

HOMILY FOR THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME  
Sunday, 14 August 2022

- 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: 123

Reading 1 Is 66:18-21

Thus says the LORD:

I know their works and their thoughts,  
and I come to gather nations of every language;  
they shall come and see my glory.

I will set a sign among them;

from them I will send fugitives to the nations:

to Tarshish, Put and Lud, Mosoch, Tubal and Javan,  
to the distant coastlands

that have never heard of my fame, or seen my glory;  
and they shall proclaim my glory among the nations.

They shall bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations  
as an offering to the LORD,

on horses and in chariots, in carts, upon mules and dromedaries,  
to Jerusalem, my holy mountain, says the LORD,

just as the Israelites bring their offering  
to the house of the LORD in clean vessels.

Some of these I will take as priests and Levites, says the LORD.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 117:1, 2

R.(Mk 16:15) Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Praise the LORD, all you nations;  
glorify him, all you peoples!

R. Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.

or:

R. Alleluia.

For steadfast is his kindness toward us,  
and the fidelity of the LORD endures forever.

R. Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.

or:  
R. Alleluia.

Reading 2 Heb 12:5-7, 11-13

Brothers and sisters,  
You have forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as children:  
"My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord  
or lose heart when reproved by him;  
for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines;  
he scourges every son he acknowledges."  
Endure your trials as "discipline";  
God treats you as sons.  
For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline?  
At the time,  
all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain,  
yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness  
to those who are trained by it.

So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.  
Make straight paths for your feet,  
that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed.

Alleluia Jn 14:6

R. Alleluia, alleluia.  
I am the way, the truth and the life, says the Lord;  
no one comes to the Father, except through me.  
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Lk 13:22-30

Jesus passed through towns and villages,  
teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem.  
Someone asked him,  
"Lord, will only a few people be saved?"  
He answered them,  
"Strive to enter through the narrow gate,  
for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter  
but will not be strong enough.  
After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door,  
then will you stand outside knocking and saying,  
'Lord, open the door for us.'  
He will say to you in reply,  
'I do not know where you are from.'  
And you will say,  
'We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.'

Then he will say to you,  
'I do not know where you are from.  
Depart from me, all you evildoers!'  
And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth  
when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob  
and all the prophets in the kingdom of God  
and you yourselves cast out.  
And people will come from the east and the west  
and from the north and the south  
and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.  
For behold, some are last who will be first,  
and some are first who will be last."

## PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

I distinctly remember walking into a hospital room in San Francisco about forty-five years ago. There, I spoke with an elderly woman, very frail and wizened from what must have been a long illness. She was dying. She had not had an easy life. She was not having an easy death either. Suddenly, in the midst of our conversation, she asked,

Padre, it's so hard to live.  
Why does it have to be so hard to die?

I don't remember what I said to her in reply. Maybe I had nothing to say. I remember feeling awkward and fearful that I would say something to her that was trite. Worse still, I was afraid that I would say something patronizing.

I thought of this woman last Monday. In this homily, I want to explain why this memory came back to me.

Monday 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.

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 shows us the beauty of our original humanity. She is an emblem, a sign from heaven, a visual reminder of what God always intended us to be.

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. We have become something God finds hard to recognize. We are willing to do just about anything to escape our anxiety about death.

If, in her Immaculate Conception, Mary is the icon of our original humanity, her Assumption into heaven takes on a special meaning. The woman who was immaculately conceived did not taste the bitterness of death. Instead, she was assumed into heaven. God never intended any of us to taste of the bitterness of death. We were not created for death. The Maker of Heaven and Earth intended us to walk gracefully 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 drives all human folly, 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 sin and despair, greed and meanness, dread and anxiety, guilt and addiction are not a part of our human nature.

This is very hard to believe.

But we were created for communion with our Creator and communion with one another. Somehow, we have fallen away from this communion. Dread of death is the sign that we are not ourselves. Mary is a sign as well. In the Mystery of her Assumption, she is a sign of our original innocence. The Church celebrates her

Assumption on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August so we might remind ourselves that, for all our sinfulness, we are still God's handiwork.

