

HOMILY FOR THE TWENTY-NINETH SUNDAY
OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 20 October 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: 146

Reading I Is 53:10-11

The LORD was pleased to crush him in infirmity.
If he gives his life as an offering for sin,
he shall see his descendants in a long life,
and the will of the LORD shall be
accomplished through him.
Because of his affliction he shall see
the light in fullness of days;
through his suffering, my servant shall justify many,
and their guilt he shall bear.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Upright is the word of the LORD,
and all his works are trustworthy.
He loves justice and right;
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.
R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,
upon those who hope for his kindness,
To deliver them from death
and preserve them in spite of famine.
R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Our soul waits for the LORD,
who is our help and our shield.
May your kindness, O LORD, be upon us
who have put our hope in you.
R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Reading II Heb 4:14-16

Brothers and sisters:

Since we have a great high priest
who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus, the Son of God,
let us hold fast to our confession.
For we do not have a high priest
who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,
but one who has similarly been tested in every way,
yet without sin.
So let us confidently approach the throne of grace
to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.

Alleluia Mk 10:45

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
The Son of Man came to serve
and to give his life as a ransom for many.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 10:35-45 or 10:42-45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee,
came to Jesus and said to him,
"Teacher, we want you to do for us
whatever we ask of you."
He replied, "What do you wish me to do for you?"
They answered him, "Grant that in your glory
we may sit one at your right and the other at your left."
Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking.
Can you drink the cup that I drink
or be baptized with the baptism
with which I am baptized?"
They said to him, "We can."
Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink, you will drink,
and with the baptism with which I am baptized,
you will be baptized;
but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give
but is for those for whom it has been prepared."

When the ten heard this,
they became indignant at James and John.
Jesus summoned them and said to them,
"You know that those who are recognized

as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them,
and their great ones make their authority over them felt.
But it shall not be so among you.
Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you
will be your servant;
whoever wishes to be first among you
will be the slave of all.
For the Son of Man did not come to be served
but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Note: this homily has been prepared for our Spanish-speaking families at Saint Leo's Church and translated into English.

I want to speak to you today about suffering - the inevitability of suffering but also its meaning for us as Christian people struggling with the demanding teachings of the Gospel.

I want to reflect on today's Gospel. James and John have a grand vision for themselves as little princelings in the coming Kingdom of God. In this, they misunderstand Jesus fundamentally. I also want to reflect on the first reading - Isaiah's disturbing poem about the Messiah as the "suffering servant."

But first, let me tell you about one of my favorite songs, *Caminos de Gunajuato*, by José Alfredo Jiménez.

You all know how it goes -

No vale nada la vida
La vida no vale nada
Comienza siempre llorando
Y así llorando se acaba
Por eso es que en este mundo
La vida no vale nada

Not worth a damn.
Life just ain't worth a damn.
It begins with tears
And it ends with tears as well.

And so, here in this world,
Life just ain't worth a damn.

I love this *ranchero* because it tells out an important truth about us all: our lives are marked with suffering. To live on this earth means that we must inevitably struggle with pain and misfortune. I don't mean to say that there are never moments of genuine joy and contentment. But we must admit that the *caminos* of Guanajuato and in fact all the *caminos* of this world lead to people who are suffering.

As a human being, I understand José Alfredo Jiménez when he sings that "life just ain't worth a damn." But let me also say that, as a man of faith, I sympathize with him as well. In fact, I am grateful to him for telling the truth about us all.

I love this song because it does not let us flee from the reality of suffering. In fact, *Caminos de Guanajuato* confronts us with this truth about ourselves.

As human beings, we are always tempted to flee from the reality of suffering. But, as people of Christian faith, I also think we have to recognize that the Gospel will not let us do this.

Look at the Gospel for today's mass.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approach Jesus with what cannot be considered a modest request.

Teacher, we want you to do for us
whatever we ask of you.

They want him to guarantee that they are given high positions when the Messiah restores the Kingdom of Israel.

Grant that in your glory we may sit
one at your right and the other at your left.

And Jesus's response is revealing:

You do not know what you are asking.

