

HOMILY FOR SIXTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 19 July 2020

- 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

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 106

Reading 1 [WIS 12:13, 16-19](#)

There is no god besides you who have the care of all,
that you need show you have not unjustly condemned.
For your might is the source of justice;
your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all.
For you show your might when the perfection of your power is disbelieved;
and in those who know you, you rebuke temerity.
But though you are master of might, you judge with clemency,
and with much lenience you govern us;
for power, whenever you will, attends you.
And you taught your people, by these deeds,
that those who are just must be kind;
and you gave your children good ground for hope
that you would permit repentance for their sins.

Responsorial Psalm [PS 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16](#)

R. (5a) **Lord, you are good and forgiving.**

You, O LORD, are good and forgiving,
abounding in kindness to all who call upon you.

Hearken, O LORD, to my prayer
and attend to the sound of my pleading.

R. **Lord, you are good and forgiving.**

All the nations you have made shall come
and worship you, O LORD,
and glorify your name.

For you are great, and you do wondrous deeds;
you alone are God.

R. Lord, you are good and forgiving.

You, O LORD, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in kindness and fidelity.

Turn toward me, and have pity on me;
give your strength to your servant.

R. Lord, you are good and forgiving.

Reading 2 [ROM 8:26-27](#)

Brothers and sisters:

The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness;
for we do not know how to pray as we ought,
but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings.

And the one who searches hearts
knows what is the intention of the Spirit,
because he intercedes for the holy ones
according to God's will.

Alleluia [MT 11:25](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth;
you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel [MT 13:24-43](#) OR [13:24-30](#)

Jesus proposed another parable to the crowds, saying:

"The kingdom of heaven may be likened
to a man who sowed good seed in his field.

While everyone was asleep his enemy came
and sowed weeds all through the wheat, and then went off.

When the crop grew and bore fruit, the weeds appeared as well.

The slaves of the householder came to him and said,

'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?

Where have the weeds come from?'

He answered, 'An enemy has done this.'

His slaves said to him,

‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’
He replied, ‘No, if you pull up the weeds
you might uproot the wheat along with them.
Let them grow together until harvest;
then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters,
“First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning;
but gather the wheat into my barn.”’”

He proposed another parable to them.
“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed
that a person took and sowed in a field.
It is the smallest of all the seeds,
yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants.
It becomes a large bush,
and the ‘birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.’”

He spoke to them another parable.
“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast
that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour
until the whole batch was leavened.”

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables.
He spoke to them only in parables,
to fulfill what had been said through the prophet:
*I will open my mouth in parables,
I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation
of the world.*

Then, dismissing the crowds, he went into the house.
His disciples approached him and said,
“Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”
He said in reply, “He who sows good seed is the Son of Man,
the field is the world, the good seed the children of the kingdom.
The weeds are the children of the evil one,
and the enemy who sows them is the devil.
The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.
Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire,
so will it be at the end of the age.
The Son of Man will send his angels,
and they will collect out of his kingdom
all who cause others to sin and all evildoers.
They will throw them into the fiery furnace,
where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.
Then the righteous will shine like the sun

in the kingdom of their Father.
Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

I went through what can only be described as a personal crisis earlier this week: for several days, I thought my sourdough starter had died.

I went to my pantry to fetch it, thinking that I would feed it and let it bubble up overnight so that I could make a dough the following morning. After the dough’s first rise, I planned to retard the dough in the fridge a second night and bake my boule on the third day. (I know, it sounds a little like Jesus’ resurrection.)

But, when I looked at my starter, I was sure it had died.

I started this starter over fifteen years ago. I went over to see my friend Pat at Leveroni Vineyards {“accept no substitute!”}. Pat and I picked a few grape-clusters off her vines. I brought them home, placed them carefully in a bowl and spooned some flour over them. Then I added a little water, placing this rather unappetizing mud-pie in a sunny window of my kitchen.

Then, I waited.

Being patient is very important in making sourdough. Being patient, of course, is important when it comes to many things, including the Kingdom of God. But before I get to the Kingdom of God, let me tell you more about my sourdough starter.

Looking at my starter and thinking all was lost, I could swear that I heard the *Dies Irae* from Verdi’s Requiem outside my kitchen. Then, I smelled the starter. It smelled nice and sour, as it should. But it didn’t smell yeasty at all...

Was the yeast dead? What to do?

