

HOMILY FOR THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 11 July 2021

- Fr. Jim Fredericks

Part One: the readings for the day

Part Two: reflection on the readings

Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY

Lectionary: 104

Reading I Am 7:12-15

Amaziah, priest of Bethel, said to Amos,
“Off with you, visionary, flee to the land of Judah!
There earn your bread by prophesying,
but never again prophesy in Bethel;
for it is the king’s sanctuary and a royal temple.”
Amos answered Amaziah, “I was no prophet,
nor have I belonged to a company of prophets;
I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores.
The LORD took me from following the flock, and said to me,
Go, prophesy to my people Israel.”

Responsorial Psalm Ps 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14

R. (8) Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

I will hear what God proclaims;

the LORD — for he proclaims peace.

Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him,

glory dwelling in our land.

R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Kindness and truth shall meet;

justice and peace shall kiss.

Truth shall spring out of the earth,

and justice shall look down from heaven.

R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

The LORD himself will give his benefits;

our land shall yield its increase.

Justice shall walk before him,

and prepare the way of his steps.

R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Reading II Eph 1:3-14 or 1:3-10

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us in Christ
with every spiritual blessing in the heavens,
as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world,
to be holy and without blemish before him.
In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ,
in accord with the favor of his will,
for the praise of the glory of his grace
that he granted us in the beloved.
In him we have redemption by his blood,
the forgiveness of transgressions,
in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us.
In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us
the mystery of his will in accord with his favor
that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times,
to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth.
In him we were also chosen,
destined in accord with the purpose of the One
who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will,
so that we might exist for the praise of his glory,
we who first hoped in Christ.
In him you also, who have heard the word of truth,
the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him,
were sealed with the promised holy Spirit,
which is the first installment of our inheritance
toward redemption as God's possession, to the praise of his glory.

Alleluia Cf. Eph 1:17-18

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
enlighten the eyes of our hearts,
that we may know what is the hope that
belongs to our call.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 6:7-13

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two
and gave them authority over unclean spirits.
He instructed them to take nothing for the journey
but a walking stick—
no food, no sack, no money in their belts.
They were, however, to wear sandals
but not a second tunic.

He said to them,
“Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave.
Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you,
leave there and shake the dust off your feet
in testimony against them.”
So they went off and preached repentance.
The Twelve drove out many demons,
and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

You can be forgiven if you don't remember Michael Collins. He went to the moon with Buzz Aldrin and, of course, Neil Armstrong, in 1969. Perhaps you don't remember him because Michael Collins stayed on board Apollo 11 while his other two shipmates descended to the surface of the moon.

Michael Collins was often asked what the moon looked like from the lunar orbiter. His answer is worth remembering. When asked this question he didn't actually have a lot to share. Instead, he would say, “I spent much more time looking at the earth – beautiful, shimmering blue, a fragile speck, lost in the immensity of black-velvet space.” (I'm not sure if this is an exact quote, but it is close).

When I heard this story about Michael Collins, I thought of something that Pope Francis said a few years ago. At some event, a little girl asked the pope, “What was God doing before he created the world?”

This strikes me as a very sensible question. And the pope was ready with a sensible answer. Without dropping a beat, he said to the little girl,

“God was looking for something to love.”

The little girl, I'm told, liked the answer.

God created the universe because he was looking for something to love.

I think it is helpful, as a spiritual practice, to remember that we are created in the image and likeness of this God who was looking for something to love when he created the universe. Think of how enchanted Michael Collins was with the earth as it rose, shimmering, in “the immensity of black-velvet space.”

We can be distracted by all the foolish things human beings do to hurt the things that God has found to love. So, I think it is a good spiritual practice to reflect on the fact that, in our deepest instincts, we are fundamentally like God: we too are looking for something to love.

With all this in mind, take a look at today's Gospel.

Jesus gives marching orders to "the Twelve."

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two
and gave them authority over unclean spirits.

In effect, Jesus is telling the Twelve to go out and find something to love.

In Jesus's view, we don't need much to do this.

He instructed them to take nothing for the journey
but a walking stick—
no food, no sack, no money in their belts.
They were, however, to wear sandals
but not a second tunic.

And this is certainly Good News. Mark, in effect, is telling us that we don't need a lot of money or material resources to do what God is doing – looking for something to love.

And when we begin to do what God is always doing – looking for something to love – we will finally become once again the miraculous creature that God always intended us to be. We are created in the image and likeness of the God who is looking for something to love. The Good News is that we need hardly anything at all to become this creature once again... a walking stick, a pair of sandals and, of course, a touch of God's grace.

Jesus is not naïve about looking for something to love either. Love, freely offered, can be refused. Sometimes, the refusal can be down-right cruel. When this happens, we are to continue the search for something to love by moving on.

He said to them,
"Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave.
Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you,
leave there and shake the dust off your feet
in testimony against them."

When you set out, like the Twelve and, of course, like the God of Creation, on the journey, don't expect to be thanked for your services. I recommend that we love and serve our neighbors as best we can and then let go of the result. We plant the seeds. The harvest belongs to the good Lord above. Our job is just to keep looking for something to love.

This can be a hard thing to do. But Saint Paul tells us, in his letter to the Galatians, that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is *agathosyne*. This word is often translated into English as

“generosity.” But there is a nuance that we need to appreciate. *Agathosyne* means “attachment to doing what is good” or “the pursuit of what is good.” Maybe we could translate this word as “a dedication or commitment to doing what is good.” Today, I think I will translate *agathosyne* as “a steadfast determination to go looking for something to love.”

This is a good way to spend your life. In fact, this is The Way itself. Anything else is really just wasting time.

Think of Michael Collins, back in 1969, circling around the moon as his companions descended to the lunar surface. Think of this fellow human being who was enchanted by the earth – “beautiful, shimmering blue, a fragile speck, lost in the immensity of black-velvet space.” And then remember that this is how God looks on the earth and all the creatures that make a home here.

God created the earth, Pope Francis tells us, because he was looking for something to love. Don’t waste time doing anything else.

PART THREE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR *LECTIO DIVINA*

I suggest that you use the readings and my reflections as an opportunity for practicing *lectio divina* (“divine reading”). This is an ancient spiritual practice that started with the great monks in the Syrian and Egyptian desert back in the early days of the Church. It is really quite simple.

Step one: calm your mind (my Buddhist friends describe the mind as “a mango-tree full of chattering monkeys”). I find that paying attention to your breath for a few minutes is a practical and effective way to do this.

Step two: read the readings slowly and attentively. Savor the words as if you were tasting a great Pinot Noir. Don’t rush. You are not looking for information or instructions. You are making friends with a sacred text which will bless you abundantly if you will only open your heart to it and let it speak to you. In *lectio divina*, we are not actually “reading” the Bible. Rather, we are “listening” to the Bible as the sacred words speak to us.

Step three: repeat step two.

Step four: read the reflection on the readings.

Step five: Ask yourself a few questions:

- What particular words in the readings call out to me most forcefully?
- What is going on in my life such that these words call to me so forthrightly?
- How am I being asked to change, both interiorly and exteriorly?
- In light of this *lectio divina*, how am I being invited to be of service to the world today?

