

HOMILY FOR EASTER SUNDAY

Sunday, 17 April 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: 41 (selections)

Reading I [Gn 1:1–2:2](#)

In the beginning,
when God created the heavens and the earth,
the earth was a formless wasteland,
and darkness covered the abyss,
while a mighty wind swept over the waters.

Then God said,
"Let there be light," and there was light.
God saw how good the light was.
God then separated the light from the darkness.
God called the light "day,"
and the darkness he called "night."
Thus evening came, and morning followed—the first day.

Then God said,
"Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters,
to separate one body of water from the other."
And so it happened:
God made the dome,
and it separated the water above the dome
from the water below it.
God called the dome "the sky."
Evening came, and morning followed—the second day.

Then God said,
"Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin,
so that the dry land may appear."
And so it happened:
the water under the sky was gathered into its basin,
and the dry land appeared.
God called the dry land "the earth, "

and the basin of the water he called "the sea."
God saw how good it was.
Then God said,
"Let the earth bring forth vegetation:
every kind of plant that bears seed
and every kind of fruit tree on earth
that bears fruit with its seed in it."
And so it happened:
the earth brought forth every kind of plant that bears seed
and every kind of fruit tree on earth
that bears fruit with its seed in it.
God saw how good it was.
Evening came, and morning followed—the third day.

Then God said:
"Let there be lights in the dome of the sky,
to separate day from night.
Let them mark the fixed times, the days and the years,
and serve as luminaries in the dome of the sky,
to shed light upon the earth."
And so it happened:
God made the two great lights,
the greater one to govern the day,
and the lesser one to govern the night;
and he made the stars.
God set them in the dome of the sky,
to shed light upon the earth,
to govern the day and the night,
and to separate the light from the darkness.
God saw how good it was.
Evening came, and morning followed—the fourth day.

Then God said,
"Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures,
and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky."
And so it happened:
God created the great sea monsters
and all kinds of swimming creatures
with which the water teems,
and all kinds of winged birds.
God saw how good it was, and God blessed them, saying,
"Be fertile, multiply, and fill the water of the seas;
and let the birds multiply on the earth."
Evening came, and morning followed—the fifth day.

Then God said,
"Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures:
cattle, creeping things, and wild animals of all kinds."
And so it happened:
God made all kinds of wild animals, all kinds of cattle,
and all kinds of creeping things of the earth.
God saw how good it was.
Then God said:
"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.
Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,
the birds of the air, and the cattle,
and over all the wild animals
and all the creatures that crawl on the ground."
God created man in his image;
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.
God blessed them, saying:
"Be fertile and multiply;
fill the earth and subdue it.
Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air,
and all the living things that move on the earth."
God also said:
"See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth
and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it
to be your food;
and to all the animals of the land, all the birds of the air,
and all the living creatures that crawl on the ground,
I give all the green plants for food."
And so it happened.
God looked at everything he had made,
and he found it very good.
Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day.
Thus the heavens and the earth
and all their array were completed.
Since on the seventh day God was finished
with the work he had been doing,
he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had
undertaken.

Reading III [Ex 14:15–15:1](#)

The LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me?
Tell the Israelites to go forward.
And you, lift up your staff and,

with hand outstretched over the sea,
split the sea in two,
that the Israelites may pass through it on dry land.
But I will make the Egyptians so obstinate
that they will go in after them.
Then I will receive glory through Pharaoh and all his army,
his chariots and charioteers.
The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD,
when I receive glory through Pharaoh
and his chariots and charioteers."

The angel of God, who had been leading Israel's camp,
now moved and went around behind them.
The column of cloud also, leaving the front,
took up its place behind them,
so that it came between the camp of the Egyptians
and that of Israel.
But the cloud now became dark, and thus the night passed
without the rival camps coming any closer together
all night long.
Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea,
and the LORD swept the sea
with a strong east wind throughout the night
and so turned it into dry land.
When the water was thus divided,
the Israelites marched into the midst of the sea on dry land,
with the water like a wall to their right and to their left.

The Egyptians followed in pursuit;
all Pharaoh's horses and chariots
and charioteers went after them
right into the midst of the sea.
In the night watch just before dawn
the LORD cast through the column of the fiery cloud
upon the Egyptian force a glance that threw it into a panic;
and he so clogged their chariot wheels
that they could hardly drive.
With that the Egyptians sounded the retreat before Israel,
because the LORD was fighting for them against the
Egyptians.

Then the LORD told Moses,
"Stretch out your hand over the sea,
that the water may flow back upon the Egyptians,

upon their chariots and their charioteers."
So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea,
and at dawn the sea flowed back to its normal depth.
The Egyptians were fleeing head on toward the sea,
when the LORD hurled them into its midst.
As the water flowed back,
it covered the chariots and the charioteers of Pharaoh's
whole army
which had followed the Israelites into the sea.
Not a single one of them escaped.
But the Israelites had marched on dry land
through the midst of the sea,
with the water like a wall to their right and to their left.
Thus the LORD saved Israel on that day
from the power of the Egyptians.
When Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore
and beheld the great power that the LORD
had shown against the Egyptians,
they feared the LORD and believed in him and in his servant
Moses.

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:
I will sing to the LORD, for he is gloriously triumphant;
horse and chariot he has cast into the sea.

Epistle [Rom 6:3-11](#)

Brothers and sisters:
Are you unaware that
we who were baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death?
We were indeed buried with him through baptism
into death,
so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead
by the glory of the Father,
we too might live in newness of life.