Never forget these words. James and John, and all of us, don't know what we are asking because, fundamentally, we don't understand the Messiah God is sending to deliver us from our sins. The Messiah God is sending is a suffering Messiah.

So now, look at the first reading.

Centuries before the time of Jesus, the Prophet Isaiah proclaimed that the Messiah must suffer, be humiliated and die in order to redeem us from our sins.

Isaiah doesn't mince his words,

The LORD was pleased to crush him in infirmity.

Yes: the Messiah will be crushed. And it is our sins that will crush him.

Isaiah is saying that our Redeemer will join all those countless human souls who, from the beginning, have been crushed by unbearable suffering.

The Messiah will not only suffer. He will suffer in order to become our servant. I think this is what the Lord means when he gathers his disciples, who are indignant about the temerity of James and John and their attempt at self-promotion, and instructs them.

Jesus summoned them and said to them,

You know that those who are recognized
as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them,
and their great ones make
their authority over them felt.
But it shall not be so among you.
Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will
be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among
you will be the slave of all.
For the Son of Man did not come to be served
but to serve and to give his life
as a ransom for many.

And so, I am reminded of José Alfredo Jiménez and the *caminos* of Guanajuato. Yes, the streets of Guanajuato are full of sorrow and suffering. All the streets of the world are full of sorrow and suffering. I need not remind you of this. But remember this: the Messiah is traveling these same *caminos*. The Lord is going down these roads in search of those who suffer. Our Messiah is seeking out those who suffer so that he can share in their suffering.

The Messiah will be a suffering Messiah because God insists that His Messiah embrace the suffering of all human beings, no matter who they are and no matter how sinful they are. This is how we are to be redeemed: God, in his Messiah, will embrace our suffering.

Do not forget that the Messiah is traveling down the *caminos* of Guanajuato. Do not forget that the Messiah is in search of all those who are suffering.

There is a mystery about our faith that I certainly do not understand. There is a great truth of God that utterly transcends my ability to comprehend.

The Redeemer must suffer. Our Messiah must be humiliated if we poor, confused, sinful human beings are to be redeemed from our suffering.

Remember José Alfredo Jiménez -

Life just ain't worth a damn.
It begins with tears
And it ends with tears.

As people of faith, we sing these words with José Alfredo and with all those who suffer in this outrageous world.

But also, as people of faith, let us remember that our Messiah longs to find us and to embrace our suffering and so to become a suffering Messiah.

This is what God has willed. And this is why the Messiah is traveling down the *caminos* of Guanajuato.

[] [] []

Quiero hablarles hoy sobre el sufrimiento: la inevitabilidad del sufrimiento, pero también su significado para nosotros como cristianos que luchamos con las exigentes enseñanzas del Evangelio.

Quiero reflexionar sobre el Evangelio de hoy. Santiago y Juan tienen una gran visión de sí mismos como pequeños príncipes en el Reino de Dios venidero. En esto, malinterpretan fundamentalmente a Jesús. También quiero reflexionar sobre la primera lectura: el inquietante poema de Isaías sobre el Mesías como el "siervo sufriente".

Pero primero, déjenme contarles sobre una de mis canciones favoritas, "Caminos de Guanajuato," de José Alfredo Jiménez.

Todos saben la letra:

No vale nada la vida
La vida no vale nada
Comienza siempre llorando
Y así llorando se acaba
Por eso es que en este mundo
La vida no vale nada

Me encanta esta canción ranchera porque dice una verdad importante sobre todos nosotros: nuestras vidas están llenas de sufrimiento. Vivir en esta tierra significa que inevitablemente debemos luchar con el dolor y la desgracia. No quiero decir que nunca haya momentos de alegría y satisfacción. Pero debemos admitir que los caminos de Guanajuato y, de hecho, todos los caminos de este mundo conducen a personas que sufren.

Como ser humano, entiendo a José Alfredo Jiménez cuando canta que "la vida no vale nada". Pero permítanme decir también que, como hombre de fe, también simpatizo con él. De hecho, le agradezco que diga la verdad sobre todos nosotros.