Padre, it's so hard to live.  
Why does it have to be so hard to die?

I don't remember what I said to that old woman, lying on her deathbed, so many years ago. Maybe there is no answer to her question.

But know this: God never intended that we would be haunted by death. In heaven, after her Assumption, Christ places a crown on the head of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the New Eve. This is the fifth of the Glorious Mysteries. Christ rejoices in our true humanity.

We will not be assumed into heaven like the Blessed Virgin. We will 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.

And then, knowing how hard it is to die, we shall share Mary's crown in the restoration of our true humanity.

#### ORIGINAL SPANISH VERSION:

Recuerdo claramente un encuentro en un hospital en San Francisco hace unos cuarenta y cinco años. Hablé con una mujer anciana, muy frágil y marchita por lo que debió ser una larga enfermedad. Ella se estaba muriendo. No había tenido una vida fácil. Ella tampoco estaba teniendo una muerte fácil. De repente, en medio de nuestra conversación, ella preguntó:

Padre, es tan difícil vivir.  
¿Por qué tiene que ser tan difícil morir?

No recuerdo lo que le dije en respuesta. Tal vez no tenía nada que decir. Recuerdo sentirme incómodo y temeroso de decirle algo que fuera trillado. Peor aún, tenía miedo de decir algo condescendiente.

Pensé en esta mujer el lunes pasado. En esta homilía quiero explicar por qué me vino este recuerdo.

El lunes 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, ella fue asumida, 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 a 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 esta enseñanza: en la Iglesia primitiva, la madre de Jesús se convirtió rápidamente en un icono para nosotros. En María, Dios nos muestra la belleza de nuestra humanidad original. Ella es un emblema, una señal del cielo, un recordatorio visual de lo que Dios siempre quiso que fuéramos.

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

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

Si en su Inmaculada Concepción María es el icono de nuestra humanidad originaria, su Asunción al cielo adquiere un significado especial. La mujer que fue inmaculadamente concebida no probó la amargura de la muerte. En cambio, ella fue asumida al cielo. Dios nunca tuvo la intención de que ninguno de nosotros probara la amargura de la muerte. No fuimos creados para la muerte. El Creador del Cielo y de la Tierra quiso que

camináramos con gracia con Él por toda la eternidad “en el jardín, al aire del día”, como nos dice el Libro del Génesis.

El pavor a la muerte, el miedo que impulsa toda locura humana, es un indicio 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 requiere que creamos que el pecado y la desesperación, la codicia y la mezquindad, el temor y la ansiedad, la culpa y la adicción no son parte de nuestra naturaleza humana.

Esto es muy difícil de creer.

Pero fuimos creados para la comunión con nuestro Creador y la comunión unos con otros. De alguna manera, nos hemos alejado de esta comunión. El miedo a la muerte es la señal de que no somos nosotros mismos. María es también un signo. En el Misterio de su Asunción, ella es signo de nuestra inocencia originaria. La Iglesia celebra su Asunción el 15 de agosto para que recordemos que, a pesar de todos nuestros pecados, todavía somos obra de Dios.

Padre, es tan difícil vivir.  
¿Por qué tiene que ser tan difícil morir?

No recuerdo lo que le dije a esa anciana, tendida en su lecho de muerte, hace tantos años. Tal vez no haya respuesta a su pregunta.

Pero sepan Uds esto: Dios nunca tuvo la intención de que fuéramos perseguidos por la muerte. En el cielo, después de su Asunción, Cristo coloca una corona sobre la cabeza de la Santísima Virgen María, la Nueva Eva. Este es el quinto de los Misterios Gloriosos. Cristo se regocija en nuestra verdadera humanidad.

No seremos elevados al cielo como la Santísima Virgen. Probaremos la amargura de la muerte. Solo entonces seremos levantados de nuestras tumbas en la victoria del amor de Dios sobre el poder de la muerte.

Y entonces, sabiendo lo duro que es morir, 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 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?



