

## HOMILY FOR THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 19 September 2021

- 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: 134

#### Reading I Wis 2:12, 17-20

The wicked say:

Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us;

he sets himself against our doings,

reproaches us for transgressions of the law

and charges us with violations of our training.

Let us see whether his words be true;

let us find out what will happen to him.

For if the just one be the son of God, God will defend him

and deliver him from the hand of his foes.

With revilement and torture let us put the just one to the test

that we may have proof of his gentleness

and try his patience.

Let us condemn him to a shameful death;

for according to his own words, God will take care of him.

#### Responsorial Psalm Ps 54:3-4, 5, 6 and 8

R. (6b) The Lord upholds my life.

O God, by your name save me,

and by your might defend my cause.

O God, hear my prayer;

hearken to the words of my mouth.

R. The Lord upholds my life.

For the haughty have risen up against me,

the ruthless seek my life;

they set not God before their eyes.

R. The Lord upholds my life.

Behold, God is my helper;

the Lord sustains my life.

Freely will I offer you sacrifice;

I will praise your name, O LORD, for its goodness.

R. The Lord upholds my life.

**Reading II Jas 3:16—4:3**

Beloved:

Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist,  
there is disorder and every foul practice.  
But the wisdom from above is first of all pure,  
then peaceable, gentle, compliant,  
full of mercy and good fruits,  
without inconstancy or insincerity.  
And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace  
for those who cultivate peace.  
Where do the wars  
and where do the conflicts among you come from?  
Is it not from your passions  
that make war within your members?  
You covet but do not possess.  
You kill and envy but you cannot obtain;  
you fight and wage war.  
You do not possess because you do not ask.  
You ask but do not receive,  
because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

**Alleluia Cf. 2 Thes 2:14**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.  
God has called us through the Gospel  
to possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel Mk 9:30-37**

Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee,  
but he did not wish anyone to know about it.  
He was teaching his disciples and telling them,  
“The Son of Man is to be handed over to men  
and they will kill him,  
and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise.”  
But they did not understand the saying,  
and they were afraid to question him.  
They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house,  
he began to ask them,  
“What were you arguing about on the way?”  
But they remained silent.  
They had been discussing among themselves on the way  
who was the greatest.  
Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them,

“If anyone wishes to be first,  
he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”  
Taking a child, he placed it in the their midst,  
and putting his arms around it, he said to them,  
“Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me;  
and whoever receives me,  
receives not me but the One who sent me.”

## **PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS**

I turned 70 last June. Looking back on my life, I can think of several times when I have prayed to God that He illumine my mind so that I might understand the desires of my heart.

If I only knew what I really wanted, perhaps then I would be happy. Perhaps then, in being happy, I would be of better service to others or at least of more use to myself.

I don't mean to imply that knowing what you really want guarantees that you will be happy. Some of us really want to do things that do not bring happiness to ourselves or to anyone else for that matter. However, I do believe that most of us, when we are given the grace to delve deeply into the darkness of our hearts, find there a great desire to do what is good and beneficial for ourselves, for our family members and neighbors and for the earth itself.

For the fourth week in a row, the Church has given us a portion from the Epistle of James for the second reading. This Epistle bristles with practical wisdom. I strongly suspect that the Apostle James, whose name I received at my baptism, had the grace to delve deeply into the labyrinth of solitude that is the human heart. And James found there a deep desire to do what is beneficial to all. Perhaps, this is where the practicality of his wisdom comes from.

James is always attentive to how our lack of self-knowledge leads us to do things that are destructive.

Where do the wars  
and where do the conflicts among you come from?  
Is it not from your passions  
that make war within your members?

We have conflict within our families and our local communities because, deep within our hearts, our desires (“passions”) are at war with themselves. If we only could know what we really desired, perhaps we wouldn't make such wars.

As a result, the Apostle can say to us:

You covet but do not possess.  
You kill and envy but you cannot obtain;  
you fight and wage war.

There is a practical insight here for us all. How many of us, after obtaining what, supposedly, “I really want,” discover that we aren’t happy after all? All too often, this entails doing a little violence along the way.

For the Apostle James, coveting, killing and envy are signs that our desires are disordered. We are at war with one another because our desires are at cross-purposes with themselves.

I am sorry to say it, but there is an abundance of empirical evidence to support the Apostle’s teaching.

I am reminded of what Regan, one of King Lear’s wicked daughters, says of her father in Shakespeare’s famous play,

Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.

Go see *King Lear*. What horrid misery comes out of Lear’s lack of self-awareness.

And yet, I continue to believe that, for most of us, knowing what we *truly* desire will bring us to happiness. I believe this because I believe that grace discovers us whenever and wherever we return to ourselves through self-understanding.

According to the Saint Paul, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit – a gift that we have all received through Baptism, is *agathosyne*.

This is a great word, but hard to capture in English. *Agathosyne* means an attachment to doing what is good, or the pursuit of what is beneficial. It refers to a thirst for doing what will be a blessing for others.

Above all else, *agathosyne* is a desire. In Latin, *agathosyne* is translated as *benevolentia*, which means “the will to do what is good.”

*Agathosyne* may be our deepest desire. It is, without doubt, inseparable from our desire to be friends with God and it often makes its presence felt within us in moments of insight into ourselves.

Do not be afraid to look into the darkness of your heart. You will certainly find desires there that are disordered. Keep looking. Look very deep. I will pray for you. I will pray that there, among the deepest desires of your heart, you will discover the desire to be a blessing to yourself, to your loved ones and neighbors and to the earth itself.

In his Epistle, commenting on the war-making of our disordered desires, the Apostle James says,

But the wisdom from above is first of all pure,  
then peaceable, gentle, compliant,  
full of mercy and good fruits,  
without inconstancy or insincerity.

He is talking about the grace of the Holy Spirit that brings us self-knowledge. He is talking about the virtues of *agathosyne* and *benevolentia*. He is talking about what your heart really desires and the grace that will finally bring you happiness.

### **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?

