

HOMILY FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
Sunday, 15 December 2024

Fr. Jim Fredericks

Part One: the readings for the day
Part Two: reflections on the readings
Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY
Lectionary: 9

Reading I Zep 3:14-18a

Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!
Sing joyfully, O Israel!
Be glad and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The LORD has removed the judgment against you
he has turned away your enemies;
the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst,
you have no further misfortune to fear.
On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged!
The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a mighty savior;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
and renew you in his love,
he will sing joyfully because of you,
as one sings at festivals.

Responsorial Psalm Is 12:2-3, 4, 5-6.

R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the
great and Holy One of Israel.

God indeed is my savior;
I am confident and unafraid.
My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.
With joy you will draw water
at the fountain of salvation.

R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the
great and Holy One of Israel.

Give thanks to the LORD, acclaim his name;
among the nations make known his deeds,
proclaim how exalted is his name.

R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the
great and Holy One of Israel.

Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious achievement;
let this be known throughout all the earth.
Shout with exultation, O city of Zion,
for great in your midst
is the Holy One of Israel!

R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the
great and Holy One of Israel.

Reading II Phil 4:4-7

Brothers and sisters:

Rejoice in the Lord always.

I shall say it again: rejoice!

Your kindness should be known to all.

The Lord is near.

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,
make your requests known to God.

Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

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 Lk 3:10-18

The crowds asked John the Baptist,

“What should we do?”

He said to them in reply,

“Whoever has two cloaks
should share with the person who has none.
And whoever has food should do likewise.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptized

and they said to him,
"Teacher, what should we do?"
He answered them,
"Stop collecting more than what is prescribed."
Soldiers also asked him,
"And what is it that we should do?"
He told them,
"Do not practice extortion,
do not falsely accuse anyone,
and be satisfied with your wages."
Now the people were filled with expectation,
and all were asking in their hearts
whether John might be the Christ.
John answered them all, saying,
"I am baptizing you with water,
but one mightier than I is coming.
I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals.
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor
and to gather the wheat into his barn,
but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."
Exhorting them in many other ways,
he preached good news to the people.

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

The gospel for today's mass confronts us with a very practical question - What should we do?

The crowds ask this of John the Baptist.

Teacher, what should we do?

After this, tax collectors and soldiers ask him,

What should we do?

And the answer the Baptist gives us is daunting: We need to change the way we live our lives... and we need to change our lives in ways that are specific, concrete and demanding.

To the crowds, he says,

Whoever has two cloaks
should share with the person who has none.
And whoever has food should do likewise.

To the tax collectors, he says,

Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.

And to the soldiers, he says,

Do not practice extortion,
do not falsely accuse anyone,
and be satisfied with your wages.

John the Baptist is not speaking in generalities. He is not simply exhorting us to "be nice" or "do good and avoid evil." He is placing specific demands on each group - the crowds, the tax collectors and the soldiers.

I shudder to think what the Baptist would have said to me if I had asked him, "what should I do?"

It's easy to love people in theory and from a distance. But love in actual practice can be "a harsh and dreadful thing," as Dostoevsky, the great Russian novelist, wrote.

The same is true of our faith. The actual, daily practice of our Christian faith can be difficult, confusing and demanding.

What must we do to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah? The Baptist is saying that we are required to change the way we live our lives in ways that are concrete and specific and hard.

I do not want you to lose heart. I certainly don't want you to give up on your daily practice of the faith.

So, let me offer some practical advice.

My advice is just this: remember that faith is not a matter of never falling down. Living our faith means always getting back up.

Let me be clear - we have all been called to a life of holiness. We are to do our best as we strive for spiritual perfection. But the Lord does not expect us to be saints. He only asks us to remember that we are sinners who have been completely forgiven.

So, what should we do? This is the question that the people posed to John the Baptist as he preached in the wilderness. What should we do to prepare for the coming of the messiah?

