

HOMILY FOR TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 13 September 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: 130

Reading 1 SIR 27:30—28:7

Wrath and anger are hateful things,
yet the sinner hugs them tight.
The vengeful will suffer the LORD's vengeance,
for he remembers their sins in detail.
Forgive your neighbor's injustice;
then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.
Could anyone nourish anger against another
and expect healing from the LORD?
Could anyone refuse mercy to another like himself,
can he seek pardon for his own sins?
If one who is but flesh cherishes wrath,
who will forgive his sins?
Remember your last days, set enmity aside;
remember death and decay, and cease from sin!
Think of the commandments, hate not your neighbor;
remember the Most High's covenant, and overlook faults.

Responsorial Psalm PS 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12

R. (8) **The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.**

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.

R. **The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.**

He pardons all your iniquities,
heals all your ills.

He redeems your life from destruction,
crowns you with kindness and compassion.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

He will not always chide,

nor does he keep his wrath forever.

Not according to our sins does he deal with us,

nor does he requite us according to our crimes.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

For as the heavens are high above the earth,

so surpassing is his kindness toward those who fear him.

As far as the east is from the west,

so far has he put our transgressions from us.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

Reading 2 ROM 14:7-9

Brothers and sisters:

None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself.

For if we live, we live for the Lord,

and if we die, we die for the Lord;

so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

For this is why Christ died and came to life,

that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Alleluia JN 13:34

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I give you a new commandment, says the Lord:

love one another as I have loved you.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel MT 18:21-35

Peter approached Jesus and asked him,

“Lord, if my brother sins against me,

how often must I forgive?

As many as seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.

That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king

who decided to settle accounts with his servants.

When he began the accounting,

a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount.

Since he had no way of paying it back,

his master ordered him to be sold,

along with his wife, his children, and all his property,
in payment of the debt.
At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said,
'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.'
Moved with compassion the master of that servant
let him go and forgave him the loan.
When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants
who owed him a much smaller amount.
He seized him and started to choke him, demanding,
'Pay back what you owe.'
Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him,
'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'
But he refused.
Instead, he had the fellow servant put in prison
until he paid back the debt.
Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened,
they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master
and reported the whole affair.
His master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant!
I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to.
Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant,
as I had pity on you?'
Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers
until he should pay back the whole debt.
So will my heavenly Father do to you,
unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart."

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

Yesterday (Saturday) was the 11th of September. Most of us remember where we were on the morning of 9/11 nineteen years ago. I will forgive you if you don't remember what you heard in church the following Sunday. But I certainly remember what I said during my homily at mass that day. I think it bears repeating.

That Sunday morning, as I read the Gospel to my parish in Los Angeles, I knew exactly what I was going to say. I told the people at mass about my friend, Christophi. The terrorist attacks came on the Tuesday morning of that week. Two or three days later, I stopped in to see the guy who changes the oil in my car. Christophi is a wonderful man. I can recommend him to you all, and not just for an oil change.

Christophi (I'm guessing at the spelling) is a very devout Christian and has a holy card of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the (slightly grungy) office in his gas station. Nothing was wrong with my car. I stopped in to see Christophi because he has come to us from Egypt. My

friend is a Coptic Christian, a member of one of the oldest Christian communities in the world (it's as old as Father Jojo's church in India, and of course far older than the church in Northern Europe). I stopped in to see Christophi because "people who look like Muslims" were being threatened in various ways in Los Angeles in the days since the terrorist attacks. I wanted to find out if Christophi was okay.

"Christophi, my car is fine. How are you and the family doing?"

"Oh, thank you for asking, Father. One of my kids has been taunted at school. It's upsetting, but other than that, we're okay. What a terrible thing has come to our country."

I told the people in church about Christophi and his family in my homily on the Sunday after 9/11. I told them about Christophi, the Copt, who "looks like a Muslim" and who has a kid that had been taunted in school for being sympathetic to terrorists.

But I need to give you a wider perspective on my homily on that Sunday after 9/11.

My parish is in the "Little Tokyo" neighborhood of Los Angeles. Most of the people in the parish are Japanese Americans. I had been serving them for about ten years at that point. As I was preaching my homily, I was looking into the faces of elderly people who, as children, had been sent to what we call "camp" in Little Tokyo: the internment camps for Americans of Japanese ancestry at Manzanar and other desolate places. Vince and Agnes were there that Sunday. George and Florence were there as well. Joe and Angie, Hank and Joan, Bernadette and Teresita

As I look at these people, who have always been so good to me, I thought of the family-pictures I had seen of them taken when they were little kids in camp. They are all wonderful people. Their kids and grandkids were at mass as well.

After telling them all about Christophi and his family, I said,

"America is scared. We have all been terrified. And no one knows better than you do what America can do when it is frightened.

That's not all I said in my homily. I also said that the time has come for us to stop talking about our faith. *The time has come for us to do the Gospel.*

Christian faith is certainly something we believe. This is not to be doubted. But we must recognize that our faith is only complete once we begin to put into practice what we believe.

Looking into the faces of those who had been interned during the War, I said,

No one knows better than you do what America can do when it is frightened. The time has come for us to put aside our fear and do what we are commanded to do by the Gospel.

This brings us to the Gospel for this Sunday. It also brings us to what is happening right now in our country. The Gospel is all about Christian faith as something we do, not just something we believe. It is about belief bearing fruit in the actual practice of the faith.

Peter, once again, has a question to ask of his rabbi, Jesus.

Peter approached Jesus and asked him,
“Lord, if my brother sins against me,
how often must I forgive?
As many as seven times?”

Peter, true to form, is being extravagant... or at least, true to form, he thinks he’s being extravagant. Jesus, once again, beats him at his own game.

Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.

We are commanded to forgive. Christ commands us to forgive, just as he commands us to love. Americans think of love in sentimental, romantic terms. Not Jesus. Love is what is commanded of us. The same is true of forgiving those who have hurt us. We are not to wait until we “feel” forgiveness in our hearts. Forgiving is an act which is commanded of us – and not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

If we were to put this teaching into practice, there would be a revolution that would change the world forever.

I told my friends at mass in Little Tokyo, nineteen years ago on the Sunday after the terrorist attacks, that preaching love is not enough. We have to believe in love and in God’s power to change the world through love. And our belief in love will only be complete when we put love into practice – regardless of how we might feel. Love is something that we are commanded to do.

And the same is true of forgiving sins in this world. Talking about it is not enough. We have to believe in the power of God’s goodness that is set lose in the world in every act of forgiveness – no matter how great or humble this act might be. And like love, belief in forgiveness is completed only in the act of actually forgiving those who have wounded us.

I have no doubt that you believe the Gospel. I have witnessed you doing the Gospel in ways great and small. America is very fearful right now. The time has come, once again, to complete our belief by putting the Gospel into action.

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?