

HOMILY FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
Sunday, 11 December 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: 7

Reading 1 Is 35:1-6a, 10

The desert and the parched land will exult;
the steppe will rejoice and bloom.
They will bloom with abundant flowers,
and rejoice with joyful song.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to them,
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the LORD,
the splendor of our God.
Strengthen the hands that are feeble,
make firm the knees that are weak,
say to those whose hearts are frightened:
Be strong, fear not!
Here is your God,
he comes with vindication;
with divine recompense
he comes to save you.
Then will the eyes of the blind be opened,
the ears of the deaf be cleared;
then will the lame leap like a stag,
then the tongue of the mute will sing.

Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return
and enter Zion singing,
crowned with everlasting joy;
they will meet with joy and gladness,
sorrow and mourning will flee.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10.

R. (cf. Is 35:4) Lord, come and save us.

or:

R. Alleluia.

The LORD God keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets captives free.

R. Lord, come and save us.

or:

R. Alleluia.

The LORD gives sight to the blind;
the LORD raises up those who were bowed down.

The LORD loves the just;
the LORD protects strangers.

R. Lord, come and save us.

or:

R. Alleluia.

The fatherless and the widow he sustains,
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.

The LORD shall reign forever;
your God, O Zion, through all generations.

R. Lord, come and save us.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Reading 2 Jas 5:7-10

Be patient, brothers and sisters,
until the coming of the Lord.

See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth,
being patient with it

until it receives the early and the late rains.

You too must be patient.

Make your hearts firm,
because the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another,
that you may not be judged.

Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates.

Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters,
the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Alleluia Is 61:1 (cited in Lk 4:18)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mt 11:2-11

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ,
he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question,

"Are you the one who is to come,
or should we look for another?"

Jesus said to them in reply,

"Go and tell John what you hear and see:

the blind regain their sight,

the lame walk,

lepers are cleansed,

the deaf hear,

the dead are raised,

and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.

And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

As they were going off,

Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John,

"What did you go out to the desert to see?

A reed swayed by the wind?

Then what did you go out to see?

Someone dressed in fine clothing?

Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces.

Then why did you go out? To see a prophet?

Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

This is the one about whom it is written:

Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;

he will prepare your way before you.

Amen, I say to you,

among those born of women

there has been none greater than John the Baptist;

yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Dear Reader - Again, I ask your patience. This homily is another translation from Spanish into English. I gave it at the vigil mass for Our Lady of Guadalupe on Sunday night, 11 December. Some of you may not be familiar with Our Lady of Guadalupe. I think you will get the point.

Tonight, we celebrate the Solemnity of Our Lady of Guadalupe. *La Virgencita* has made her way through the desert, crossing the border, to be with us here in Sonoma. Father Jojo, our pastor, has

built a *grotto* on the property with the image of *La Morinita* made out of tiles. The image is beautiful - and all the more beautiful when our people are sitting on the benches Father Jojo has provided. I am always happy to see the people of our parish praying, telling stories, and maybe indulging in a little gossip at times.



A few weeks back, my phone rang. It was a fellow I know who has recently arrived in Sonoma from Venezuela. Let's call him Miguel. He's young (late twenties?) and very eager to find work.

My friend assures me he will do anything and if you know of anyone hiring, call me right away.

Some months ago, Miguel fled his little town in Venezuela. A man can no longer support his family growing corn in this town. Drug gangs (*narcotraficantes*) have pretty much taken over. My friend was concerned for his young wife and two little children. So, he and his family left their town and made their way into Columbia. There, he left his wife and kids in a shelter run by the local

Catholic diocese and made his arduous way up to Sonoma. He is staying with a cousin.

Miguel left his wife and kids in Columbia because he was afraid to let them try to cross the Darién Gap. This is a stretch of jungle, swamps and mountains that creates a formidable barrier between Columbia and Panama. The "gap" refers to the fact that the terrain is so difficult that the Pan-American Highway was not able to be built there. Now, there are gangs preying on people who are desperate, like Miguel. Women, of course, are especially in danger.

Talking to my Miguel on the phone, I told him to meet me at Saint Leo's, by the grotto of Our Lady of Guadalupe. We sat and chatted for a few minutes. Miguel was very distressed. Then, looking up at the image of *Nuestra Señora*, my friend said,

I saw her a lot as I made my way through Mexico.
¿She is here in the United States too?

Yes, she has come here to be with us on this side of the border. Then I explained to Miguel that one of Guadalupe's titles is "Mother of All the Americas."

¿*Todas las Americas?*
¿Padre, then she will protect my family in Colombia?

Almost five centuries ago, Guadalupe appeared to a humble Indian in colonial Mexico. Juan Diego could not imagine why a Lady of such dignity would choose an illiterate peasant to preach the Gospel to the traumatized people of New Spain.

