

HOMILY FOR THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME  
Sunday, 18 August 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: 119

Reading 1 Prv 9:1-6

Wisdom has built her house,  
she has set up her seven columns;  
she has dressed her meat, mixed her wine,  
yes, she has spread her table.  
She has sent out her maidens; she calls  
from the heights out over the city:  
"Let whoever is simple turn in here;  
To the one who lacks understanding, she says,  
Come, eat of my food,  
and drink of the wine I have mixed!  
Forsake foolishness that you may live;  
advance in the way of understanding."

Responsorial Psalm Ps 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

R. (9a) Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.  
I will bless the LORD at all times;  
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.  
Let my soul glory in the LORD;  
the lowly will hear me and be glad.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.  
Glorify the LORD with me,  
let us together extol his name.  
I sought the LORD, and he answered me  
and delivered me from all my fears.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.  
Look to him that you may be radiant with joy,  
and your faces may not blush with shame.  
When the poor one called out, the LORD heard,  
and from all his distress he saved him.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Reading 2 Eph 5:15-20

Brothers and sisters:

Watch carefully how you live,  
not as foolish persons but as wise,  
making the most of the opportunity,  
because the days are evil.  
Therefore, do not continue in ignorance,  
but try to understand what is the will of the Lord.  
And do not get drunk on wine, in which lies debauchery,  
but be filled with the Spirit,  
addressing one another in psalms  
and hymns and spiritual songs,  
singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts,  
giving thanks always and for everything  
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

Alleluia Jn 6:56

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood  
remains in me and I in him, says the Lord.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Jn 6:51-58

Jesus said to the crowds:

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven;  
whoever eats this bread will live forever;  
and the bread that I will give  
is my flesh for the life of the world."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying,  
"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them,  
"Amen, amen, I say to you,  
unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,  
you do not have life within you.  
Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood  
has eternal life,  
and I will raise him on the last day.  
For my flesh is true food,  
and my blood is true drink.  
Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood  
remains in me and I in him.  
Just as the living Father sent me  
and I have life because of the Father,  
so also the one who feeds on me  
will have life because of me.  
This is the bread that came down from heaven.  
Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died,  
whoever eats this bread will live forever."

## PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Dear reader: please know that this homily was  
written originally in Spanish and subsequently  
translated into English.

Last Sunday, when I walked into Saint Leo's, we were chanting  
a rosary and had reached the Fifth Glorious Mystery: The  
Crowning of Mary in Heaven.

Last Thursday was the Solemnity of the Assumption of the  
Blessed Virgin Mary. The teaching is that Mary never tasted of  
the bitterness of death. Instead, she was assumed, bodily, into  
heaven. In heaven, Christ places a crown atop the head of his  
mother.

This is an image beautiful to imagine. Heaven so loved this  
woman that, as she lay on her deathbed, she was embraced by  
the love of God and drawn gracefully into the sweetness that

awaits us above. Mary did not die. She fell asleep on her deathbed and was taken up into heaven. This great teaching has quickened the faith of Christians since the earliest days of the Church.

There is a good reason for this: in the early Church, the mother of Jesus quickly became an icon for us. In Mary, God has shown us the beauty of our original humanity. She is an emblem, a sign from heaven, a visual manifestation of what God intended us to be when he created the First Eve.

If you want to understand how Mary is an icon of our true and original humanity, I strongly advise you to think of Mary's Assumption in tandem with another great teaching about the Blessed Virgin, Mary's Immaculate Conception.

The Immaculate Conception means that Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin. She is, therefore, an image of our humanity before our fall away from our original innocence. Innocence, not sinfulness, is original in us. Now we dwell "East of Eden" where death casts its shadow over all the children of Eve. Now, we are willing to do just about anything to escape our anxiety about death. We have become something which God can hardly recognize.

If, in her Immaculate Conception, Mary is the icon of our original humanity, her Assumption into heaven takes on a special meaning. The two great teachings are inseparable. In creating us and placing us in the Garden, God never intended us to be haunted by death. We were not created for death. The Maker of Heaven and Earth intended us to walk with Him for all eternity "in the garden, in the cool of the day," as the Book of Genesis tells us.

The dread of death, the fear that do such terrible things to one another and to the earth, is an indication that something catastrophic has happened to us. We have fallen away from our original innocence. The Church's teaching about our original innocence is bold and, frankly, hard to believe given

the enormity of human folly. The Church requires us to believe that violence and meanness, greed and the refusal to love, but also despair and, above all else, sin are NOT a part of our human nature.

This is very hard to believe.

We were created for communion with our Creator and communion with one another. Somehow, we have fallen away from this communion. The dread of death that drives us is the sign that we are not ourselves.

But Mary is a sign as well. In the Mystery of her Assumption, she is a sign of our original innocence. She is *La Purissima*. The Church celebrates her Assumption on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August so we might remind ourselves that, for all our sinfulness, we have never stopped being God's handiwork.

