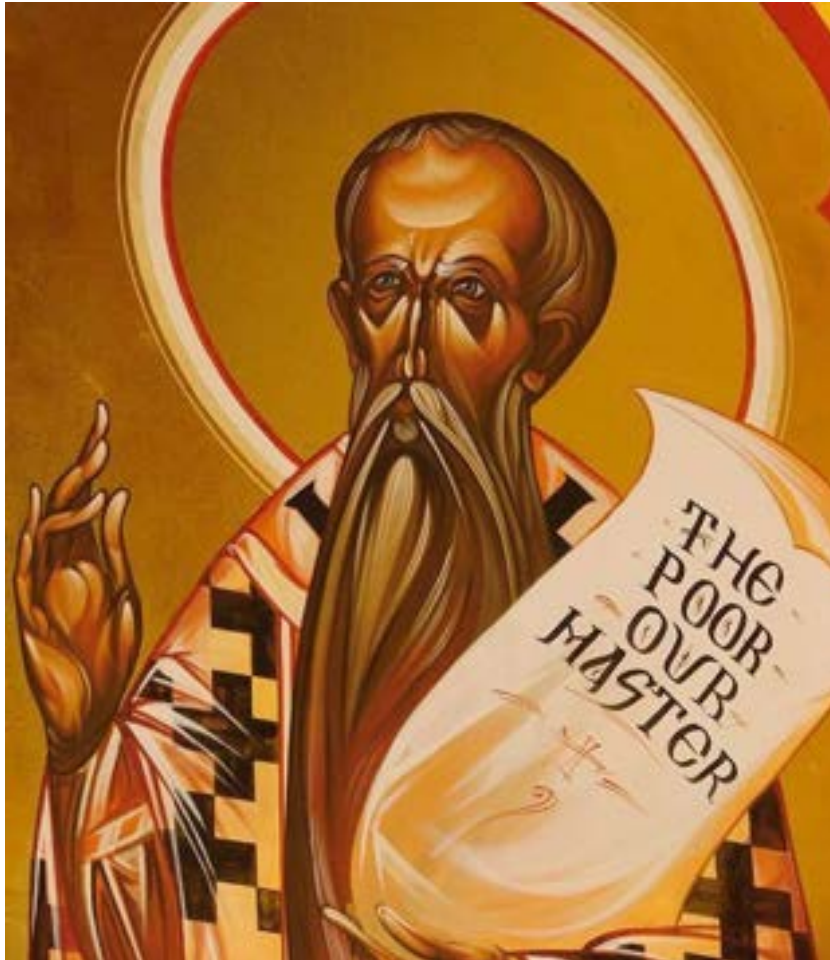




A long journey home



The hope of a broken community:

"God loves the poor, consequently, He loves those who love the poor; for, when we truly love someone, we have an affection for his friends and for his servants. Now, the Little Company of the Mission strives to devote itself ardently to serve persons who are poor, the well-beloved of God; in this way, we have good reason to hope that, for love of them, God will love us." –St. Vincent de Paul (XI:349)

St. John The Compassionate Mission began as a mission-parish (hence the name 'mission') of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in 1986.

The mission-parish was founded and placed under the protection of St. John The Almsgiver, later rendered as The Compassionate, as suggested by an Athonite Monk, a "refugee" from Simonos Petras Monastery. "Those whom you call poor and beggars, these are my masters and teachers, for they alone can help us and bestow upon us the kingdom of God."

As early as 1990, we began a search to have the relics of our Saint. He has been the inspiration and model for our community since the beginning and we felt the desire to have a part

of him with us in this way. (What impressed us was the story that he sold himself to ransom a runaway slave.)

There were many attempts to find a relic. We tried through our local Ukrainian Catholic bishop, Isidore of blessed memory, but he was in the middle of a Vatican war. We turned to the Apostolic Nunzio in Ottawa. We turned to the Metropolitan in Winnipeg, Bezdell also of blessed memory who promised to help but also got entangled in the "war". We turned to then Cardinal Ambrozic of Toronto, who also said we should talk to our bishop, everyone seemed only to play ping pong with our request. Mind you, they all answered our letters and tried to be helpful; it was a different climate than now, where no one ever seems to answer emails! When the Mission entered the Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Nicholas of blessed memory, also tried to help us, writing letters of support to different hierarchs. In the meantime, we had an icon of St. John painted by Tatiana, a Russian iconographer now living in Moscow. I digress here. This icon started to ooze a white oil during the week of the feast of St. John in 2020. It has since stopped. It resembled the Manna of St. Nicolas, a white watery substance that oozes from his bones to this day.

