

**HOMILY FOR THE 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent**  
Sunday, 13 December 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: 8

**Reading 1 [IS 61:1-2A, 10-11](#)**

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,  
to heal the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and release to the prisoners,  
to announce a year of favor from the LORD  
and a day of vindication by our God.

I rejoice heartily in the LORD,  
in my God is the joy of my soul;  
for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation  
and wrapped me in a mantle of justice,  
like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem,  
like a bride bedecked with her jewels.  
As the earth brings forth its plants,  
and a garden makes its growth spring up,  
so will the Lord GOD make justice and praise  
spring up before all the nations.

**Responsorial Psalm [LK 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54.](#)**

R. (Is 61:10b) **My soul rejoices in my God.**  
My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked upon his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed:  
R. **My soul rejoices in my God.**  
the Almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his Name.  
He has mercy on those who fear him

in every generation.

**R. My soul rejoices in my God.**

He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel  
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

**R. My soul rejoices in my God.**

**Reading 2** [1 THES 5:16-24](#)

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing.

In all circumstances give thanks,  
for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

Do not quench the Spirit.

Do not despise prophetic utterances.

Test everything; retain what is good.

Refrain from every kind of evil.

May the God of peace make you perfectly holy  
and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body,  
be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls you is faithful,  
and he will also accomplish it.

**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** [JN 1:6-8, 19-28](#)

A man named John was sent from God.

He came for testimony, to testify to the light,  
so that all might believe through him.

He was not the light,  
but came to testify to the light.

And this is the testimony of John.

When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests  
and Levites to him  
to ask him, "Who are you?"

He admitted and did not deny it,  
but admitted, "I am not the Christ."  
So they asked him,  
"What are you then? Are you Elijah?"  
And he said, "I am not."  
"Are you the Prophet?"  
He answered, "No."  
So they said to him,  
"Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us?  
What do you have to say for yourself?"  
He said:  
"I am *the voice of one crying out in the desert,*  
*'make straight the way of the Lord,'*"  
as Isaiah the prophet said."  
Some Pharisees were also sent.  
They asked him,  
"Why then do you baptize  
if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?"  
John answered them,  
"I baptize with water;  
but there is one among you whom you do not recognize,  
the one who is coming after me,  
whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."  
This happened in Bethany across the Jordan,  
where John was baptizing.

## **PART TWO: A REFLECTION ON OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE**

Normally on the night of 11 December, we gather at Saint Leo's for mass. It is the vigil of the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

A ten-piece Mariachi begins the procession. The guys in the Mariachi know just how to honor *Nuestra Señora*. After they process to the altar, they don't turn around and look at all of us in the pews as if we were their audience. Instead, they look up to the image of Guadalupe, high above the altar and, all together, we sing the old hymns dedicated to *La Virgincita*, the *patrona national* of Mexico and "The Mother of all the Americas."

After mass, women go to the kitchen to serve the tamales and hot chocolate (the best Mexican chocolate of course). It's a great night. The whole church is filled with the Church – little kids dressed up in traditional garb; old grandmothers (maybe some great-grandmothers) looking elegant and dignified with their shawls draped over their braided gray hair; some of the men wear cowboy hats. The moms and dads are there: the men that work in the vineyards and the women who clean homes are there. Father Jojo is there as well – he's as delighted as anyone in

the church because this ever-so-Mexican fiesta reminds him of celebrations in his local parish back in India. The mere thought of Father Jojo’s happiness makes me happy as well.

And, of course, I am there too – so grateful to *Nuestra Señora* that she has claimed me as one of her children.

Normally, after mass, I go about the church and greet everyone by giving them a holy card bearing the famous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

I’m sure you’ve seen it.



After mass, these cards will go into bibles and prayerbooks. They are taped to dashboards of pickup trucks or on the sides of cash registers. They also show up the following November on home-altars for the Day of the Dead (2 November is the Feast of all Souls. (Saint Leo’s has lots of Mexican women who will be happy to show you how to build a lovely altar to honor your deceased loved ones at home next November).

This year, sadly, I will not be greeting the people. My doctors don't want me saying mass because of COVID. So, the holy cards with Guadalupe's image are resting by my laptop as I write this homily for you.

Passing out the holy cards with the image of *Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe* has a special meaning for me which I want to share with you. The cards remind me of a friend who means the world to me. My friend has taught me much about faith in God, about fidelity to family and what it means to be a beloved child of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

My friend doesn't live in Sonoma or even in Sonoma County. In fact, he lives far from our Valley. He has lived in the United States for about twenty years, but he was born on a little family farm in Mexico. NAFTA drove the off the farm and, with no future in his home village, my friend came to California looking for work.

He works really hard and has done well for himself. He is a handyman who can do just about anything. Since he is here on "this side" (as we say in Spanish) and without papers, I will call my friend "Juaquin."

