

HOMILY FOR THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD  
12 January 2025

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Part One: the readings for the day  
Part Two: reflections on the readings  
Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY  
Lectionary: 21

Reading I Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Thus says the LORD:

Here is my servant whom I uphold,  
my chosen one with whom I am pleased,  
upon whom I have put my spirit;  
he shall bring forth justice to the nations,  
not crying out, not shouting,  
not making his voice heard in the street.  
A bruised reed he shall not break,  
and a smoldering wick he shall not quench,  
until he establishes justice on the earth;  
the coastlands will wait for his teaching.

I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice,  
I have grasped you by the hand;  
I formed you, and set you  
as a covenant of the people,  
a light for the nations,  
to open the eyes of the blind,  
to bring out prisoners from confinement,  
and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10

R. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

Give to the LORD, you sons of God,  
give to the LORD glory and praise,  
Give to the LORD the glory due his name;  
adore the LORD in holy attire.

R. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters,  
the LORD, over vast waters.

The voice of the LORD is mighty;  
the voice of the LORD is majestic.

R. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

The God of glory thunders,  
and in his temple all say, "Glory!"  
The LORD is enthroned above the flood;  
the LORD is enthroned as king forever.

R. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

Beloved:

The grace of God has appeared, saving all  
and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires  
and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age,  
as we await the blessed hope,  
the appearance of the glory of our great God  
and savior Jesus Christ,  
who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness  
and to cleanse for himself a people as his own,  
eager to do what is good.

When the kindness and generous love  
of God our savior appeared,  
not because of any righteous deeds we had done  
but because of his mercy,  
He saved us through the bath of rebirth  
and renewal by the Holy Spirit,  
whom he richly poured out on us  
through Jesus Christ our savior,  
so that we might be justified by his grace  
and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Alleluia Cf. Mark 9:7

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The heavens were opened and the voice of the Father  
thundered:

This is my beloved Son, listen to him.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

The people were filled with expectation,  
and all were asking in their hearts  
whether John might be the Christ.  
John answered them all, saying,  
"I am baptizing you with water,  
but one mightier than I is coming.  
I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals.  
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

After all the people had been baptized  
and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying,  
heaven was opened  
and the Holy Spirit descended upon him  
in bodily form like a dove.  
And a voice came from heaven,  
"You are my beloved Son;  
with you I am well pleased."  
Caravans of camels shall fill you,  
dromedaries from Midian and Ephah;  
all from Sheba shall come  
bearing gold and frankincense,  
and proclaiming the praises of the LORD.

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READING

Note to reader: this homily was prepared for Spanish speaking members of our community at Saint Leo's Church.

The other day, someone asked me an innocent question.

"Padre, when did you decide to become a priest?"

And I gave them a truthful answer:

"This morning, when I got out of bed."

I have a spiritual practice, which you might find helpful, so I will share it with you.

When I get out of bed in the morning and set my feet on the floor, I ask myself a question:

“Do I really want to be a priest today?”

This is serious question. I am not being frivolous when I do this. When I ask myself this question, I try to think about the people I’m going to meet during the day. Do I really want to be a priest for these people? Do I want to find compassion in my heart for them?

In truth, some mornings, as I get out of bed and think about what I have to do for the day, my answer to this question is not always enthusiastic. I even have to confess that, sometimes, I’m not enthusiastic at all. When this happens, I tell myself to get over it and get to work. Happily, this has not happened very often over the last 48 years.

This is a spiritual exercise that I practice. I am offering it to you in the hope that this practice might be helpful to you as well.

Of course, I am not suggesting that you should ask yourself if you want to be a priest when you get up in the morning. Instead, let me suggest that you ask yourself something more basic. When you rise in the morning, ask yourself:

“Do I really want to be baptized today?”

This is an excellent question for us all, myself included. It is an especially important question for those of us who were baptized as infants. I suppose it is only natural that, from time to time, we take our baptism for granted.

In fact, however, our baptism is our vocation. And we should never take this for granted. The way we answer this question - do I really want to be baptized today? - should alter the way we live our lives.