Remember the Fifth Glorious Mystery of the Rosary: the Crowning of Mary in Heaven. In heaven, after her Assumption, Christ places a crown on the head of the Blessed Virgin, the New Eve. In doing so, all of heaven rejoices in our true humanity.

We will not be assumed into heaven like the Blessed Virgin. We are haunted by death, and we will all one day taste the bitterness of death. Only then will we be raised up out of our tombs in the victory of God's love over the power of death that haunts us.

And then, we shall share Mary's crown in the restoration of our true humanity.

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El domingo pasado, cuando entré en la iglesia de San Leo, estábamos rezando el rosario y habíamos llegado al quinto misterio glorioso: la coronación de María en el cielo.

El jueves pasado fue la solemnidad de la Asunción de la Santísima Virgen María. La enseñanza de la iglesia es que María nunca probó la amargura de la muerte. En cambio, fue llevada corporalmente al cielo.

Esta es una imagen hermosa de imaginar. El cielo amó tanto a esta mujer que, mientras yacía en su lecho de muerte, fue abrazada por el amor de Dios y atraída con gracia hacia la dulzura que nos espera arriba. María no murió. Se durmió en su lecho de muerte y fue llevada al cielo. Esta gran enseñanza ha avivado la fe de los cristianos desde los primeros días de la Iglesia.

Hay una buena razón para esto: en la Iglesia primitiva, la madre de Jesús rápidamente se convirtió en un icono para nosotros. En María, Dios nos ha mostrado la belleza de nuestra humanidad original. Ella es un emblema, un signo del cielo, una manifestación visual de lo que Dios quiso que fuéramos cuando creó a la Primera Eva.

Si quieres entender cómo María es un icono de nuestra humanidad verdadera y original, te recomiendo encarecidamente que pienses en la Asunción de María junto con otra gran enseñanza sobre la Santísima Virgen, la Inmaculada Concepción de la Santísima Virgen, María.

La Inmaculada Concepción significa que María fue concebida sin la mancha del pecado original. Ella es, por lo tanto, una imagen de nuestra humanidad antes de nuestra caída, alejándonos de nuestra inocencia original. La inocencia, no el pecado, es original en nosotros. Ahora vivimos "al este del Edén", donde la muerte proyecta su sombra sobre todos los hijos de Eva. Ahora, estamos dispuestos a hacer casi cualquier cosa para escapar de nuestra ansiedad por la muerte. Nos hemos convertido en algo que Dios apenas puede reconocer.

Si, en su Inmaculada Concepción, María es el icono de nuestra humanidad original, su Asunción al cielo adquiere un significado especial. Las dos grandes enseñanzas son

inseparables. Al crearnos y colocarnos en el Jardín, Dios nunca quiso que fuéramos perseguidos por la muerte. No fuimos creados para la muerte. El Creador del Cielo y de la Tierra quiso que camináramos con Él por toda la eternidad “en el jardín, al fresco del día”, como nos dice el Libro del Génesis.

El miedo a la muerte, el miedo que nos hace cosas tan terribles a los demás y a la tierra, es una indicación de que algo catastrófico nos ha sucedido. Nos hemos alejado de nuestra inocencia original. La enseñanza de la Iglesia sobre nuestra inocencia original es audaz y, francamente, difícil de creer dada la enormidad de la locura humana. La Iglesia nos exige creer que la violencia y la mezquindad, la codicia y la negativa a amar, pero también la desesperación y, sobre todo, el pecado NO SON PARTE de nuestra naturaleza humana.

Esto es muy difícil de creer.

Fuimos creados para la comunión con nuestro Creador y la comunión entre nosotros. De alguna manera, nos hemos alejado de esta comunión. El miedo a la muerte que nos impulsa es la señal de que no somos nosotros mismos.

Pero María también es una señal. En el Misterio de su Asunción, ella es un signo de nuestra inocencia original. Ella es La Purísima. La Iglesia celebra su Asunción el 15 de agosto para que recordemos que, a pesar de todos nuestros pecados, nunca hemos dejado de ser obra de Dios.

Recuerden el Quinto Misterio Glorioso del Rosario: la Coronación de María en el Cielo. En el cielo, después de su Asunción, Cristo coloca una corona sobre la cabeza de la Santísima Virgen, la Nueva Eva. Al hacerlo, todo el cielo se regocija en nuestra verdadera humanidad.

No seremos llevados al cielo como la Santísima Virgen. Estamos atormentados por la muerte, y todos probaremos un día la amargura de la muerte. Solo entonces seremos

resucitados de nuestras tumbas en la victoria del amor de Dios sobre el poder de la muerte que nos atormenta.

Y entonces, compartiremos la corona de María en la restauración de nuestra verdadera humanidad.

### 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?