



15th Sunday of Luke: 19:1-10

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come...” (Matthew 22:2–3, from Thursday’s gospel)

The kingdom of heaven is the marriage feast where the Holy Spirit delights within the union of the Beloved with his bride. It is the joy of the covenantal love that takes place today, a love without betrayal. The king is God the Father who initiates every good thing because God “is good and His mercy endures forever” (Ps 136). The Son is Christ who becomes incarnate to be united with his bride, the church, who becomes one with his body: the Body of Christ who are the poor and the destitute. Because in this time His body is hungry, thirsty, and naked. Christ loves his bride, and He knows her pain. He knows how she wanders on the streets and how she was abused because of her love for Him (see Song of Songs). She does not need to hide the abuse she endured, the pain that she has in her heart, the dark circles under her eyes that she inherited because of her weeping day and night when they say to her “Where is your Go?” (42:3). She does not need to hide what the world did to her because the Bridegroom loves her. It is His love that she always desired, it is His love that she delights in today.

On Friday, in church, we heard again the Beatitudes of Luke due to the feast of St. Euthymius the Great. One would wonder why all these great saints get to hear on their feast day the beatitudes where the Beloved vows His love to the poor in marriage.

It is because they fully participate in the feast. When we listened to the reading about the saint’s life on Friday, we heard that before his death, the saint told his disciples to always practice hospitality within the community, to always welcome and receive all those who are without a home. Just by listening to the Beatitudes we understand that only God can utter these words. Only God can speak about the future joy for those who cry today because He is the beginning and the End. The Beatitudes are the betrothal vows that the Bridegroom takes publicly to the poor. So that’s why only God can utter these words. We know, when we come to the realisation that we are barely human, we rather hear and see the pain. Many times, we come across this sorrow in the life of the poor and we cannot share the hope of the end of time with them because we don’t know for ourselves if we are participating in the wedding.

Those who refuse to come and kill the servant who brings good news are the nations. The power of this world that reasserts his own self determination. They don’t rejoice for the wedding feast, actually they hate the joy because they despise the bride, the poor. They remain unrepentant in their abuse. The sorrow of the bride, the church, and the harm done to the Innocent, who is the Bridegroom, do not move them to repentance and so they cannot rejoice.

The one who is not wearing the wedding garment is always me. Because the joy of the many does not touch the soul of the “individual.” I am still stuck in my own misery because I see only my own soul. *“Grant unto me the robe of light, O most wonderful Christ our God, who does clothe Thyself with light as with a garment.”*

Autonomy and self-determination

Could autonomy be the lack of the wedding garment? When we watched the documentary on Wednesday about Euthanasia, the disabled person in the wheelchair said if he could do one thing in this world today it would be to show the evil consequences of autonomy. It is precisely this concept or rather this lie which is the “invincible argument” (Br. Luke) for the ending of life today, producing so much death and evil deeds. The same demon kills young people with depression or the elderly who are defenseless and the same demon starts and

keeps wars going. Because self determination is applied as a cardinal rule both in geopolitics and in health care systems.

We know one could not trust the evil spirits even when they try not to lie. One thing though is that they always brag about their success. So, when checking their books, “St. Google” (as José says), one would see that the influence of autonomy is vast, and it touches all areas of our life. Today it does not matter much what culture or nation you are coming from or what religion you have, most of the time this demon is always present, affecting us in different ways, always presenting itself as light.

One could argue that we don’t have many political alternatives. That’s why we need to come and listen to the online session on psalms on Tuesday evenings, from 7:30 pm, in order to understand that “self governance” of the nation is the cardinal sin of man. The modern demon today is not new. It is the old powerful one that changed its name.

Because the church has the revelation, it is her duty to exorcise this demon from the heart of the world. But by doing so, we need to start from within, including both the personal life of the Christian, who has to respond to the wedding invitation with joy, and the structure of the community at large that could govern itself based on a demon that gives us the illusion of autonomy. Autonomy breaks the communion with God. The joy of the wedding feast is calling all of us to repentance. We should not stay outside like the older brother of the prodigal son and sadden the Father more than we already did.

Please consider

We believe that the times are urgent when it comes in particular to the application of MAiD in Canada. Not that we can stop a wave of social and legal trends towards encouraging people to die. This is already happening.

