

HOMILY FOR THIRTIETH-SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY  
TIME

Sunday, 19 November 2023

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: 157

Reading 1 Prv 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

When one finds a worthy wife,  
her value is far beyond pearls.  
Her husband, entrusting his heart to her,  
has an unfailing prize.  
She brings him good, and not evil,  
all the days of her life.  
She obtains wool and flax  
and works with loving hands.  
She puts her hands to the distaff,  
and her fingers ply the spindle.  
She reaches out her hands to the poor,  
and extends her arms to the needy.  
Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting;  
the woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.  
Give her a reward for her labors,  
and let her works praise her at the city gates.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5

R. (cf. 1a) Blessed are those who fear the Lord.  
Blessed are you who fear the LORD,  
who walk in his ways!  
For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork;  
blessed shall you be, and favored.  
R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord.  
Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine  
in the recesses of your home;  
Your children like olive plants  
around your table.  
R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord.  
Behold, thus is the man blessed

who fears the LORD.  
The LORD bless you from Zion:  
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem  
all the days of your life.  
R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

Reading 2 1 Thes 5:1-6

Concerning times and seasons, brothers and sisters,  
you have no need for anything to be written to you.  
For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord  
will come like a thief at night.  
When people are saying, "Peace and security, "  
then sudden disaster comes upon them,  
like labor pains upon a pregnant woman,  
and they will not escape.

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness,  
for that day to overtake you like a thief.  
For all of you are children of the light  
and children of the day.  
We are not of the night or of darkness.  
Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do,  
but let us stay alert and sober.

Alleluia Jn 15:4a, 5b

R. Alleluia, alleluia.  
Remain in me as I remain in you, says the Lord.  
Whoever remains in me bears much fruit.  
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mt 25:14-30

Jesus told his disciples this parable:  
"A man going on a journey called in his servants and  
entrusted his possessions to them.  
To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third,  
one-- to each according to his ability.  
Then he went away.  
Immediately the one who received five talents went and  
traded with them,  
and made another five.  
Likewise, the one who received two made another two.  
But the man who received one went off and dug a hole  
in the ground and buried his master's money.

"After a long time  
the master of those servants came back  
and settled accounts with them.  
The one who had received five talents came forward  
bringing the additional five.  
He said, 'Master, you gave me five talents.  
See, I have made five more.'  
His master said to him,  
'Well done, my good and faithful servant.  
Since you were faithful in small matters,  
I will give you great responsibilities.  
Come, share your master's joy.'  
Then the one who had received two talents also came  
forward and said,  
'Master, you gave me two talents.  
See, I have made two more.'  
His master said to him,  
'Well done, my good and faithful servant.  
Since you were faithful in small matters,  
I will give you great responsibilities.  
Come, share your master's joy.'  
Then the one who had received the one talent came  
forward and said,  
'Master, I knew you were a demanding person,  
harvesting where you did not plant  
and gathering where you did not scatter;  
so out of fear I went off  
and buried your talent in the ground.  
Here it is back.'  
His master said to him in reply,  
'You wicked, lazy servant!  
So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant  
and gather where I did not scatter?  
Should you not then have put my money in the bank  
so that I could have got it back with interest on my return?  
Now then! Take the talent from him  
and give it to the one with ten.  
For to everyone who has,  
more will be given and he will grow rich;  
but from the one who has not,  
even what he has will be taken away.  
And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside,  
where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'"

## PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Today, I want to talk about women, their dignity and their holiness in the eyes of God. I want to talk about how we, as the Church, must accompany women in a way that allows them to use their gifts in support of the Church's mission to announce the Good News.

I want to talk about women today, not just because the first reading is about the greatness of a "worthy wife." I want to talk about women in the Church today because the Gospel reading is Jesus' parable of the talents.

I also want to talk about women today because local Churches in many parts of the world are calling for a return to the Church's ancient practice of ordaining women for service as deacons. This call for ordaining women comes as part of the synod-process.

But there is yet another reason I want to talk about women.

Recently, I spoke at some length with a woman who is suffering greatly. She opened her heart to me as we sat in the back of the church. She is in her sixties and her children are grown up and have left home. She has lived here in Sonoma for almost 30 years but doesn't speak English. She was born on a *rancho* in Jalisco and, as is often the case, had to leave school and go to work to support her family after only a few years of grammar school.

When she watches her grandchildren use their iPhones and surf the internet, she senses that there is a world that she knows nothing about - a world from which she has been excluded.

"Padre, I feel left behind (*dejada*)."

This woman feels that she is useless and of no consequence.

Pope Francis speaks often about our modern "throw-away" culture where some people are pushed aside as useless and of no consequence.

The Bible requires us to recognize the innate dignity of every single human being, no matter how useless they might be in the eyes of the world. The Church needs to be a community dedicated to building a society where every human being has an opportunity to contribute to the common good and where the gifts of all are recognized and celebrated.

This is the vision of the Church within which we should be thinking about the leadership women.

If the Church is called to help build a world where everyone has an opportunity to serve in according with their abilities, then we need to be a community where the gifts of women are recognized and supported.

The first reading extols the virtues of a worthy wife.

Her husband, entrusting his heart to her,  
has an unfailing prize.

She works with “loving hands” not only at the spindle, but also in reaching out to the poor and the needy.

Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting;  
the woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.  
Give her a reward for her labors,  
and let her works praise her at the city gates.

I know many women who are like this “worthy wife.”

Take for example, Phoebe. This is what the Apostle Paul said of her in his letter to the Romans:

I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a minister\* of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the holy ones, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a benefactor to many and to me as well.

Cenchreae was one of the ports for the city of Corinth and Paul was preaching in Corinth when he wrote his Letter to the Romans. Most scripture scholars think that Phoebe was

Paul's courier: she brought the letter from Corinth to Rome. This is why he mentions her at the end of the letter.

In his letter, Paul goes out of his way to say that Phoebe is a "minister of the church." The word Saint Paul uses for this in ancient Greek is *diakonos*.

Phoebe was a deacon.

In the Gospel for today, Jesus tells us a parable:

A man going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one-- to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

You know the story. When the master gets back, he rewards the servant who did the most with the money he was given. The servant who did the least with his resources was punished.

The message is clear: God expects us to make something of the gifts we have been given no matter what our gifts happen to be.

Jesus parable should be read as a challenge to the Church today. We must create a Church where everyone can make something of their gifts. We can start to build such a Church by finding ways to recognize the gifts we have been given and providing opportunities for our people to make a contribution to the common good of us all.

Deacons do lots of things. They preach at mass and minister to the sick. They celebrate weddings and they accompany the poor.

I know lots of women who would be able to do such things well. The time for ordaining women, once again, has come.

### 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?