Getting back to the story. We had originally learned that part of the body of our Saint is in Bratislava. Members of St. Demetrius Ukrainian Catholic Church had kindly brought back for us a cloth that had touched his relics. We knew that chances of receiving an actual relic from there were slim, as the church and all that it contains is part of the Slovakia national patronage. After a long hiatus, we turned to Venezia.

Through a family member, we had learned that there was a significant relic of the Saint's incorrupt body in Venice, at the actual parish church they attended.

Thus began a long, drawn-out process of asking for a relic from Venice. Then one day, around St. John's feast day, when all hope seemed to be lost, we received a note that it was granted us to have this relic. The year was 2010. When we tried to get the relic, there were always reasons why we had to wait. As the years passed by, we gave up on this path.

Then Francis became pope. We learned he was generous with relics and that he really cared about the poor. This was an opportunity to turn to him for help.

We wrote to him. Six months later, he answered. He referred us to the Vatican office dealing with this issue. What followed were years of correspondence between us and the pope, each time being referred to a different office, each secretary in turn responding: "we don't have this relic."

In 2019, Father Michael, a local Jesuit who knew the Mission since day one, was suddenly made Cardinal. So we wrote to him asking him to give the pope a hand-written letter explaining why we wanted this relic. A year ago, on March 25, 2020, we received the response. Francis had granted us a relic of St. John! In the meantime, COVID lockdown happened in Italy. Relics could not be shipped, and no one could go and pick them up. So a special permission was given for the relic to be sent to us by special courier service directly from the Vatican.

The story does not end here. We receive the relic. But it is not the relic of our saint. It is the relic of St. John The Apostle!

We tried to bring the issue up with the Cardinal and others but they said, "Hey you got a pretty good relic! Why complain?" Yes, we are happy to have St. John the Apostle.

As for St. John the Merciful, things seemed to have come to a halt. In the meantime, his icon started to ooze Manna...

We returned to the Patriarchate of Venezia, presented to the patriarchate all our papers and requested again the relic. The answers from all the different departments was the same: "Things have changed in 21 years, and besides we are in lockdown....sorry....can't help you "

So we wrote to the Patriarch Francesco directly, explaining the whole story. To our surprise, we received an official release of the relic within a month. The same family member living in Venice went and picked it up a day before the new lockdown, and now it is in his care. He had to sign a letter promising that it would not be shipped by mail, but only given over by hand.

So now we await the relic for the day when St. John the Almsgiver will come home at last to his Mission. We are in the process of purchasing a reliquary from St Elizabeth of Moscow Convent in Minsk, Russia, and would like to offer to anyone interested the opportunity to contribute to its cost.

A special note of gratitude goes to Deacon Pawel, who always encouraged and supported this journey.

Fr. Roberto

From today's gospel - Mark 2:1-12

*"And they came, bringing to him a **paralytic carried by four men**. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, **"My son, your sins are forgiven."***

When we say at the mission that the community practices the "asceticism of the open doors" it means that you never know who is going to come in through those doors during the day. And you have to take it the way it is and see how you are going to welcome and relate with the person or with the situation. This can put various pressures on you in many ways because people are unique, having different gifts, different hearts, different needs and different moods, to put it nicely. And we have different triggers and "a shorter attention span than a fish leaving alone in a tank" (a child), to put it nicely again. We could, for instance, welcome a fragile young person who looks for prayer and community in the most innocent way and after that, or at the same time, have to relate with people requiring special attention because of the violence and deceit that they bring with them. It is the church and they come to church, aware or unaware, searching for goodness, even when they are not able to give it too much to others. Or especially then. Nevertheless, we don't expect to have naked people coming in through our doors, which is exactly what happened this past Thursday. A man came in wearing only his underwear. The community reacted naturally to

this unexpected event, because we expect the unexpected to happen to us. That was helpful in finding the right spot and the proper support for him at that time. The whole situation in itself revealed to us a few things about the gospel of the day and the gospel of our time.