What is urgent, and the time is fleeting, is our ability to openly reflect on this issue and be informed by the truth of what is proposed and dialogue within a faith community. The movement in our culture is to silence any voice that does not speak the ideology of the times. Please come and reflect with us, be informed before this possibility to invite and meet openly will be considered “hate speech” and be shut down. **Time is running out.**

Mission church collections of 1 Sunday: Jan 8, 2023, Donations \$900, Candle box \$27.85, wine/candles \$20

Community life:

What can we choose if we have no autonomy? How would our good deeds be good if initiated by others? José spoke to us on Friday about the murmur of the whole community who condemns the sinner, Zacchaeus. The gossiping, the voice of the accuser becomes the voice of the community where no sinner can repent. We can hear it at times. Especially when one tries to repent. That’s when the voices murmur more.

There is another murmur though: John who grew up in the Inuit community up North said that his people, as he calls them, make a murmur when they have a pain. They mourn with one voice. Their sorrow is not silent. One could hear it. “They used to do that more, these days probably not. They forgot.”

The freedom we have is to listen to the voice that mourns and not to the voices that condemn. This is what keeps alive the dignity of being human. This is the channel through which the invitation to the wedding comes. This is the media outlet that makes us know the good news. Because we listen together with Christ. And when He speaks to them we’ll know the hope that comes with the voice of the beloved.

*It was really touching to listen to the young man on Friday. How passionate he was about what he heard in the gospel. How personal he took it to heart. How, after the door closed at 4:00, he continued to look for a way to help the older woman who spoke only his language. He told us before Christmas that he would come back to volunteer after he finishes his community hours. Many others said the same, but he is the one who came. One could say that only the gospel could touch a young soul in this way.

Community reflection of the gospel of the blind man - Elisha

I...As with the blind man, it might seem obvious what a person has need of, yet it all may only translate to love, which Christ freely gives to anyone who asks, and, as at the mission, to even those who for whatever reason haven't asked. Perhaps someone needs a warm pair of socks, and when asked, they say they have need of them. But they also might need to sit across from another person and have them hear their story, and Christ knows this, as we should as well. Christ seeks the faithful, and that is the blind man. He also seeks out the hearts of the faithless however, and we must never forget those who for whatever reason have turned away from God. We must freely give our love to whomever crosses our path, with a warm pair of socks, a hot coffee and conversation.

Whatever one coming through the doors of St. John's that we can provide materially we should, but we must also never forget to show the people Christ's love for them.

They might not have a problem asking for a pair of socks, but asking for a hug might be much harder, or socks might be the excuse the person needs to then ask for a coffee and a place to sit for awhile a place to laugh with, cry with people who are trying to show them they genuinely care.

I think the blind man sought to be healed by Christ's love and mercy. He had faith he would be healed, and so he was.

I think Jesus asked the question because he knew the blind man understood completely what he was asking and why.

It is tough to ask someone to please care about me, so we must anticipate the question and show Christ's love for the poor.



Death & dying in Canada: Living a good death

A series of talks, Wednesdays, 2023

Jan 18	Introduction to the series
Jan 25	Alex Schadenberg, Euthanasia Prevention Coalition
Feb 1	TBA
Feb 8	Panel discussion: the Christian understanding of the moment of death, and how to prepare for it
Feb 15	Kathy Matusiak, Compassionate Community Care

6:00 p.m. coffee • 6:30 presentation • 8:00 compline

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Christmas declaration of Russian Christians

Russian Federation - December 25, 2022

The Christmas declaration of a group of Russian Christians. A surprising text because it is unexpected and unitary, born from the base, and clearly evangelical in its simple reference to Christ. A gesture of great value and hope.

“Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to those whom he loves” (Lk 2:12). “The people who walked in darkness saw a great light; upon those who dwelt in the dark land a light shone ... For every soldier’s shoe in the fray and every cloak stained with blood will be burned, it will be tinder of the fire. Because a child was born to us, a son was given to us. On his shoulders is the sign of sovereignty and he is called Admirable Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace; great will be his dominion and peace will have no end on the throne of David and on the kingdom, which he comes to consolidate and strengthen with law and justice, now and for ever” (Is 9,1,4-6).

Christmas’ Eve. Along the streets, we get ready for the party, buy gifts, warm up with a hot coffee in our favorite bar, make plans for the holidays. Life as always. We’re joking that another difficult year is coming to an end. Meanwhile, in the neighboring country, Ukraine, there is war, unleashed by our government: the inhabitants are left without electricity, without heating, many without their families. They too were making plans for this year, they too wanted to party and they too believed in a miracle. But our country has brought the war into their homes, and now for them to warm up a bit and recharge their cell phones is already a celebration.

We cannot remain silent about what is happening.

It is an intolerable pain that on these festive days in Ukrainian cities the Christmas hymns are covered by the scream of sirens, and the sky lights up not from fireworks but from rockets. While we celebrate here, our brothers and sisters in Ukraine continue to suffer and die at the hands of our compatriots.