Some twenty years ago, Juaquin kissed his mom goodbye and set out for the USA thinking that he would never see her again. Irish immigrants used to tell similar stories about saying goodbye to families in places like Claire and Mayo, Cork and Kerry, as they set of for New York and Boston.

But things turned out differently for Juaquin.

After many years in the United States, members of a drug syndicate in Mexico kidnapped Juaquin's aged mother and held her for ransom. The gang demanded \$30,000 to release Juaquin's mom. His sister called Juaquin from Mexico with the news. No one in Juaquin's family had this kind of money. Juaquin didn't either. This is an enormous sum for a dispossessed farming family in rural Mexico and for a handyman with no Social Security number and a family to support in California.

Juaquin did what he had to do. He scraped together as much money as he could and went back across the border to Mexico. He drove his pickup into some forlorn canyon in southern Arizona and then went on foot across the desert.

Juaquin was crossing the border illegally once again, only this time, he was headed south.

I don't know the details. The gang members were paid something. Maybe they got the whole \$30,000. I do know that Juaquin got his mother back, unharmed.

I also know this: when Juaquin told me about his plan to return to Mexico to ransom his mom, I told him to be careful. I told him things that seem almost silly in retrospect

I told him that the desert is dangerous.

Si Padre.

I told him that the thugs who are holding your mom are demons.

Si Padre.

I told him that, whatever happens in Mexico, you will have to come North again, across the desert, to be with your wife and kids here in California.

Si Padre.

And then, Juaquin gave me a smile full of tenderness and serenity and said,

But Padre, I will not be traveling alone.

Juaquin took out his wallet and produced a carefully folded piece of paper. It was a holy card with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on it.

*La Virgencita* will be with me, Padre.

Saturday was 12 December, the feast of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*. There is so much to learn from our Mexican neighbors regarding their devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. There is the story of her appearance to Juan Diego, a lowly Indian. She spoke to him not in Spanish, the language of the *conquistadores*, but in Nahuatl, the language of the vanquished Indians.

She has remained with the vanquished ever since.

*La Virgencita* (as Juaquin calls her) appeared in Mexico, almost five centuries ago with a message that spoke directly to the Indian and the Spaniard, the vanquished and the *conquistador*.

Look into the face on the image and see that Guadalupe is neither an Indian nor a Spaniard. She is a *mestiza* – the new humanity that has come out of the marriage of vanquished and *conquistador*.

Guadalupe is the first *mestiza* and therefore the first Mexican. I think we can say that she is the first American as well – by “American,” I mean a person originating in the Western Hemisphere. Remember, Guadalupe appeared almost a century before any Englishman set foot in Virginia.

Guadalupe is also a revelation from God about our future. The image is a sign indicating that all that divides us is being overcome by the maternal love of God.

This is because Guadalupe crosses borders.

In the sixteenth century, she crossed the border that separated the Indian from the Spaniard in New Spain. Her image proclaims the ultimate reconciliation of the vanquished Indian and the *conquistador* that colonized them. In transgressing this border, Guadalupe gave birth to Mexico.

Guadalupe has crossed the US-Mexican border as well. She came across the border with my friend Juakin when he came North in search of work after saying goodbye to his mother for what he thought was the last time.

Guadalupe crossed that same border when Juakin headed back into Mexico to ransom his mother from her tormentors. And she accompanied him when Juakin found his way across the border once again to be reunited with his wife and children here in California.

Guadalupe crosses borders and, in doing so, heals divisions. As such, she is a sign, not only for Mexico and its long-suffering people. *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is a sign for the people of the United States as well. The divisions that separate us – the racial strife, the failure of our economy to provide for the common good and our broken politics – are being overcome by the maternal love of God.

Look into the face miraculously imprinted on Juan Diego's *tilma*. There you will see my friend Juakin's face and the face of his kidnaped mother. Look closely, and you will see the faces of those who kidnaped Juakin's mom as well.

Look into the face of Our Lady of Guadalupe. There you will see the faces of the little kids slurping their hot chocolate and singing to *La Virgincita* with the Mariachi on the night of 11 December at Saint Leo's. You will see the faces of all the grandmas and grandpas.

Look closely and you will see Father Jojo's face as well. I have no doubt whatsoever that Guadalupe is crossing the border that separates the wonder that is India and the Sonoma Valley.

Let's be patient as we wait until next December. On the evening of the eleventh, at the vigil mass for Our Lady of Guadalupe, I will have a holy card for you with the image of *La Virgincita*. Don't worry if you don't speak Spanish. Just come.

The church that night will be filled with the Church.

The Mariachi will lead us in singing all the old hymns, and, after mass, there will be hot chocolate and tamales. And together with *La Virgincita*, *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, Mother of All the Americas, the first Mexican and even the first American, we will cross borders, trusting in God's maternal love which has no border.

*Que viva la Virgincita.*

### **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?