

HOMILY FOR THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 11 September 2022

- 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: 132

Reading 1 Ex 32:7-11, 13-14

The LORD said to Moses,
"Go down at once to your people,
whom you brought out of the land of Egypt,
for they have become depraved.
They have soon turned aside from the way I pointed out to them,
making for themselves a molten calf and worshiping it, sacrificing to it
and crying out,
'This is your God, O Israel,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt!'
"I see how stiff-necked this people is, " continued the LORD to Moses. Let
me alone, then,
that my wrath may blaze up against them to consume them. Then I
will make of you a great nation."

But Moses implored the LORD, his God, saying,
"Why, O LORD, should your wrath blaze up against your own people, whom
you brought out of the land of Egypt
with such great power and with so strong a hand?
Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,
and how you swore to them by your own self, saying, 'I will make your
descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky; and all this land that I
promised,
I will give your descendants as their perpetual heritage.'" So the
LORD relented in the punishment
he had threatened to inflict on his people.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 51:3-4, 12-13, 17, 19

R. (Lk 15:18) I will rise and go to my father.
Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt

and of my sin cleanse me.

R. I will rise and go to my father.

A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.

Cast me not out from your presence,
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

R. I will rise and go to my father.

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit;
a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn. R. I will
rise and go to my father.

Reading 2 1 Tm 1:12-17

Beloved:

I am grateful to him who has strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord,
because he considered me trustworthy
in appointing me to the ministry.

I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and arrogant, but I
have been mercifully treated

because I acted out of ignorance in my unbelief.

Indeed, the grace of our Lord has been abundant,
along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. This
saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: Christ
Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Of these I am the foremost.

But for that reason I was mercifully treated,
so that in me, as the foremost,

Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those
who would come to believe in him for everlasting life. To the king of
ages, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, honor and glory forever
and ever. Amen.

Alleluia 2 Cor 5:19

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ
and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Lk 15:1-32

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but
the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man
welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So to them he addressed this parable.

“What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.

“Or what woman having ten coins and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it? And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.’ In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Then he said,

“A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, ‘Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’ So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I no longer deserve to be called your son;
treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.” So he
got up and went back to his father.
While he was still a long way off,
his father caught sight of him,
and was filled with compassion.
He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.
His son said to him,
‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no
longer deserve to be called your son.’
But his father ordered his servants,
‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him;
put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
Take the fattened calf and slaughter it.
Then let us celebrate with a feast,
because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he
was lost, and has been found.’
Then the celebration began.
Now the older son had been out in the field
and, on his way back, as he neared the house,
he heard the sound of music and dancing.
He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The
servant said to him,
‘Your brother has returned
and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf
because he has him back safe and sound.’
He became angry,
and when he refused to enter the house,
his father came out and pleaded with him.
He said to his father in reply,
‘Look, all these years I served you
and not once did I disobey your orders;
yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But
when your son returns,
who swallowed up your property with prostitutes,
for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’
He said to him,
‘My son, you are here with me always;
everything I have is yours.
But now we must celebrate and rejoice,
because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he
was lost and has been found.’”

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

I used to know a fine old nun, Sister Kathleen. She was a great woman in several ways. Sister Katherine had been around the block more than a few times and had both feet on the ground. When I first met her, she had been teaching third grade for easily more than thirty years. Over the years, she had cultivated the virtue of practical wisdom, what the ancient Greeks called *phronesis*.

One day, Sister Kate told me something we would all do well to remember. Reflecting on her experience with third graders, she said,

Children are always in need of love.
And they need love the most when they least deserve it.

This is a great truth. It is a great truth because it is not simply a truth about children. We are all in need of love and we need it the most when we least deserve it.

I like Sister Kate's teaching very much. She is not talking about justice (what is deserved). She is talking about our human needs, quite apart from what we might deserve.

Sister Kate's teaching goes to the core of the parable of the Prodigal Son. This parable is all about being loved when we deserve to be loved the least.

A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father,
"Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me."

This younger son certainly doesn't deserve what he is demanding. In fact, I'm sure the older son would say his brother was being brazen.

You know the rest of the story. The younger son takes what he doesn't deserve and skips town. He squanders his inheritance on a life of dissipation and ends up working as a hired hand, feeding pigs.

Eventually, the younger son comes to his senses about what he has done. But, notice that he comes to his senses in a very specific way: he realizes how undeserving he is of his father's love.

How many of my father's hired workers
have more than enough food to eat,
but here am I, dying from hunger.
I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him,
"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no
longer deserve to be called your son;
treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."

I trust you all know what happens when the younger son
comes home.

While he was still a long way off,
his father caught sight of him,
and was filled with compassion.
He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.

Then the father gives orders to his servants,

'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him;
put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
Take the fattened calf and slaughter it.
Then let us celebrate with a feast,
because this son of mine was dead,
and has come to life again;
he was lost and has been found.'

Today, I recommend reading this parable in light of Sister
Kate's practical wisdom.

Children are always in need of love.
And they need love the most when they least deserve it.

This is what the father in the story is doing. He is loving his son, in an
especially tender and generous way, when his son deserves to be loved
the least.

For two-thousand years, we have called Jesus' story, "The Parable of
the Prodigal Son." The word "prodigal" means "extravagantly wasteful to
the point of being reckless." To be sure, the younger son in this story is
prodigal. He is extravagantly wasteful of his inheritance to the point of
being reckless.