The paralytic in today's gospel was carried by four people and let down at Jesus' feet through the roof. Our guest came alone in the cold morning, wearing no clothes and no shoes (he was carrying some clothes in his arms, along with a coffee cup with some money in it). The paralytic was lying in a bed. The naked person walked all the way, but when he tried to sit down on the toilet, he could not talk or move his arms or his feet. We had to lift his legs and his arms in order to help him get dressed. We do not know about the mental state of the paralytic in the gospel, but our guest was visibly affected by a mental illness as well. We know that in the

gospel, the sins of the paralytic were forgiven by Jesus. As for our guest, we don't know if he had sinned or not because there was no one to ask for the mercy of God on his behalf. The only similarity was that, just like the paralytic, our guest was able to stand up to walk back to where he had come from (to our great shock and surprise), after he tried to eat without success a bowl of cereal. Another difference is that, before leaving, our guest left money with us, as a donation for the church. He gave us \$20 from his coffee cup, which he had probably got from panhandling. "Is this for the church?, I asked". " Yes, for the church", he replied with difficulty. The paralytic and our guest were both in need of healing and made their entrance in an unorthodox way - one through the roof carried by four, the other one naked and alone, coming through the open doors. The paralytic left being healed and forgiven. Our guest was still in need of healing when he left, as for his heart, only God could watch there because there was nobody else around him (Kinks 16:7). Unorthodox appearances ask for an orthodox approach when it comes to forgiveness and healing. Only that today orthodoxy is written and read in books and preached here and there without a praxis that challenges at least - if not able to change - the fabric of our modern cities. We rather mingle with it, with a complicity that leaves the paralytic alone to his own devices. The thing is that the paralytic is refusing to be consoled in his own misery but he comes our way. He is reaching out to us so God can forgive us for mingling with the alienation of a modern city. He is

the hope. It does not matter if he sinned or not because he comes to bring us forgiveness. He shows his faith to Christ so we might be forgiven. He is walking towards us for the sake of the church so God can see that. It is painful to watch, but everything that is real and truthful today is painful to watch because of the pain that it brings with it. And because we recognize our own complicity with the system.

The thing with our guest is that we recognized him and we remembered having seen him a few years ago. He used to come on Wednesdays for dinner. He was always purposely dressed in a funny way, but respectful - on Thursday he was happy to see that the pants we put on him were purple - coming across as an educated man. In a moment of total humiliation and sickness and abandonment, having no place to hide, he came to church. What depth, coming from his ill mind and abandoned soul, covered with shame from top to bottom, moved him towards the church? The only place he was trusting. Not because of us, he did not really have any special connection with any of us in the community - as far as I know - but because he trusted God lives there, among the poor, where he used to eat on Wednesdays a few years ago.

"It is good we had clothes and shoes and socks", George said when thinking about the situation. And I would add it was also good that we were open so early in the morning. But now I am also thinking how many others like him we've been missing, sick and poor, naked and hungry, coming our way when we were not there? We might have felt more forgiven. How many has the church missed who came its way to bring about the forgiveness of God for people? In the faithfulness of those who reach out to her, being forgotten, but with no desire to remain like that.

From today's epistle:

"...how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"

Where are the four of them today? We know about the alienation of the modern cities and of the modern man, but where are we? The gulf from Hades has settled in our modern life so much so that we don't even realize it. We are away from each other. We are scattered around the globe being locked in an empty room, ignoring each other's presence by telling each other lies. Of course, this sounds like the internet. It is and it is not. The time that the holy apostle Paul is asking us not to waste was given to us to enter in this personal intimacy with God. We know that everything that touches this movement of the Holy Spirit within the sinful condition of man redeemed in Christ, becomes a burden because of the brokenness that we all carry. In a marriage or even in a community we look for the faults in others to find reasons to be accepted within the relationship with our own personal struggles. What makes a marriage real and difficult is not the weakness of the other but your own. We look for the weaknesses of the other so that we can be accepted with our own faults. An unfair way to live the relationship that leads to nowhere. In the relationship with Christ it is even more difficult because there is only love. And this teaches us everything. It is a merciful love that is given to us, asking the same in return. And then you are left with your own wounds to behold, knowing that there is nothing to give in return.

