

HOMILY FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT  
Sunday, 12 March 2023

- 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: 28

Reading I Ex 17:3-7

In those days, in their thirst for water,  
the people grumbled against Moses,  
saying, "Why did you ever make us leave Egypt?  
Was it just to have us die here of thirst  
with our children and our livestock?"  
So Moses cried out to the LORD,  
"What shall I do with this people?  
a little more and they will stone me!"  
The LORD answered Moses,  
"Go over there in front of the people,  
along with some of the elders of Israel,  
holding in your hand, as you go,  
the staff with which you struck the river.  
I will be standing there in front of you on the rock in Horeb.  
Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it  
for the people to drink."  
This Moses did, in the presence of the elders of Israel.  
The place was called Massah and Meribah,  
because the Israelites quarreled there  
and tested the LORD, saying,  
"Is the LORD in our midst or not?"

Responsorial Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

R. (8) If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.  
Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;  
let us acclaim the Rock of our salvation.  
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us joyfully sing psalms to him.  
R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.  
Come, let us bow down in worship;  
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.

For he is our God,  
and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.  
R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.  
Oh, that today you would hear his voice:  
"Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,  
as in the day of Massah in the desert,  
Where your fathers tempted me;  
they tested me though they had seen my works."  
R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Reading II Rom 5:1-2, 5-8

Brothers and sisters:  
Since we have been justified by faith,  
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
through whom we have gained access by faith  
to this grace in which we stand,  
and we boast in hope of the glory of God.  
And hope does not disappoint,  
because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts  
through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.  
For Christ, while we were still helpless,  
died at the appointed time for the ungodly.  
Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person,  
though perhaps for a good person one might even find  
courage to die.  
But God proves his love for us  
in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

Verse Before the Gospel Cf. Jn 4:42, 15

Lord, you are truly the Savior of the world;  
give me living water, that I may never thirst again.

Gospel Jn 4:5-42

Jesus came to a town of Samaria called Sychar,  
near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.  
Jacob's well was there.  
Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well.  
It was about noon.  
A woman of Samaria came to draw water.  
Jesus said to her,  
"Give me a drink."  
His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.  
The Samaritan woman said to him,  
"How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"

– For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.  
Jesus answered and said to her,  
“If you knew the gift of God  
and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’  
you would have asked him  
and he would have given you living water.”  
The woman said to him,  
“Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep;  
where then can you get this living water?  
Are you greater than our father Jacob,  
who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself  
with his children and his flocks?”  
Jesus answered and said to her,  
“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again;  
but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst;  
the water I shall give will become in him  
a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”  
The woman said to him,  
“Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty  
or have to keep coming here to draw water.”  
Jesus said to her,  
“Go call your husband and come back.”  
The woman answered and said to him,  
“I do not have a husband.”  
Jesus answered her,  
“You are right in saying, ‘I do not have a husband.’  
For you have had five husbands,  
and the one you have now is not your husband.  
What you have said is true.”  
The woman said to him,  
“Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.  
Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain;  
but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”  
Jesus said to her,  
“Believe me, woman, the hour is coming  
when you will worship the Father  
neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.  
You people worship what you do not understand;  
we worship what we understand,  
because salvation is from the Jews.  
But the hour is coming, and is now here,  
when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and  
truth;  
and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him.

God is Spirit, and those who worship him  
must worship in Spirit and truth."  
The woman said to him,  
"I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ;  
when he comes, he will tell us everything."  
Jesus said to her,  
"I am he, the one speaking with you."  
At that moment his disciples returned,  
and were amazed that he was talking with a woman,  
but still no one said, "What are you looking for?"  
or "Why are you talking with her?"  
The woman left her water jar  
and went into the town and said to the people,  
"Come see a man who told me everything I have done.  
Could he possibly be the Christ?"  
They went out of the town and came to him.  
Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat."  
But he said to them,  
"I have food to eat of which you do not know."  
So the disciples said to one another,  
"Could someone have brought him something to eat?"  
Jesus said to them,  
"My food is to do the will of the one who sent me  
and to finish his work.  
Do you not say, 'In four months the harvest will be here'?  
I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest.  
The reaper is already receiving payment  
and gathering crops for eternal life,  
so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together.  
For here the saying is verified that 'One sows and another  
reaps.'  
I sent you to reap what you have not worked for;  
others have done the work,  
and you are sharing the fruits of their work."  
Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him  
because of the word of the woman who testified,  
"He told me everything I have done."  
When the Samaritans came to him,  
they invited him to stay with them;  
and he stayed there two days.  
Many more began to believe in him because of his word,  
and they said to the woman,  
"We no longer believe because of your word;

for we have heard for ourselves,  
and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.”

## PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

The first reading for today’s mass is one of the great stories in the Torah. This is so for many reasons. The incident at Massah and Meribah reveals much about the journey of faith that began with the call of Abraham (the first reading last week).

It is also a great story because it has much to teach us about how difficult it can be to be “on the road together” in a synodal Church.

To explain what I mean, let’s look at the story.

It’s taken from the Book of Exodus. The Hebrew people have been led out of the slavery of Egypt into the freedom of the desert. They have witnessed the drama of the ten plagues and passed through the towering walls of water in the parting of the Red Sea. The Hebrew people have witnessed the great acts of God - the *magnalia dei*, as Medieval theologians used to say.

Now comes the hard part: the people are making their way through the desert. They are thirsty and not happy with Moses’ leadership.

In those days, in their thirst for water,  
the people grumbled against Moses,  
saying, “Why did you ever make us leave Egypt?  
Was it just to have us die here of thirst  
with our children and our livestock?”

The story is carefully crafted. Moses, they ask, “why did you ever make us leave Egypt?” I think we should interpret this as an implicit accusation against God. Back in Egypt, the people cried out to heaven, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham. With all the drama of the *magnalia*, God led the people out of the slavery of Egypt into the freedom of the desert. Then, by quarrelling with Moses, the people are accusing God of abandoning them in the desert to die of thirst.

This wonderful story reveals much about what Pope Francis means when he says that we are a “synodal Church.”

First, he means that we are a people of faith who are “on the road together.” Like the Hebrew people out in the desert at Massah and Meribah, we have witnessed the *magnalia dei*. Time and again, throughout the long history of the Church, we have cried out to God and God has remembered the promise he made to Abraham. God has not abandoned us.

But Pope Francis means something more when he asks us to reflect on the “synodality” of the Church. The Pope is calling us to recognize a difficult truth about ourselves and this God who refuses to abandon us.

Today, we are not enslaved by Pharoah. We are enslaved by sin. What do I mean by “sin”? We vigorously defend an economy that does not serve the common good. We prefer to live like wolves preying on sheep. We eagerly push aside solidarity with our fellow human beings so that we can cling to power and privilege. We work to marginalize those who are weak and those who would challenge our privileges. We are driving human civilization off the cliff of climate change.

And the Good News is that God will not abandon us. But the Good News comes with some fine print that is difficult. Truly, God has led us out of Egypt. But we are not yet in the Promised Land. We are, like the Hebrew people of old, on a sojourn in the desert longing for the Promised Land.

This means that we are “on the road together” and, in our thirst and in our despair, I am not surprised that we are tempted to say that God has led us all this way only to abandon us to a death in the desert. God is treacherous and not to be trusted.

This is why we need to reflect on water during our Lenten sojourn and as we reflect on the “synodality” of the Church. Remember how the incident at Massah and Meribah ends:

So Moses cried out to the LORD,  
“What shall I do with this people?  
a little more and they will stone me!”  
The LORD answered Moses,  
“Go over there in front of the people,

along with some of the elders of Israel,  
holding in your hand, as you go,  
the staff with which you struck the river.  
I will be standing there in front of you  
on the rock in Horeb. Strike the rock,  
and the water will flow from it  
for the people to drink.”

The God of Abraham is faithful to his promise never to abandon his people. In our thirst, he provides us with water in the desert.

We are a synodal Church, on the road together. I am not surprised that we complain about how difficult it is to sojourn in the desert. I am not surprised that we quarrel with one another. I am not a bit surprised that nasty things are being said about Pope Francis by people who are, if I may say so, of little faith. The complaints against Pope Francis are much like the Hebrew people quarreling with Moses. And like the outcry against Moses, the Pope’s critics are really despairing of the God.

The place was called Massah and Meribah,  
because the Israelites quarreled there  
and tested the LORD, saying,  
“Is the LORD in our midst or not?”

Yes, at last – here is a very good question for us: Is the Lord God – the God who promised not to abandon our forefather Abraham – in our midst or not? A synodal Church needs to ask this question again and again and then give thanks to God when water begins to flow from the rock onto the parched earth of the desert.

### 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?