For if we have grown into union with him
through a death like his,
we shall also be united with him in the resurrection.
We know that our old self was crucified with him,
so that our sinful body might be done away with,
that we might no longer be in slavery to sin.
For a dead person has been absolved from sin.
If, then, we have died with Christ,

we believe that we shall also live with him.
We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more;
death no longer has power over him.
As to his death, he died to sin once and for all;
as to his life, he lives for God.
Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as being
dead to sin
and living for God in Christ Jesus.

Responsorial Psalm [Ps 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his mercy endures forever.
Let the house of Israel say,
"His mercy endures forever."

R. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

The right hand of the LORD has struck with power;
the right hand of the LORD is exalted.
I shall not die, but live,
and declare the works of the LORD.

R. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.
By the LORD has this been done;
it is wonderful in our eyes.

R. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel [Lk 24:1-12](#)

At daybreak on the first day of the week
the women who had come from Galilee with Jesus
took the spices they had prepared
and went to the tomb.
They found the stone rolled away from the tomb;
but when they entered,
they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.
While they were puzzling over this, behold,
two men in dazzling garments appeared to them.
They were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground.

They said to them,
"Why do you seek the living one among the dead?
He is not here, but he has been raised.
Remember what he said to you while he was still in Galilee,
that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners
and be crucified, and rise on the third day."
And they remembered his words.
Then they returned from the tomb
and announced all these things to the eleven
and to all the others.
The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the
mother of James;
the others who accompanied them also told this
to the apostles,
but their story seemed like nonsense
and they did not believe them.
But Peter got up and ran to the tomb,
bent down, and saw the burial cloths alone;
then he went home amazed at what had happened.

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Happy Easter to everyone!

In the ancient Church, baptisms were celebrated only once a year: the vigil mass of Easter. The people and their bishop would gather around the New Fire to light the pascal candle. The history of our redemption would be recounted by reading the story of creation and the crossing of the Red Sea during the Exodus. The Gospel reading was the account of the discovery of the empty tomb.

After this, the deacons would plunge the pascal candle into the baptismal font to bless the water. Then, the bishop would instruct those about to be baptized on their responsibilities as members of the Church.

This homily is a baptismal instruction, in keeping with the Church's ancient practice.

My instruction is simply this: Those who have been baptized have a responsibility to hope. The Risen Christ demands this of us.

This is a weighty responsibility, and I don't pretend that it is an easy responsibility to fulfill – especially given the fact that much of the world has fallen into despair these days.

I have spoken a good deal about despair during Lent.

I see despair in the way we have abandoned the common good in our politics. I see despair in the vehemence with which we cling to absurd conspiracy theories and to lies obviously calculated to appeal to our worst fears and vulnerabilities. COVID has taken more from us than many realize.

I see despair in our school children as well.

This is too painful for me to address in any detail. But those of you who have spoken to me about your children and the challenges they face – please know that your Church stands with you and is ready to accompany you and your entire family so that you will not have to make your way through this difficult time alone.

The Risen Christ grasps our souls and cradles our fears and anxieties. But Christ also lays upon our shoulders a great responsibility: we are required to hope.

How are we to live up to this responsibility?

Let me tell you a story.

Father Pedro Arrupe became the Superior General of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) after the Second Vatican Council. He was a great man of faith and his life has much to teach us about living up to the responsibilities that have come to us through our baptism.

Arrupe was born in Spain in 1907 and became a Jesuit in 1927. He was sent to Japan in 1938 to work as a missionary. At that time, Spain had descended into the despair of civil war and Japan had descended into the despair of nationalism.

Father Arrupe was arrested in December, 1941, under suspicion of espionage. He was kept in solitary confinement for over a month before being released. Years later, he wrote that, during his time in solitary confinement, "I learned the most in all my life."

This is an important point for my baptismal instruction to you this Easter.

Our baptism places on us the responsibility to know ourselves thoroughly and to come to a deep understanding of the world based on this self-knowledge.

Father Arrupe was living in the outskirts of Hiroshima in 1945 when the flash and the shock wave swept over him. He was the Director of Novices for the Jesuits and the novitiate was sheltered from the bomb blast by a low hill.

Immediately after the blast, he took the Jesuit novices into the streets of the city to care for the sick. The novitiate itself was turned into a makeshift hospital.

This leads me to the last point in my baptismal instruction for this Easter.

Our baptism into the Death and Resurrection of Christ requires of us to lead lives of service to those who are afflicted and in despair.

In addition to hope and self-knowledge, service is a third responsibility that falls upon us through Easter Faith. We are to be a people of hope and our hope takes concrete form in the world through our service to those in despair.

Hope yearns to take form as service so it can touch those in despair. Giving hope this concrete form is a responsibility rooted in our baptism.

And if we are to succeed in these tasks, we must see that we have a responsibility to know ourselves. Certainly, we must gain a thorough knowledge of our ability to miss the mark through sin. Just as certainly, we must gain a

thorough understanding of the innate dignity - indeed the innate goodness - that God has created us to be.

And above all else, we must come to understand that it is the Risen Christ who pours the Holy Spirit of God into our hearts that we might have the grace to live up to these baptismal responsibilities.

I have one more instruction for you. Teach one another our responsibilities as baptized people of Easter Faith. After all, where did my instructions come from if not from you? We have a responsibility to teach one another what our baptism requires of us. This is as it should be in the Church.

Happy Easter 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 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?