We should live lives rooted in the Evangelical virtues: faith, hope and charity towards all. We should live lives that are gentle and generous, patient and compassionate. We should be kind and honest. We should do the best we can for our children. We should also try our best to forgive those who have sinned against us. This is hard.

What should we do to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah? First, we should remember that the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ places a moral demand on us that is very high.

But above all else we should remember that our sins have been forgiven - all of them. And so, when we fall down, we should not be afraid to get back up again.

The birth of the Messiah is drawing near. This is what we should do.

[] [] []

El evangelio de la misa de hoy nos enfrenta a una pregunta muy práctica: ¿Qué debemos hacer?

La gente le pregunta esto a Juan el Bautista.

Maestro, ¿qué debemos hacer?

Después de esto, los publicanos y unos soldados le preguntan:

Y nosotros, ¿qué tenemos que hacer?

Y la respuesta que nos da el Bautista es desalentadora: Necesitamos cambiar la manera en que vivimos nuestras vidas... y necesitamos cambiar de maneras que sean específicas, concretas y exigentes.

A la gente, les dice:

Quien tenga dos túnicas, que dé una al que no tiene ninguna, y quien tenga comida, que haga lo mismo.

A los publicanos, les dice:

No cobren más de lo establecido.

Y a los soldados, les dice:

No extorsionen a nadie,
ni denuncien a nadie falsamente,
sino conténtense con su salario.

Juan el Bautista no está hablando en generalidades. No nos exhorta simplemente a "depórtenles bien" o "hacer el bien y evitar el mal". El bautismo está planteando exigencias específicas a cada uno: la gente, los publicanos y los soldados.

Me estremezco al pensar qué me habría dicho el Bautista si le hubiera preguntado: "Y yo? ¿Qué debo hacer?"

A menudo, es fácil amar a las personas en teoría y a la distancia. Pero el amor en la práctica real puede ser "algo duro y terrible", como escribió Dostoievski, el gran novelista ruso.

Lo mismo es cierto con respecto a nuestra fe. La práctica real y diaria de nuestra fe cristiana puede ser difícil, confusa y exigente.

¿Qué debemos hacer para preparar el camino para la llegada del Mesías? Se nos exige que cambiemos la forma en que vivimos nuestras vidas de maneras concretas, específicas y difíciles.

No quiero que se desanimen. Ciertamente no quiero que abandonen la práctica diaria de la fe.

Por lo tanto, permítanme ofrecerles un consejo práctico.

Mi consejo es simplemente este: recuerden que la fe no es una cuestión de nunca caer. Vivir con fe significa levantarse siempre.

Todos hemos sido llamados a una vida de santidad. Debemos hacer lo mejor que podamos en nuestro esfuerzo por alcanzar la perfección espiritual. Pero el Señor no espera que seamos santos. Solo nos pide que recordemos que somos pecadores que hemos sido completamente perdonados.

Entonces, ¿qué debemos hacer?

Esta es la pregunta que el pueblo le planteó a Juan el Bautista mientras predicaba en el desierto. ¿Qué debemos hacer para prepararnos para la llegada del Mesías?

Debemos vivir vidas arraigadas en las virtudes evangélicas: fe, esperanza y caridad. Debemos vivir vidas amables y generosas, pacientes y compasivas. Debemos ser amables y honestos. Debemos hacer lo mejor que podamos por nuestros hijos y hijas. También debemos hacer todo lo posible por perdonar a quienes han pecado contra nosotros.

¿Qué debemos hacer para preparar el camino para la llegada del Mesías? Debemos recordar que el Evangelio de nuestro Señor Jesucristo nos impone una exigencia moral muy alta.

Pero, sobre todo, debemos recordar que nuestros pecados han sido perdonados, todos ellos. Por eso, cuando nos caigamos, no debemos tener miedo de levantarnos de nuevo.

La natividad del Mesías está acercando. Esto es lo que debemos hacer.

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 homily 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?