

## Forgiveness Sunday

Matthew 6:14-21

*"If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses".*

Saturday morning, a mother stepped into the chapel after having breakfast. She hadn't been there before, but she was asking for prayers for her son, who had left from home. Families are always complex. In this case, the mother felt more guilty than anything else and she had good reasons for that, she would admit. As she was leaving, she asked us again to pray for her son. She has no hope of reconciliation now, only the hope that he is well, as well as a teenage son who left his home can be. As always, the mother has tears in her eyes when she thinks about her son.

The same day, another young person who has been coming daily to eat at the mission told us that she is a student. She has a childish face and joyful eyes most of time, except when she mentions her parents, whom she has left behind. That's when her countenance changes.

We people know how to lose things in a great way. Not things, but rather what we love or who we love. We have this freedom of losing goodness in our life that has flesh and bones. And when we realize it, it is too late. We do not know if God had tears in His eyes when Adam was departing with Eve. He has not become man yet. But then He loses too. Maybe that's why we don't see Him by the gate, but we only see the angel.

How did God cry before becoming human? How does He cry now, when He sees this brokenness among those whom He loves? He covers them because they are naked. That's why God judges in us what He reveals Himself to us to be. He is the one who covers with His wings those who are naked and ashamed of who they are. God himself becomes a garment for a naked humanity. A shelter and a home for the poor and the oppressed. He is the dignity that we lost through sin. He is our patient endurance today. He loves what we despise in us. Poor and broken humanity.

It is hard to imagine Adam and Eve outside the garden in Toronto, with no proper clothes for the weather we're facing these days, the mix of snow, ice and rain. And yet, at the mission during the week we encounter that every day.



A couple, soaking wet, who seem to be living on the streets, entered quickly looking for food and some dry clothes and shoes for the woman. She needs so much that she does not dare ask for anything. He is patient, but has an urgency, he says he needs to go back at the intersection and make some money for the day. Somebody left them two dogs, and he needs to buy some food for them. Both look like Adam and Eve in the icon, small of stature, only soaking wet and with a purpose: to go back at the intersection, in the cold rain falling on them, so that he can make some money in order to get food for the dogs. To care for something.

We do not leave heaven today, but rather we remember what we are marching towards. Today, we start the journey towards the promised land. We do not go into the desert out of paradise, but rather we are taken out of our shame in order to come and see the promise of a new life. Every beginning in our fallen state starts with the journey towards the promise. The beginning of lent is the beginning of our freedom, where we rediscover daily the relationship with who we love and thought we had lost for good. This is the time when we discover a new way of living with those we have fallen in love with. The pillars of lent, as we see in the lives of the people who teach us daily, are: the entering into the chapel in order to discover in prayer our only hope; entrusting our life to the loving God, who feeds us and covers us with His hands, who teaches us communion and solitude of heart, in which we can rejoice; and the need to care, where God gives to us with gratuity.

And then there is forgiveness ... What else but forgiveness, in a broken humanity, so broken that only the Holy Spirit, in Christ, can keep us together? And the love of the Father. Otherwise, we would be so scattered that we could not see our face in the eyes of others, that we would be forgotten even to our own self.

The life of the community and the stories of our lives speak about forgiveness as the only light given to a soul paralysed in the darkness of a wounded self. Forgiveness is not only the oil that heals what was broken in us by others, it does not only heal communion and bring desire for encounter, but it also gives us a glimpse of the resurrection, of life redeemed in Christ. Because it touches within the soul our own forgiveness which we received at Pascha. It asks for it, it gives a voice to the soul and opens it towards communion. There is nothing that eases the pain as forgiveness does, there is nothing that touches the soul with such peace, after the soul has been betrayed and hurt. Because forgiveness opens the door to the resurrection.

Our own repentance starts with the forgiveness of those who harmed us, in small or big ways.

The gospel today points towards the pain of our own heart, to the wound that was not self inflicted. Today we are not asked to face our own sins but the sins of those very close to us that have caused us pain. This is what makes us poor and vulnerable and worthy of the Word of God, who needs something from the poor, and today we are one of them. And what He wants is forgiveness.

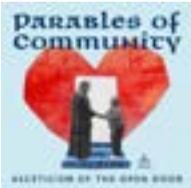
There is no journey without forgiveness. Without it we remain blocked in what has become a possession of the soul. Lack of forgiveness makes the soul possessive and in need of control. It endangers communion and obedience because of lack of trust. In our own life, we become surprised at times how the wounds of the past become the hate of today. Without forgiveness there is no movement. It is a paralysis of spirit. It is the moment when the pain of others becomes in us a self-inflicted pain. Without forgiveness we cannot believe that we can be forgiven, and what a great need there is for that in us. We could not receive in joy the good news of the resurrection. We would remain doubtful for too long.

But who is going to teach us this forgiveness? as Carlos was asking on Friday. I want to forgive, but then what am I going to do?

Forgiveness is the door through which we step into the journey of lent. It is the door that is marked with the blood of the lamb. We open that door through forgiveness, and we join the community who has set foot on the journey. We think that forgiveness is always the light that searches within us the wounds of the past. And in a way it is so. Because the past keeps us captive. But then, forgiveness is called to be new and fresh, not only a light on the past but also the joy of the present. The quickness of steps that go on untrodden paths. The pillar of fire that leads us through the darkness of every soul's night. It is the mana given to all and the sweet water of communion. Not much is asked of us on the journey, but only to forgive, and the communion embraces even the most sinful soul.

If we do not know how to forgive, we pray to learn to behold what is broken today and see if we can do that without hope. We pray to come closer to those who have been enduring much within the community, to see that forgiveness is real and it takes many forms. And it is communal and present within the heart of the poor, in the community and in every lonely and broken heart.

Forgiveness marks the lent of community with joy, because it leaves no one behind us.



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**St Silouan Chapel at St John's Mission**

155 Broadview Ave. Toronto, ON M4M 2E9

T: 416-466-1357 E: [info@stjohnsmmission.org](mailto:info@stjohnsmmission.org) W: [stjohnsmmission.org](http://stjohnsmmission.org)

**St Zoticos Orthodox Church at Good Neighbours Mission**

193 Markham Rd Scarborough, ON M1J 3C3

T: 647-358-4105

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