

HOMILY FOR THE THIRY-THIRD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 14 November 2021

- 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: 158

Reading I Dn 12:1-3

In those days, I Daniel,

heard this word of the Lord:

"At that time there shall arise

Michael, the great prince,
guardian of your people;

it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress
since nations began until that time.

At that time your people shall escape,

everyone who is found written in the book.

"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake;
some shall live forever,
others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace.

"But the wise shall shine brightly

like the splendor of the firmament,
and those who lead the many to justice
shall be like the stars forever."

Responsorial Psalm Ps 16:5, 8, 9-10, 11

R. (1) You are my inheritance, O Lord!

O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup,
you it is who hold fast my lot.

I set the LORD ever before me;

with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord!

Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices,
my body, too, abides in confidence;

because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld,
nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption.

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord!

You will show me the path to life,

fullness of joys in your presence,
the delights at your right hand forever.
R. You are my inheritance, O Lord!

Reading II Heb 10:11-14, 18

Brothers and sisters:

Every priest stands daily at his ministry,
offering frequently those same sacrifices
that can never take away sins.
But this one offered one sacrifice for sins,
and took his seat forever at the right hand of God;
now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool.
For by one offering
he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated.
Where there is forgiveness of these,
there is no longer offering for sin.

Alleluia Lk 21:36

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Be vigilant at all times
and pray that you have the strength to stand before the Son of Man.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 13:24-32

Jesus said to his disciples:

"In those days after that tribulation
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will be falling from the sky,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

"And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds'
with great power and glory,
and then he will send out the angels
and gather his elect from the four winds,
from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.

"Learn a lesson from the fig tree.
When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves,
you know that summer is near.
In the same way, when you see these things happening,
know that he is near, at the gates.
Amen, I say to you,
this generation will not pass away
until all these things have taken place.

Heaven and earth will pass away,
but my words will not pass away.

"But of that day or hour, no one knows,
neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

We are in the last few weeks of Ordinary Time before the beginning of Advent and Jesus, as is always the case at this time of year, is in an apocalyptic mood. In today's Gospel, he has scary things to say about the end of time - scary at least if you are a sinner like me.

Jesus makes no bones about the end of the world:

In those days after that tribulation
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will be falling from the sky,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

As if this were not vivid enough, Jesus goes on to talk about a judgment on the Last Day.

And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in
the clouds'
with great power and glory,
and then he will send out the angels
and gather his elect from the four winds,
from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.

Jesus was by no means the first Jew to talk about the end of the world and a judgment at the end of time.

Take the first reading for example.

A couple of hundred years before the time of Jesus, the author of the Book of Daniel, wrote about the end of time, saying,

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth
shall awake;
some shall live forever;

others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace.

But the wise shall shine brightly
like the splendor of the firmament,
and those who lead the many to justice
shall be like the stars forever.

People sometimes tell me that they don't like it when I preach about the Last Day and the Final Judgment. This seems strange to me. These days, at least on television, judgment couldn't be more popular.

We have Judge Judy glaring at delinquent tenants or estranged lovers in her court on the daytime TV. The humiliating judgments we see on "American Idol" and the joy we seem to take in such humiliations speak volumes about our love affair with judgment. I even know of a celebrity who has done quite well in promoting himself through a reality-TV show called "The Apprentice." This celebrity famously renders judgment on some hapless contestant by shouting, "You're fired!"

Maybe the reason that preaching about the Final Judgment isn't popular is because we don't want God to do the judging. God, apparently, is supposed to be like a nice neighbor, who never plays his stereo loud and is always home when you need to borrow a cup of sugar. Yet we can be downright gleeful when we are doing the judging or when we get to watch someone else being judged.

In this regard, I have a confession to make.

I have a "little list" of people who, in my humble opinion, richly deserve to be consigned to the pit of damnation for all eternity. What's more, I am quite confident that the Risen Lord, when he comes in his Glory after Gabriel blows his horn, will be in complete agreement with all the names I have put on my list. How could he not agree with someone as good at judging others as I am?

My only fear is that some of the people on my list may have made lists of their own. Could my name appear on one of these lists?

Have you got a list too?

Since this homily is getting complicated, allow me to offer some practical advice.

First, I think we should regularly remind ourselves that God will, one day, bring this world to an end. Moreover, he will end history with a judgment. Sometimes, people who don't want to hear about a Final Judgment have said to me,

"What is your belief in a Final Judgment doing to you?"

To this, I can only say in reply,

"What is NOT believing in a judgment at the end of time doing to YOU? Do you really believe that our life in this world is just a knife-fight with no rules and no penalties for the bad guys?"

The Creed reminds us that the Lord will "come again to judge the living and the dead." Keeping this in mind puts a certain spiritual edge on the way we live our lives.

Second, I recommend that you remind yourself that Jesus will "come again to judge the living and the dead" whenever you are tempted to put another name on your "little list." Remember that Jesus once said, "judge not lest you be judged."

Third, and most important of all, I recommend that you recall what King David said in one of his Psalms. In the Mystery of God,

"Justice and mercy shall kiss."

I am still trying to understand how this could be possible. Perhaps this explains why I haven't thrown out my "little list."

As I struggle with this, the Lord must be judging me with mercy. I say this because I came upon a beautiful prayer

in Saint Augustine's *Confessions* recently and I want to share it with you.

As he reflected on his troubled past, Augustine remembered that Christ would someday come again to judge the living and the dead. Then, he prayed,

Do not abandon what You have begun in me,
But go on to perfect all that remains unfinished.

Perhaps, on the Last Day, God will have perfected all that is unfinished in us. Then, surely, in the Final Judgment, justice and mercy shall kiss.

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?