First, I said a little prayer to Saint Honoré of Amiens (you all know him – he’s the patron saint of bakers). Then, in an act of faith, I added a little flour and water to the moribund starter. After that, all I could do was wait.

The following day, the starter was still a lifeless paste with no cheery bubbles indicating that my faith had been well-placed. The day after that? Still no bubbles... But on the third day (just like in the Bible): resurrection! The bubbles were smiling back at me as if all the little yeasties were saying,

“Oh ye of little faith, do you really think we would desert you in your time of need?”

I will feed the starter again tonight and make a dough tomorrow (Saturday) and will have bread baking in the oven on Sunday shortly after the 9:30 mass.

I can almost smell it already... which brings me to the Kingdom of God.

Last week, and again, this Sunday, the Lord has been out-doing himself in offering curious stories and images (parables) about the Kingdom of God. Last week, he told us the parable of the sowers. This week, Jesus gives us the parable of the wheat and the weeds as well as the parable of the mustard seed. But I am not going to comment on these parables. Instead, in honor of my recently resurrected sourdough starter, I want to reflect on the parable of the leaven.

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast
that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour
until the whole batch was leavened

Jesus is nothing if not extravagant in his parables. This is a parable no exception.

What woman (presumably a homemaker) makes bread with three measures of flour? This is enough flour to feed over a hundred people! A sensible woman bakes one loaf every day for the family. She makes a dough and then adds a little starter left over from the previous day's baking. Before baking, however, she will pinch a little of the dough to serve as starter for the next day's dough.

How much time will it take for this pinch of starter to leaven three whole measures of dough? Take it from me: the dough won't be ready to bake the following morning. It will be many days before you see in bubbles in the dough if you see them at all. And maybe days more before you will get enough bubbles to insure that you have a nice open crumb when you slice into your sourdough at dinner time.

I'm confident that all the women listening to Jesus preach this parable said to him:

"Sonny, didn't you watch your mother bake bread back in Nazareth? If you want to leaven three whole measures of flour with the previous day's starter, you will need to be extraordinarily patient."

And no doubt, Jesus smiled back as said,

"Yes Ladies, of course it will take time for the yeast to leaven the dough... and so it is with the Kingdom of God."

(To be clear: none of this is recorded in any of the Gospels.)

A good dough takes time to leaven. If you hope to succeed in the baking business, you need to have patience. (This is especially the case if you let your starter starve to an inch of its death like I did.) There is just no getting around the fact that the yeast, whether your starter is perky or moribund, works at its own pace.

The same is true, apparently, of the Holy Spirit in bringing about the Kingdom of God.

If you are like me (busy, impatient and saddled with an exaggerated sense of self-importance), you will have to get a grip on yourself when it comes to doing your bit to bring about the Kingdom of God.

For a good sourdough, you have to feed your starter and wait. When the starter is perky, add it to your dough. And then your job is to wait some more. The dough will be ready to bake when the yeast has done its work. The same is true in proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps the trick is learning how to act within the world with what the great spiritual directors call *serenitas* (serenity). Acting with serenity often means learning how to wait as the yeast does its job. Patience is a virtue that can be difficult to cultivate.

Saint Francis de Sales (1567-1622) understood this quite well. This Saint Francis was the bishop of Genoa during a very turbulent period in the Church's history. He was noteworthy for his serenity. In one of his books on spiritual direction, he offers very practical advice about serenity or what he calls "tranquility in action."

"In order to acquire tranquility in action, it is necessary to carefully consider what we are capable of accomplishing and never to undertake more than that."

Those who would work for the Kingdom of God must know themselves through and through and be honest about their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Anything else is what Francis de Sales calls "self-love."

"To be anxious about doing much rather than doing well is a self-love that wishes to undertake everything and accomplishes nothing!"

I think this is very useful advice.

Feed your starter. Get it to perk. Can you smell the yeast within the sourness? If so, it's ready. Add your starter to the dough. Good: but your work is not finished. Now your job is to be patient, be serene, be tranquil, and let the Holy Spirit do its work. In the Spirit's own time, you will have your loaf of sourdough.

And trust in just this: as you bring your loaf to the table to feed your loved-ones, God, in his own mysterious way, is leavening the whole of creation in bringing about his Kingdom. You are the yeast that leavens this Kingdom. Be patient, for patience is God's work.

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?