

HOMILY FOR THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 16 June 2024

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: 92

Reading 1 Ez 17:22-24

Thus says the Lord GOD:

I, too, will take from the crest of the cedar,
from its topmost branches tear off a tender shoot,
and plant it on a high and lofty mountain;
on the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it.
It shall put forth branches and bear fruit,
and become a majestic cedar.
Birds of every kind shall dwell beneath it,
every winged thing in the shade of its boughs.
And all the trees of the field shall know
that I, the LORD, bring low the high tree,
lift high the lowly tree,
wither up the green tree,
and make the withered tree bloom.
As I, the LORD, have spoken, so will I do.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

R. (cf. 2a) Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.
It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praise to your name, Most High,
To proclaim your kindness at dawn
and your faithfulness throughout the night.

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.
The just one shall flourish like the palm tree,
like a cedar of Lebanon shall he grow.
They that are planted in the house of the LORD
shall flourish in the courts of our God.

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.
They shall bear fruit even in old age;

vigorous and sturdy shall they be,
Declaring how just is the LORD,
my rock, in whom there is no wrong.
R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

Reading 2 2 Cor 5:6-10

Brothers and sisters:

We are always courageous,
although we know that while we are at home in the body
we are away from the Lord,
for we walk by faith, not by sight.
Yet we are courageous,
and we would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord.
Therefore, we aspire to please him,
whether we are at home or away.
For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,
so that each may receive recompense,
according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil.

Alleluia

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
The seed is the word of God, Christ is the sower.
All who come to him will live forever.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 4:26-34

Jesus said to the crowds:
"This is how it is with the kingdom of God;
it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land
and would sleep and rise night and day
and through it all the seed would sprout and grow,
he knows not how.
Of its own accord the land yields fruit,
first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.
And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once,
for the harvest has come."

He said,
"To what shall we compare the kingdom of God,
or what parable can we use for it?
It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground,
is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth.
But once it is sown,

it springs up and becomes the largest of plants
and puts forth large branches,
so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade.”
With many such parables
he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it.
Without parables he did not speak to them,
but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Happy Father’s Day to you all.

Fourteen years ago, I remember telling my dad to get ready for mass. I had the 9:30 mass at Saint Leo’s that day. We got in the car - my dad in the passenger seat and my mom in the back. I drove. It was a day just like today - warm and sunny, the hills and fields still green and the vines in full leaf. It was Father’s Day.

I remember teasing my dad as we drove to Church. I said,

It’s Father’s Day and in my sermon I’m going to tell stories about what a great dad you are.

He wasn’t enthusiastic about my plan.

Today, I want to share with you one of the stories I might have told about my dad.

When my older brother and I were just tikes, my dad used to come into our bedroom early on Saturday mornings and tell us stories. I think he did this to keep us quiet while my mom got a little more shot-eye. I have a vivid memory - maybe my earliest memory - of my dad lying on my brother’s bed. I can see my dad and my brother through the bars of my crib.

My dad told us wonderful stories. He must have told us about Columbus, I think, because I remember my teacher saying something about Columbus years later in grammar school and saying to myself, in utter amazement,

“How does she know this? That’s dad’s story!”

I don't remember if this is one of the memories about my dad that I was planning to share at the 9:30 mass at Saint Leo's fourteen years ago, but I am telling it to you on this Father's Day.

It's such a happy memory.

I don't think my dad realized what a great father he was. He was patient with us, of course. He also had a way of firing our imagination in a way that helped us to imagine a future for ourselves. But I don't think he thought about this very much.

As you may have noticed, I like to tell stories. This seed was planted in me by my dad while I was still sleeping in a crib. I don't think my dad ever really understood how the seeds he planted in his children grew to fruition as the people his kids are today.

And, on this Father's Day, let me say, this is what the Kingdom of God is like.

Jesus said to the people,

This is how it is with the kingdom of God;
it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land
and would sleep and rise night and day
and through it all the seed would sprout and grow,
he knows not how.
Of its own accord the land yields fruit,
first the blade, then the ear,
then the full grain in the ear.
And when the grain is ripe,
he wields the sickle at once,
for the harvest has come.

My dad is exactly like the man who scatters seed on the land and who then sleeps and rises night and day.

and through it all
the seed would sprout and grow,
he knows not how.

In truth, this is what the Kingdom of God is like: God himself gives us the seeds of the Kingdom to plant - in the hearts of our children, our friends, even in the hearts of the complete strangers we encounter only briefly in our lives. And then these seeds grow into an abundant harvest in a way we cannot really explain. In fact, we may not even be aware that it is happening.

I was teasing my dad about the stories I was going to tell about him as we drove to Saint Leo's on that Father's Day fourteen years ago. But in truth, I never got a chance to preach that day.

As we were turning onto Arnold Drive, my dad suffered a massive heart attack. He died almost immediately sitting right next to me.

What a great way to go: a beautiful day in the Valley, his son driving him to mass. But also this: my dad died having lived long enough to see that, somehow, all the little seeds that he had scattered over the land had sprouted and grown up and become for him a rich harvest in a way that he could not explain.

And this, the Lord assures us, is what the Kingdom of God is like.

Happy Father's Day to you all.

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?