I cannot see how much more resistance he can show when the euthanasia becomes legal for people with disabilities.

"Before I thought it was a sin to commit suicide. I am not very faithful but that's as much as I knew and understood and this kept me alive. Now they told me that it is legal to do it. I have the right. I understand from this that I am a coward if I don't do it. At least this is what I could do." To "complete" his life, to redeem it. (words of a homeless person with an addiction and mental illness, who speaks Latin, Hebrew, German and English, spoken a few years ago, while trying to get away from addictions that destroyed his marriage and sent him on the streets).

Father spoke on Tuesday about the heart as being the place of sin. That's where it starts, that's where it ends. Not around the corner, not on the outside of yourself but from within our most intimate being. It is in the heart. That is why, healthy or sick, good or bad, the heart needs to be searched and pondered upon and prayed upon. That's why people with mental illness can love or

say no to love, like all of us, who diagnose ourselves as “being normal”. In the gospel today we see that the prodigal son had everything good, as in paradise, but he decided to leave. His sin is coming out of nowhere, being surrounded by goodness. By knowing love he chooses to turn it away. He remembered the love of the Father because he knew his father from home. And he had no hesitation to return. We say, and rightly so, that the church is the heart of the world, but how come, when the world goes astray we blame it (the world) for everything today? We blame the prodigal for everything bad that happens, being detached from his suffering. Even if the world is coming back to its sense, where is it going to return if the church does not search its heart but acts rather like the older brother, who cuts himself from the rest because of his own righteousness? Or like the



servant whom Christ asked to pray and watch and be attentive to welcome Him when He returns, but he keeps the door closed. Repentance happens only within the heart, because the heart knows and treasures the love of the Father. But if the heart stays closed...Today we see no reaction (and the reaction is not about writing emails to the politicians) in opening the gates to those who came back to their senses and returned but found themselves locked outside because of the way they looked like and because they did not fit the description. We might think that the church is the place of those who returned and, after being healed, prayed for the salvation of all. Those who are outside are the sick ones who refuse to come. Fair enough. Only that the number of those who are inside is getting lower and lower. I would be terrified to know how easily a

person today gets a diagnosis of a mental illness. This thought should frighten all of us. Because today they give you the right to ask for it, but tomorrow they could decide for all of us. By following this logic, we find out today that we have the right to ask for death, for all of us are sinful and therefore we are sick. By having the right to death we choose to live and watch and pray for the sick and the suffering and the oppressed, so that they may find the door open when they come back from this culture of death, looking for a place where they will be treated like humans and embraced by a repenting heart.

"My sin I have acknowledged, and my iniquity I have not hid. I said, "I will confess against myself my sin unto the Lord." And You forgave the ungodliness of my heart. For this shall everyone who is holy pray to You in a seasonable time..." (Ps 31)

We have been planning for a while to have a special time at the mission dedicated to people with disabilities. We had everything planned and prepared but we had to put everything on hold because of the pandemic and the lack of space. However, this week it looked like it was happening already. All this week there was a lot of energy within the room and a few things happened. People were working, preparing food for the day or for the next day, doing jobs for the bakery, cleaning the chapel, playing the piano or the guitar, teaching each other, fixing photos and painting. Or giving each other support. It was moving to see all this community work in action, being organized so well by Sister Penka, Br Luke and George. More than that, people also searched for prayer time. On Wednesday, N came to have a memorial for his father, who died this week. He came to pray with us so he would not go through this alone. The funeral was taking place the same day. He did not attend it because he said he had an agreement with his brother that he was to take care of his father while he was alive and his brother would deal with the funeral arrangements. And N did take good care of his father. He would visit him every week, do cleaning chores and shopping for him. I would better not say how many people attended our prayer time with N. We probably never had so many people on a Wednesday for the prayer before lunch. Nobody knew about the memorial. They were all there for the 6th Hour. We also read the gospel and we commented on it. We served food and offered hospitality, praying and offering a warm presence to those who came through the doors looking for peace.