But we do and we pray for that, we pray that we may render unto Him from what we lack. By learning to give to Him what we are desiring, as broken as it might be, it teaches us to do the

same with those who come our way. In marriages, as parents with our children, in communities. Within the kingdom of God. Not to be considered by the greatness of the gift but by the purity of the offering, giving everything we have without keeping anything for ourselves.

I remember taking a course on "Relational Psychotherapy for children" during my studies. The professor, a highly esteemed professional in Toronto, probably the most expensive you could find if you had a child in need of therapy, told us about the importance of entering in a relationship with the child. Establishing a genuine relationship with the child leads to healing. But it must be a real and honest relationship. He gave many examples to underline that. His practice and his theory reflect, within its own measure, the reality and the meaning of life. Where time is not wasted if we look to enter in every moment in a relationship with Christ and with those who are part of our life. Without forgetting that Christ is in the poor, where our intimacy with Him is breaking the gulf we created between each other, in our own lives, in our communities, in our kingdom, that today we are willing to render back to God.

From Friday's readings : Genesis 5:32-6:8

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart. So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

Last Thursday felt like an endless day of joy, in the feast of the Annunciation. Friday on the other hand felt like a real lenten Friday, where many troubles came our way. There is more violence and a growing distress in the city that does not avoid us. Wickedness creates complicity with those that come its way because it seduces, appearing as good, or it makes you have pity on it so it can spread more. It does not play by the rules. At times, whatever you might do or not, it appears you are losing the battle and complicity comes on top. If there is anything easy for us when it comes to the suffering of others, it is to connect with those who are innocent, with the lambs of God. When we deal with the suffering of those who are hurt by harming others, it is impossible to connect and we try to reason with them, to find ways to contain the wickedness. We eventually fail and sometimes unwillingly enable more harm. In order to find forgiveness for us, when entering into this complicity with sin that does not spare anybody, we need to look for the innocent of God, suffering in those who harm His own lambs. For the sake of our own lack of suffering and for the forgiveness of all.

From the Saturday gospel:

"At that time, Jesus went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed..."

"We enter into our chamber and shut the door and pray to our father...removing our hearts inwardly from the din of all thoughts and anxieties...We pray to the searcher not of words but of hearts... in secret from the heart and fervent mind ... pray in complete silence ... so the purport of our petitions may be concealed from our enemies".

St John Cassian

How much of a gift are the lenten vigils until midnight for the community and for the city ?

When one retires in silence and in secret to pray and to be searched by God within their heart, the mercy of God reveals its name to the one who prays. When more than one does the same, the heart of the community is searched by Christ. And His presence within the heart brings grace to those who come through its doors and for the whole city, unworthy though we may be. Just because we know where we are on Friday evenings, during lent, and God can find us there, to search the heart of the community and to render the name of His mercy to those who search to care for His poor.

"For man does not see as God sees; for man look at the outward appearance, but the Lord sees into the heart". (I Kings 16: 7)

Keep in your prayers the catechumens:

Eliana, Wayne, Atty and Madison.

Hearer: Veneranda and her daughter and Zachary and Valerie

Please pray for:

BettyAnn and Paul.

Wafaa and Sana (cancer)

Raj (got knifed)

Rejoice

Cassandra's grandmother - Helen

Two children receiving treatment at Sick Kids and their mother Levelin.

Crisent

Ann Brown

Elizabeth

Sifie

Allen

Leon

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

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

Madison and her brother Aaron

Hilda (friend fighting covid), Anastas, Olivia, Gelly, Frank, Eva, George, Rebecca, Andreas, Cathyann, Reigan, Stephanie, James, Peter, Christine.

For health and salvation

very difficult situation for a Christian family from Bangladesh

Sandra
Peter
Angel
Bless
Grace
Swetha family
Atlaw single mom at shelter
Vernevil family

the family of
Kenide
Sathiya
Sena
Vinothiny
Yvienne
Abdul
Sakanthalathevy
Jumke
Naimi
Anish

JOSHUA DANIEL

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

Maria Lolita Soliman Torres

Jonathan

Richard

Richard

Mary

Elizabeth

Michael

Rejoice

Bill

Robert

Alan

Joanne

deceased (Covid)

Maria

St. Silouan Chapel, March 28, 2021

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