Now, Guadalupe has come to Sonoma. With hands folded in prayer, she looks serenely down on Miguel and me as we sit before her. And with Miguel, I try to remember what she said to Juan Diego when he protested his unworthiness.

*Listen and understand, my littlest son, let nothing frighten
and afflict you or trouble your heart ...
Am I not here, I, who am your mother?*

Please pray for Miguel. He is very worried about his family. Pray that he gets a job. Pray for his wife and his two little children in

Columbia. Pray for all those who are trying to find their way through the Darién Gap.

But most of all, when you offer these prayers, remember that Our Lady of Guadalupe, who appeared to her beloved Juan Diego, a humble man who counted for nothing in New Spain, has appeared to Miguel, a Venezuelan, and me, a *Norteño*, here in Sonoma.

For Our Lady of Guadalupe, truly, is Mother of All the Americas.

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Celebramos esta noche la Solemnidad de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. La Virgencita ha hecho su camino a través del desierto, cruzando la frontera, para estar con nosotros aquí en Sonoma. La imagen de Nuestra Señora, afuera la iglesia, es hermosa, y aún más hermosa cuando nuestra gente está sentada en los bancos que ha proporcionado el Padre Jojo. Siempre estoy feliz de ver a la gente de nuestra parroquia orando, contando historias y tal vez disfrutando de un poco de chisme a veces.

Hace unas semanas sonó mi teléfono. Era mi compañero que llegó recientemente a Sonoma desde Venezuela. Llamémosle Miguel. Es joven (¿veintiocho años?) y está ansioso por encontrar trabajo.

Mi amigo me asegura que hará cualquier cosa.

Hace algunos meses, Miguel huyó de su pueblo en Venezuela. Un hombre ya no puede mantener a su familia cultivando maíz en este pueblo. Las bandas de narcotraficantes prácticamente se han apoderado. Mi amigo estaba preocupado por su esposa (muy joven, ella) y sus dos hijos pequeños. Así que él y su familia abandonaron su ciudad y se dirigieron a Columbia. Allí, dejó a su esposa e hijos en un refugio administrado por la diócesis católica local y emprendió su arduo viaje hasta Sonoma. Hoy, Miguel vive con un primo.

Miguel dejó a su esposa e hijos en Colombia porque tenía miedo cruzar el Tapón del Darién con su familia. Este es un tramo de selva, pantanos y montañas que forma una formidable barrera

entre Colombia y Panamá. El “tapón” se refiere a que el terreno es tan difícil que no se pudo construir allí la Carretera Panamericana. Y ahora, hay bandas que se aprovechan de la gente que está desesperada, como mi amigo Miguel. Las mujeres, por supuesto, están especialmente en peligro.

Hablando con Miguel por teléfono, le dije que nos encontraríamos en San Leo, bajo la imagen de Nuestra Señora. Nos sentamos y charlamos durante unos minutos. Miguel está muy angustiado. Entonces, mirando la imagen de Nuestra Señora, mi amigo dijo:

Ella esta en todas partes en México. ¿Ella también está aquí en los Estados Unidos?

Sí, ella ha venido aquí para estar con nosotros en este lado de la frontera. Luego le expliqué a Miguel que uno de los títulos de Guadalupe es “Madre de todas las Américas”.

¿Todas las Américas?
Padre, ¿entonces ella puede proteger a mi familia en Colombia?

Hace casi cinco siglos, la Virgen Morena se apareció a un hombre indígena en Nueva España. Juan Diego no podía imaginar por qué una Señora de tanta dignidad ha escogido un humilde de la tierra, un campesino analfabeto, por proclamar el Evangelio a la gente en el Nuevo Mundo.

Ahora, Guadalupe ha venido a Sonoma. Con las manos juntas en oración, nos mira serenamente a Miguel y a mí mientras nos sentamos frente a ella. Y sentado con Miguel yo trato de recordar lo que le dijo a Juan Diego cuando protestó por su indignidad.

No se entristezca tu corazón...
¿Acaso no estoy yo aquí, que soy tu Madre?

Por favor, todos, que ofrecen oraciones por Miguel. El está muy preocupado por su familia. Rueguen al Señor para que consiga un trabajo. Rueguen por su esposa y sus dos hijos pequeños en Columbia. Rueguen por todos aquellos que están tratando de encontrar su camino a través del Tapón del Darién.

Pero sobre todo, cuando ofrezcan estas oraciones, recuerdan que Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, que se apareció a su hijo

Juan Diego, un hombre humilde y no de importancia en la Nueva España, se nos ha aparecido a Miguel, un venezolano, y a mí, un norteco, aquí en Sonoma.

Porque Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, la Virgen de Tepeyac, en verdad, es Madre de todas las Américas.

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?