

HOMILY FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 13 February 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: 78

Reading I Jer 17:5-8

Thus says the LORD:

Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings,
who seeks his strength in flesh,
whose heart turns away from the LORD.

He is like a barren bush in the desert
that enjoys no change of season,
but stands in a lava waste,
a salt and empty earth.

Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,
whose hope is the LORD.

He is like a tree planted beside the waters
that stretches out its roots to the stream:
it fears not the heat when it comes;
its leaves stay green;
in the year of drought it shows no distress,
but still bears fruit.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6

R (40:5a) Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Blessed the man who follows not
the counsel of the wicked,
nor walks in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the company of the insolent,
but delights in the law of the LORD
and meditates on his law day and night.

R Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

He is like a tree
planted near running water,
that yields its fruit in due season,
and whose leaves never fade.

Whatever he does, prospers.

R Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.
Not so the wicked, not so;
 they are like chaff which the wind drives away.
For the LORD watches over the way of the just,
 but the way of the wicked vanishes.
R Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Reading II 1 Cor 15:12, 16-20

Brothers and sisters:
If Christ is preached as raised from the dead,
how can some among you say
there is no resurrection of the dead?
If the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised,
and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain;
you are still in your sins.
Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.
If for this life only we have hoped in Christ,
we are the most pitiable people of all.

But now Christ has been raised from the dead,
the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Alleluia Lk 6:23ab

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Rejoice and be glad;
your reward will be great in heaven.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Lk 6:17, 20-26

Jesus came down with the Twelve
and stood on a stretch of level ground
with a great crowd of his disciples
and a large number of the people
from all Judea and Jerusalem
and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon.
And raising his eyes toward his disciples he said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
 for the kingdom of God is yours.
Blessed are you who are now hungry,
 for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who are now weeping,
 for you will laugh.
Blessed are you when people hate you,

and when they exclude and insult you,
and denounce your name as evil
on account of the Son of Man.
Rejoice and leap for joy on that day!
Behold, your reward will be great in heaven.
For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way.

But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.
Woe to you who are filled now,
for you will be hungry.
Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will grieve and weep.
Woe to you when all speak well of you,
for their ancestors treated the false prophets
in this way."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Romano Guardini was one of the great Catholic intellectuals in the years leading up to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). He taught at the University of Berlin until 1939, when he was forced to resign by the Nazis. He spent the war years working quietly as a priest in a little country parish in Bavaria. After the war, he wrote books that demonstrated his uncanny gift for using the Catholic tradition to think critically about the present and to envision a possible future rooted in Christian hope.

Guardini said many things worthy of our attention today, including the following:

There is only one standard by which any epoch can be fairly judged: in view of its own particular circumstances, to what extent did it allow for the development of human dignity?

Our era is no exception. We will be judged as well, like all the previous eras, by the degree to which we have recognized, protected and fostered the innate dignity of the human person.

Contrary to what many Americans are saying today, we are not rugged, autonomous individuals who must assert

their “freedom” by denying that they have any responsibility for promoting the common good. We are persons, not isolated individuals, and our personhood finds fulfillment only in lives of responsibility and service in a community.

Human persons, regardless of their station in life, possess an intrinsic value that must be respected by all segments of society. This is what Guardini means by “the innate dignity of the human person.”

Human dignity is the work of God Himself. Our dignity is what God has created us to be. It is not granted to us by the state as a legal protection or by a corporation as a benefit or service. Our dignity can neither be revoked by a court nor forfeited when we commit a sin or a crime. Human dignity is the transcendent, irreducible worth of a person that accrues to persons simply by the fact that they are human beings created in the image and likeness of the Creator.

And Romano Guardini is correct: our era will be judged by the extent to which we honor the dignity of the human person.

This means that Christian faith makes sizable demands on us in regard to our political and economic relations. Our politics and economics will be judged by the degree to which they promote human dignity.

This teaching is certainly supported by the Bible - both the Old and the New Testaments. The Book of Deuteronomy, for example, stipulates that,

No one shall take a hand mill or even its upper stone as a pledge for debt, for that would be taking as a pledge the debtor’s life.

When we lend money to a woman, we can’t hold her millstone as collateral because that would mean taking away her ability to feed her family. This violates her dignity as a person.

How, then, can we force a woman to choose between buying medicine she needs for her health and buying food for her children? This, too, violates her dignity.

This passage from the Law of Moses indicates that the economy is not something impersonal and beyond human control like the law of gravity. It is a human creation and the human beings that create the economy will be judged according to the degree that the economy respects human dignity.

In the Gospel today, the Lord does not mince his words.

Blessed are you who are poor,
for the kingdom of God is yours.

This is an affirmation of the dignity of the poor.

But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

I take this as a reminder that we have a moral responsibility to ensure that our economy serves the common good and respects the dignity of all persons, including the poor.

Letting go of popular superstitions like “free markets” and “trickle-down economics” is difficult. Moreover, as the Church, we have no special competence in economics. As people of faith, our responsibility is to insist on the dignity of the human person and the moral demands God’s justice imposes on our economic relations. As members of a wider society, we are required to act out of the moral demands of our faith.

And one more thing: the Church must be a sign of hope for the world. God has not given up on politics and is quite opinionated about economics. God is calling rich and poor to become a community of hope.

Remember the words of Jeremiah,

Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,
whose hope is the LORD.
He is like a tree planted beside the waters
that stretches out its roots to the stream:
it fears not the heat when it comes;
its leaves stay green;

in the year of drought it shows no distress,
but still bears fruit.

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?