In the second reading today, the Letter to Titus, we read,

Beloved:

The grace of God has appeared, saving all  
and training us to reject godless ways  
and worldly desires  
and to live temperately, justly,  
and devoutly in this age,  
as we await the blessed hope,  
the appearance of the glory of our great God  
and savior Jesus Christ.

Yes, the grace of God has appeared within the world. Like Jesus, kneeling before John the Baptist in the Jordan River for His baptism, the Holy Spirit has been poured out on us, "training" us to "reject godless ways and worldly desires."

Everyday, the Spirit is inviting us to live "temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age," freed at last from the futility and lack of purpose that haunts so many people these days.

So, when did you decide you really want to be baptized? I think in the morning, when we get out of bed, is a good time to answer this question.

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Hace tiempo, alguien me hizo una pregunta inocente.

"Padre, ¿cuándo decidió hacerse sacerdote?"

Y le di una respuesta sincera:

"Esta mañana, cuando me levanté de la cama".

Tengo una práctica espiritual utiliza. Permíteme compartirla con Uds.

Cuando me levanto de la cama por la mañana y pongo los pies en el suelo, me hago una pregunta:

"¿Realmente quiero ser sacerdote hoy?"

Esta es una pregunta seria. No estoy frívolo cuando hago esto. Cuando me hago esta pregunta, trato de pensar en las personas que voy a encontrar durante el día.

¿Realmente quiero servir como sacerdote a estas personas? ¿Quiero encontrar la compasión que necesitare por estas personas?

En verdad, algunas mañanas, cuando me levanto de la cama y pienso en lo que tengo que hacer durante el día, mi respuesta a esta pregunta no siempre es entusiasta. Cuando esto sucede, recuerdo palabras de me papa:

“Pisar el embrague y ponerse la marcha.”

Afortunadamente, esto no ha sucedido muy a menudo en los últimos 48 años.

Este es un ejercicio espiritual que practico. Lo ofrezco a Uds. con la esperanza de que esta práctica también sea útil.

Pero, para Uds., por su puesto, la pregunta es diferente y mas básica. Cuando te levantes por la mañana, pregúntate:

“¿Realmente quiero ser bautizado hoy?”

Esta es una excelente pregunta para todos nosotros, incluido yo. Es una pregunta especialmente importante para aquellos de nosotros que fuimos bautizados cuando éramos infantes. Supongo que es natural que, de vez en cuando, demos por sentado nuestro bautismo.

De hecho, sin embargo, nuestro bautismo es nuestra vocación. Y nunca deberíamos darlo por sentado. La manera en que respondamos a esta pregunta - ¿realmente quiero ser bautizado hoy? - debería cambiar la manera en que vivimos nuestras vidas.

En la segunda lectura de hoy, la Carta a Tito, leemos:

Querido hermano: La gracia de Dios se ha manifestado para salvar a todos los hombres y nos ha enseñado a renunciar a la vida sin religión y a los deseos mundanos, para que vivamos, ya desde ahora, de una manera sobria, justa y fiel a Dios, en

espera de la gloriosa venida del gran Dios y Salvador, Cristo Jesús, nuestra esperanza.

Sí, la gracia de Dios se ha manifestado en el mundo. Como Jesús, arrodillándose ante Juan el Bautista en el río Jordán para su bautismo, el Espíritu Santo ha sido derramado sobre nosotros, "enseñándonos" a renunciar a "la vida sin religión y a los deseos mundanos, para que vivamos, ya desde ahora, de una manera sobria, justa y fiel a Dios."

Día por día, el Espíritu nos invita a vivir "con templanza, justicia y piedad en este siglo", liberados por fin de la futilidad y la falta de propósito que acecha a tanta gente en el mundo de hoy.

Entonces, ¿cuándo decidiste que realmente querías ser una persona bautizada? Creo que por la mañana, cuando nos levantamos de la cama, es un buen momento responder a esta pregunta.

### 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 homily 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?