Because of this: We Russian Christians belonging to various denominations: laity, pastors, teachers and priests, address all Christians in Russia: Orthodox, Protestants and Catholics; to priests, ecclesiastical leaders, communities, organizations, formal and informal Christian associations, proposing the following theses:

- We believe that Christ invites us to love everyone. That the divine commandments “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex 20:13), do not take revenge on those who have hurt you, “love your enemies” (Mt 5:39 and 44) cannot be ignored but must be embodied in personal life and of the company.
- We believe that Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine is a crime against divine law, and that its so-called “moral motivation” contradicts Christian doctrine, poisoned as it is by the desire to elevate oneself at the expense of the other, and thereby overcome the sense of helplessness and hopelessness. We are convinced that it is unacceptable for a Christian to participate in war on the side of the aggressor.
- We believe that the crimes, imagined or real, of other states cannot justify the crimes committed by ours. We do not agree that patriotism should be expressed in blind dedication to government and unrequited love for the state and the sovereign. On the other hand, we affirm that one of the greatest expressions of patriotism consists in preaching the Gospel to one’s own people, and that a people that aspires to prosperity must above all respect the divine commandments, since in the Gospel it is said: «Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things will be added to you” (Mt 6:33).

- With great sadness we note that the vast majority of Christian communities in Russia do not deem it necessary or important to raise their voices in defense of the innocent and denounce the lawlessness. We are horrified that many ministers of churches and theologians, in an attempt to justify the invasion, distort the meaning of the Holy Scriptures, and reject the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount as something superfluous and irrelevant; they bend Christ's words about love (see: Jn 15:13) to justify participation in war; they propagate Old Testament ethics (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth), forgetting that the Messiah has already come and we live in the time of the New Testament.
- We know that the Lord exhorts us to love our neighbor, and we are certain that for Christians in Russia the "neighbor" these days are the suffering Ukrainians, whom God calls us to serve with word and deed, through prayer, intercession and solidarity.
- We invite all Christians in Russia who want to be peacemakers to make the following commitments, which we also make:
- Don't retreat into your shell. To face the facts that happen seriously and with great responsibility, judging the events not from the point of view of earthly goods, but from the teaching of Christ.
- Pray for the war to end. Implore God to lead our fellow citizens, state and ecclesiastical leaders to repentance.
- Taking into account the risks involved and your own situation, denounce the evil and advocate the immediate withdrawal of troops from Ukraine as well as an end to the war.
- **Non - violent resistance to mobilization.** Convincing relatives and acquaintances not to take part in this war in any form; help those who escape military service.
- Offer humanitarian aid. Helping Ukrainian refugees wherever they are. Support by any means possible those who have fallen victim to this war.

We know that taking a stand against the war is scary in Russia today. You can be denounced as a traitor, a foreign agent, be fined, go to jail. We also know that in Russia, a country that calls itself Christian, appealing for peace leads to fines and imprisonment. But we Christians invite you to do it out of love for Christ and for our neighbors in Ukraine.

As Saint John says, "There is no fear in love, on the contrary, perfect love casts out fear" (1 Jn 4:18). Then we will be true Christians.

Today the Lord has come into the world, as John says, "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness did not receive it" (Jn 1:5). We believe that the light of Christ will also triumph over the darkness that has engulfed our country, which today is sowing death, enmity and destruction in Ukraine and Russia. We believe that the light of Christ will drive hatred and anger out of people's hearts, and Love will triumph.

"And I saw a new sky and a new earth: the sky and the earth before had in fact disappeared and the sea was no more. And I also saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, come down out of heaven from God, ready as a bride adorned for her husband. Then I heard a powerful voice coming from the throne and saying: 'Behold the tent of God with men! He will dwell with them and they will be his peoples and he will be God with them, their God. And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and there will be no more death or mourning or lamentation or pain, for the former things have passed away'" (Rev 21:1-4).

January 23 - 29

Tuesday	8:30 am 7:30 pm	Morning Prayer Prayer Psalms Study – via Zoom	Wednesday	8:30 am 12:30 pm 4:00 pm 6:30 pm	Morning Prayer Noon Hours Vespers/Dinner Bridges, 8:00 pm Compline
Thursday	8:30 am 12:30 pm 2:00 pm	Morning Prayer Noon Hours Jesus Prayer	Friday	7:00 am 12:30 pm 2:00 pm	Orthros Noon Hours Jesus Prayer
Saturday	9:00 am	Morning Prayer	Sunday	7:00 am 8:30 am	Orthros Divine Liturgy



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We are an apostolate of the ecumenical patriarchate “Mother Church of Christ’s poor”
under the Omophorion of Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa