

## HOMILY FOR TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 11 October 2020

- 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: 142

#### Reading 1 IS 25:6-10A

On this mountain the LORD of hosts  
will provide for all peoples  
a feast of rich food and choice wines,  
juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.  
On this mountain he will destroy  
the veil that veils all peoples,  
the web that is woven over all nations;  
he will destroy death forever.  
The Lord GOD will wipe away  
the tears from every face;  
the reproach of his people he will remove  
from the whole earth; for the LORD has spoken.  
On that day it will be said:  
"Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us!  
This is the LORD for whom we looked;  
let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!"  
For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.

#### Responsorial Psalm PS 23:1-3A, 3B-4, 5, 6

R. (6cd) **I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.**

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

In verdant pastures he gives me repose;

beside restful waters he leads me;

he refreshes my soul.

R. **I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.**

He guides me in right paths

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk in the dark valley

I fear no evil; for you are at my side

with your rod and your staff

that give me courage.

**R. I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.**

You spread the table before me  
in the sight of my foes;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

**R. I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.**

Only goodness and kindness follow me  
all the days of my life;  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD  
for years to come.

**R. I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.**

### **Reading 2 PHIL 4:12-14, 19-20**

Brothers and sisters:

I know how to live in humble circumstances;  
I know also how to live with abundance.  
In every circumstance and in all things  
I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry,  
of living in abundance and of being in need.  
I can do all things in him who strengthens me.  
Still, it was kind of you to share in my distress.  
My God will fully supply whatever you need,  
in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.  
To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen.

### **Alleluia EPH 1:17-18**

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

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

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

### **Gospel MT 22:1-14 OR 22:1-10**

Jesus again in reply spoke to the chief priests and elders of the people  
in parables, saying,  
"The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king  
who gave a wedding feast for his son.  
He dispatched his servants

to summon the invited guests to the feast,  
but they refused to come.  
A second time he sent other servants, saying,  
'Tell those invited: "Behold, I have prepared my banquet,  
my calves and fattened cattle are killed,  
and everything is ready; come to the feast."'

Some ignored the invitation and went away,  
one to his farm, another to his business.  
The rest laid hold of his servants,  
mistreated them, and killed them.  
The king was enraged and sent his troops,  
destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.  
Then he said to his servants, 'The feast is ready,  
but those who were invited were not worthy to come.  
Go out, therefore, into the main roads  
and invite to the feast whomever you find.'

The servants went out into the streets  
and gathered all they found, bad and good alike,  
and the hall was filled with guests.  
But when the king came in to meet the guests,  
he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment.  
The king said to him, 'My friend, how is it  
that you came in here without a wedding garment?'

But he was reduced to silence.  
Then the king said to his attendants, 'Bind his hands and feet,  
and cast him into the darkness outside,  
where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'

Many are invited, but few are chosen."

## **PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS**

These days, I'm hearing stories about how we have been helping people whose lives have been disrupted (once again) by the wildfires. You are an inspiration to me. I want to say that, after all these years, you are (still) teaching me how to be a good priest and I am grateful to you for this great kindness.

With the fires in mind, let me reflect a little on faith and service. To do this, I will concentrate on the second reading.

The Apostle Paul is writing to friends in the Church he founded in a Greek town called Philippi. Apparently, members of the Church in Philippi helped Paul out on some problem. Probably the Apostle was broke. I'm just guessing, but I say this because the scripture scholars think that Paul wrote this letter from Rome. (I guess we should ask Geoff Wood). This means that Paul was in jail, awaiting trial and eventually execution. He may have needed funds to pay for a lawyer.

Here is what he wrote:

Brothers and sisters:  
I know how to live in humble circumstances;  
I know also how to live with abundance.

While on his many journeys, Paul supported himself as a tent maker (in fact, in one of his letters, he boasts about his self-sufficiency and not being a burden to his friends while he was preaching the Gospel). Now he has been brought low. It's like our friends and family caught in the wildfires. In a heartbeat, we can go from being on top of the world to relying on the kindness of strangers.

These words remind me of John Winthrop's sermon that I shared with you last week. Preaching to a group of Pilgrims aboard ship, he asked why some are great and some are humble; why some are wealthy and others poor in this world. And the answer he gives his community is that some are at the top of their game and others are brought low not because God favors some and not others. God allows for social differences so that the Holy Spirit can bring us together. There is a divine purpose in what Shakespeare called "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." In the upheaval brought to us by these fires, the Lord is calling us to a life of service and pouring out his Holy Spirit into our hearts so that we have the wisdom and strength necessary to put our faith into practice.

We are separated from Paul by two-thousand years. Stop, for a moment, and reflect on how amazing it is that his words reveal to us his humanity after all these centuries. What he has to say to his friends in Philippi is revealing as well as touching.

In every circumstance and in all things  
I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry,  
of living in abundance and of being in need.

Paul has been around the block a few times. He has had more than his fair share of ups-and-downs. I can also add that he has been thrown out of synagogues and roughed-up, scorned and betrayed. But he tells us that he has "learned the secret" of undergoing ups-and-downs: Paul's faith in Christ has carried him through his travails.

I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

But this is not what I find so affecting in Paul's letter. In fact, I get a little impatient with Paul at times. What moves me is this: after professing faith in Christ as his strength, Paul goes on to say,

Still, it was kind of you to share in my distress.

His friends from Philippi have heard of his plight in Rome and done something to reach out to him. For this, Paul is grateful.

Three years ago, when our Valley was touched by the fury of the fires, a great friend of St. Leo's came to be with us to talk about our Christian faith in light of what we were suffering. Like Paul's friends from Philippi, he came to share in our distress. Hebert Andersen is a Lutheran minister and theologian and he said wonderful things to us about the wisdom of our faith in a time of need. Now that we are in need again – because of fires to be sure, but also because of viruses and political unrest as well – we would do well to remember what Herbert shared with us.

He told us that, as we begin to grieve over what we have lost, the hardest emotion in the grieving process, often, is anger. In the fires of 2017, we had all lost something. Some of us had been burned out of their home. Some of us had to evacuate their homes for weeks and even months. All of us had lost the sense of security-of-life here in the Valley that we had taken for granted.

I suspect that Paul, writing in gratitude to his friends in Philippi from his prison cell in Rome is dealing with a touch of anger. How could it be otherwise? I sense (a touch of) anger when he insists,

I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

Paul says this *before* he expresses his gratitude to his friends for helping him out. I may be wrong in this attempt to read between the lines of Paul's letter. I have been wrong before... but I think I smell a whiff of anger in Paul's boast. Like our friend Herbert said, often the hardest part of the grieving process is figuring out what to do with our anger over loss and the realization that, at times, we can't do all the things we want to no matter how hard we try. Underneath the boast is a touch of anger. Underneath the anger is a healthy dollop of fear.

But Herbert shared much more with us, three years ago. As the smoke was finally beginning to clear in our Valley, he also gave us a teaching that goes to the heart of Christian faith. He said that hope arises when we realize that we really are connected to one another. Hope shows itself "when we begin to feel our mutuality." We are not wolves, preying on one another. We have been given to one another. And the great sign of this truth of our faith is plain for all to see: we are taking care of our neighbors in need.

I think Paul understood what Herbert was getting at. In his cell, in his despair, some kind of gift came to the Apostle from his old friends in Philippi. Maybe it was a few bucks to help pay his legal expenses. Maybe it was something else. Whatever it was, the gesture touched Paul's troubled heart.

Still, it was kind of you to share in my distress.

So, in our shared distress, in this difficult time of separation and evacuation and anger and fear, let me propose a prayer for us to offer to God for the protection and safe-keeping of our neighbors here in the Valley and around our fiery state. Let's also pray for the folks up in Oregon who have had their own fires. Let's pray for every single human being that has been overwhelmed by events utterly beyond their control. It's Paul's prayer for his friends in Philippi.

[May God] fully supply whatever you need,  
in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.  
To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen.

### **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?