Me encanta esta canción porque no nos permite huir de la realidad del sufrimiento. De hecho, "Caminos de Guanajuato" nos enfrenta a él.

Como seres humanos, siempre estamos tentados a huir de la realidad del sufrimiento. Pero, como personas de fe cristiana, también creo que tenemos que reconocer que el Evangelio no nos permite hacer esto.

Miren el Evangelio de la misa de hoy.

Santiago y Juan, los hijos de Zebedeo, se acercan a Jesús con lo que no se puede considerar una petición modesta.

Maestro, queremos que nos concedas lo que vamos a pedirte.

Quieren que Él les garantice que recibirán puestos altos cuando el Mesías restablezca el Reino de Israel.

Concédenos que en tu gloria podamos sentarnos uno a tu derecha y el otro a tu izquierda.

Y la respuesta de Jesús es reveladora:

No saben lo que piden.

Nunca olviden estas palabras. Santiago y Juan, y todos nosotros, no sabemos lo que pedimos a Jesús porque, fundamentalmente, no entendemos al Mesías que Dios está enviando para liberarnos de nuestros pecados. El Mesías que Dios está enviando es un Mesías sufriente.

Miren la primera lectura.

Siglos antes de Jesús, el profeta Isaías proclamó que el Mesías debía sufrir, ser humillado y morir para redimirnos de nuestros pecados.

Isaías no se anda con rodeos:

El Señor quiso triturar a su siervo con el sufrimiento.

Sí: el Mesías será triturado. Y serán nuestros pecados los que lo triturarán.

Isaías está diciendo que nuestro Redentor se unirá a todas esas innumerables almas humanas que, desde el principio, han sido trituradas por un sufrimiento insoportable.

El Mesías no sólo sufrirá. Sufrirá para convertirse en nuestro siervo. Creo que esto es lo que el Señor quiere decir cuando reúne a sus discípulos.

Quando los otros diez apóstoles oyeron esto, se indignaron contra Santiago y Juan. Jesús reunió entonces a los Doce y les dijo: "Ya saben que los jefes de las naciones las gobiernan como si fueran sus dueños y los poderosos las oprimen. Pero no debe ser así entre ustedes. Al contrario: el que quiera ser grande entre ustedes que sea su servidor, y el que quiera ser el primero, que sea el esclavo de todos, así como el Hijo del hombre, que no ha venido a que lo sirvan, sino a servir y a dar su vida por la redención de todos".

Y así, me acuerdo de José Alfredo Jiménez y su canción sobre los caminos de Guanajuato. Sí, las calles de Guanajuato están llenas de dolor y sufrimiento. Todas las calles del mundo están llenas de dolor y sufrimiento. No necesito recordarles esto.

Pero recuerden esto: el Mesías está recorriendo estos caminos. El Señor va por estos caminos en busca de los que sufren. Nuestro Mesías está buscando a los que sufren para poder compartir nuestro sufrimiento.

El Mesías será un Mesías sufriente porque Dios insiste en que Su Mesías abrace el sufrimiento de todos los seres humanos, sin importar quiénes sean y sin importar cuán pecadores puedan ser.

No olviden que el Mesías está recorriendo los caminos de Guanajuato. No olviden que el Mesías está en busca de todos los que sufren.

Hay un misterio acerca de nuestra fe que ciertamente no entiendo. Hay una gran verdad de Dios que trasciende por completo mi capacidad de comprensión.

El Redentor debe sufrir. Nuestro Mesías debe sufrir si nosotros, pobres, confundidos y pecadores seres humanos, hemos de ser redimidos de nuestro sufrimiento.

Recuerden a José Alfredo Jiménez -

No vale nada la vida
La vida no vale nada
Comienza siempre llorando
Y así llorando se acaba

Como personas de fe, cantamos estas palabras con José Alfredo y con todos los que sufren en este mundo atroz.

Pero también, como personas de fe, recordemos que nuestro Mesías anhela encontrarnos y abrazar nuestro sufrimiento y así convertirse en un Mesías sufriente, conforme a la voluntad de Dios.

Por eso recorre los caminos de Guanajuato.

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?