But we might call this story “the Parable of the Prodigal Father.” As Jesus tells his story, the father is prodigal as prodigal as his younger son. The father is “extravagantly wasteful to the point of being reckless” – only the father is reckless with his love for his undeserving son.

‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him;
put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
Take the fattened calf and slaughter it.
Then let us celebrate with a feast,
because this son of mine was dead,
and has come to life again;
he was lost, and has been found.’

If you ask Sister Kathleen, she will certainly tell you that God is a prodigal father, just like the father in Jesus’ parable.

But she will tell you much more than this.

Sister Kate will tell you that we are all to be prodigal with our love. We are to be extravagantly wasteful to the point of being reckless with those who constantly need to be loved.

And, in keeping with Sister Kate’s practical wisdom, let us be prodigal in our love when those who need it deserve it the least.

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Hace muchos años, conocí a una monja, muy anciana, la hermana Catalina. Fue una gran mujer en varios sentidos. La hermana Catalina había dado la vuelta a la manzana más de una vez y tenía los dos pies en el suelo. Cuando la conocí, ella había estado enseñando tercer grado por más de treinta años. A lo largo de los años, había cultivado la virtud de la sabiduría práctica, lo que los antiguos griegos llamaban *phronesis*.

Un día, la hermana Catalina me dijo algo que todos haríamos bien en recordar. Reflexionando sobre su experiencia con niños de tercer grado, dijo ella a mi:

Los niños siempre necesitan amor.
Y necesitan más el amor cuando menos lo merecen.

Esta es una gran enseñanza. Es una gran enseñanza porque no es simplemente una verdad sobre los niños. Todos necesitamos amor y lo necesitamos más cuando menos lo merecemos.

Me gusta mucho la enseñanza de la hermana Catalina. No está hablando de justicia (lo que nosotros merecemos). Ella está hablando de nuestras necesidades humanas, no solamente sobre lo que merecemos.

La enseñanza de la hermana Catalina expresa el alma de la parábola de “el hijo pródigo.”

Un hombre tenía dos hijos, y el hijo menor dijo a su padre:
“Padre, dame la parte de tu patrimonio que me corresponde”.

Este hijo menor ciertamente no merece lo que está exigiendo. De hecho, estoy seguro de que el hijo mayor diría que su hermano estaba siendo descarado.

Tú conoces el resto de la historia. El hijo menor toma lo que no se merece y él viaja a un país extranjero. Dilapida su herencia en una vida de disipación y acaba trabajando como jornalero, alimentando cerdos.

Eventualmente, el hijo menor recupera el sentido de lo que ha hecho. Pero, fíjenles su manera de pensar: se da cuenta de lo poco que el merece el amor de su padre.

¿Cuántos de los trabajadores contratados por mi padre tener más que suficiente comida para comer, pero aquí estoy yo, muriéndome de hambre.
Me levantaré e iré a mi padre y le diré:
“Padre, he pecado contra el cielo y contra ti.
Ya no merezco ser llamado hijo tuyo;
trátame como tratarías a uno de tus jornaleros”.

Confío en que todos Uds. sepan lo que sucede cuando el hijo menor llega a casa.

Mientras aún estaba lejos,
su padre lo vio,
y se llenó de compasión.
Corrió hacia su hijo, lo abrazó y lo besó.

Entonces el padre da órdenes a sus siervos,

“Trae rápidamente la túnica más fina y vístela;
ponle un anillo en el dedo y sandalias en los pies.
Toma el becerro engordado y mávalo.
Entonces celebremos con una fiesta,
porque este hijo mío estaba muerto,
y ha vuelto a la vida;
estaba perdido y ha sido encontrado.

Hoy, recomiendo leer esta parábola a la luz de la
sabiduría práctica de la hermana Catarina.

Los niños siempre necesitan amor.
Y necesitan más el amor cuando menos lo merecen.

Esto es lo que está haciendo el padre en la historia. Está amando a su
hijo, de una manera especialmente tierna y generosa, con cariño,
cuando su hijo merece ser amado menos.

Durante dos mil años, hemos llamado a esta historia de Jesús
“La parábola del hijo pródigo”. La palabra "pródigo"
significa "extravagantemente derrochador hasta el punto de
ser imprudente". Sin duda, el hijo menor en esta historia es pródigo. Es
un despilfarro extravagante de su inherencia hasta el punto de ser
imprudente.

Pero podríamos llamar a esta historia “la parábola del padre pródigo”.
Como Jesús cuenta su historia, el padre es pródigo tan pródigo como su
hijo menor. El padre es "extravagantemente derrochador hasta el punto
de ser imprudente"; solo el padre es imprudente con su amor por su hijo
que no se lo merece.

“Trae rápidamente la túnica más fina y vístela;
ponle un anillo en el dedo y sandalias en los pies.
Toma el becerro engordado y mávalo.
Entonces celebremos con una fiesta,
porque este hijo mío estaba muerto,
y ha vuelto a la vida;
estaba perdido y ha sido encontrado.

Si les preguntan a la hermana Catalina, seguramente les dirá que Dios
es un padre pródigo, como el padre de la parábola de Jesús.

Pero ella te dirá mucho más que esto.

Sor Catalina les dirá que todos debemos ser pródigos con nuestro amor. Debemos ser extravagantemente derrochadores hasta el punto de ser imprudentes con aquellos que constantemente necesitan ser amados.

Y, de acuerdo con la sabiduría práctica de la hermana Catalina, que seamos pródigos con nuestro amor cuando aquellos que lo necesitan lo merecen lo menos.

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?