We had many difficult times at the mission over the years. We dare say good things about today because we don't want to hide the light under a basket. But even more than that, a thought came to me on Saturday realising that maybe 90 percent of us had, in a way or another, a diagnosis. I am talking about the people I know. Some diagnoses are pretty severe, like PTSD, schizophrenia, clinical depression, clinical anxiety and so on. One person was just discharged a couple of weeks ago from the hospital for the same reason.

The whole scene is even more touching and hope giving when we remember that people who made the joy appear in the church this week come here from a place of loneliness, abandonment, and illnesses of different types. I cannot even imagine where all of us would be if the doors of the church had not been open at St John's for almost 35 years, by people who remembered the love of the Father and kept their heart open for those who looked for some compassion. The joy we

felt during the week got mingled with gratitude on Saturday so we remember, keep watch and pray with open doors.

Fioretti - br Luke

It's Sunday morning and the tomb is already full of life. Two men are sleeping in the stairwell, and I know who they are. We celebrate the liturgy together. While people are still cleaning the altar a man comes to the door and knocks and then walks off. I'd never seen him before in my life. Then there is a pouding. Another man is at the door. I partly recognize him from breakfast program during the week: "I'm going to kill the bitch!" he exclaims bounding up the steps. He shakes the door trying to open it. Unsuccessful, he turns his back to the door, holds the railing and pounds it with both feet. The entire building shakes with his rage. Giving up, he runs down the steps and takes a swing at a passing female jogger who continues running in terror. "I'm going to hit the first woman that talks to me," he exclaims! What had brought him to the church, I wonder, on this warm Sunday afternoon.

Please pray for:

Sick:

Cassandra's grand mother - Helen

Two children taking treatment at sick kids and their mother Levelin.

crisent

ann brown

elizabeth

sifie

allen

Leon

Mythili

Navpreet; Manpreet; Jamie; Sue; Reishma;Anne; Kevin;Bob; Nazia; Barb;

Angie;Shaibi;Marilyn;Jean;Katie;Janine;Karen;Flora;Patricia;Katrina;Judy;Bob

Romana, Colin, Michael, Peter, Henry, Joanna, George, Kelly;Tom; Candice, Camelia, Romana,

Ricky and his family from back home for the hope of reuniting

Madison and her brother Aaron

For health and salvation

the family of

Kenide

Sathiya

Sena

Vinothiny

Yvienne

Abdul

Sakanthalathevy

Jumke

Naimi

Anish

all have asked information on the Orthodox church or a priest visit

JOSHUA DANIEL

REALLY HEARTFELT REQUEST FOR PRAYER AS HE IS STRUGGLING TO KEEP ON A GOOD PATH

Maria Lolita Soliman Torres

for health and salvation

Jonathan

Richard

Richard

Mary

Elizabeth

Michael

Rejoice

Bill

Robert

Alan

Joanne

The staff and residents, with families, of the Caressant Care Mclaughlin LTC home: 30 residents and staff who have tested positive for Covid-19.

Navpreet; Manpreet; Jamie; Sue; Reishma;Anne; Kevin;Bob; Nazia; Barb; Angie;Shaibi;Marilyn;Jean;Katie;Janine;Karen;Flora;Patricia;Katrina;Judy;Bob

From St John's

deacesed (cvid)

Maria

PLEASE DO NOT FORGET:

To reflect and write the questions below. This is an important project for our community and we want to know what you think about it. Please let me know if you need more details.

1) What do you see around you, in your family, at work, in the world? How are people feeling? What things remained the same and what changed?

Remember, I want to hear what you see and not what the media or the internet sees.

2) What is your understanding of what is going on in the world and in the church today? What meaning do you give to what you see, hear and observe?

3) What do you think is needed? What should the church be in the post Covid world?
Please take time to reflect during these days of lockdown, your words and reflections will make an important contribution to our community life and help us be prepared for the future.

St. Silouan Chapel, February 28th, 2021

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