

HOMILY FOR THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 21 July 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: 107

Reading 1 Jer 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds
who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture,
says the LORD.
Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel,
against the shepherds who shepherd my people:
You have scattered my sheep and driven them away.
You have not cared for them,
but I will take care to punish your evil deeds.
I myself will gather the remnant of my flock
from all the lands to which I have driven them
and bring them back to their meadow;
there they shall increase and multiply.
I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them
so that they need no longer fear and tremble;
and none shall be missing, says the LORD.

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD,
when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David;
as king he shall reign and govern wisely,
he shall do what is just and right in the land.
In his days Judah shall be saved,
Israel shall dwell in security.
This is the name they give him:
"The LORD our justice."

Responsorial Psalm Ps 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
beside restful waters he leads me;

he refreshes my soul.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side
with your rod and your staff
that give me courage.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Reading 2 Eph 2:13-18

Brothers and sisters:

In Christ Jesus you who once were far off
have become near by the blood of Christ.

For he is our peace, he who made both one
and broke down the dividing wall of enmity,
through his flesh,
abolishing the law with its commandments
and legal claims,
that he might create in himself one new person
in place of the two,
thus establishing peace,
and might reconcile both with God,
in one body, through the cross,
putting that enmity to death by it.
He came and preached peace to you who were far off
and peace to those who were near,
for through him we both have access
in one Spirit to the Father.

Alleluia Jn 10:27

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord;

I know them, and they follow me.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 6:30-34

The apostles gathered together with Jesus
and reported all they had done and taught.

He said to them,

“Come away by yourselves to a deserted place
and rest a while.”

People were coming and going in great numbers,
and they had no opportunity even to eat.

So they went off in the boat by themselves
to a deserted place.

People saw them leaving and many came to know about it.

They hastened there on foot from all the towns
and arrived at the place before them.

When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd,
his heart was moved with pity for them,
for they were like sheep without a shepherd;
and he began to teach them many things.

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Catholics in Croatia have a wonderful custom they have
incorporated into the wedding liturgy.

The bride takes a crucifix with her to the church. During the
ceremony, she holds the crucifix up to the groom and he
covers her hand in his. Then the priest wraps his stole
around the hands of both the bride and the groom and
blesses the crucifix. After this, he gives an instruction to the
couple, saying something like the following:

You have found your cross;
now treasure it and carry it together.

At the end of the nuptial blessing, just before the new
husband and wife kiss one another, they kiss the cross.

I think there is great wisdom and spiritual depth in this custom. Marriage is a sacrament because the family is “a privileged place of God’s revelation,” as Pope Francis teaches. Nothing less than the Mystery of Christ is revealed in the life of the family.

And the Mystery of Christ is always the Mystery of Christ’s cross. Marriage requires us to cultivate many virtues: self-sacrifice and humility, generosity and patience.

These, of course, are the virtues revealed in the cross of the savior. Remember the priest’s instruction:

You have found your cross;
now treasure it and carry it together.

I like this Croatian custom because it doesn’t sentimentalize marriage. Neither does it romanticize the vocation we embrace when we offer our lives to one another in this great sacrament.

The Pope is right to say that the family is a privileged place of God’s revelation. And in truth, the Mystery that is revealed in the lives of our families is the Mystery of a cross which is a gift given to us by Christ. This is the cross that married people have found and must treasure and must always carry together.

I recommend that we keep this Croatian custom in mind when reflecting on the second reading for today. Pope Francis has called us to reflect on the Church’s “synodality.” Long before we are an institution with a hierarchy and a clergy, we are a community of faith “on the road together,” trusting that God will show us the way forward.

Now, Pope Francis has some strident critics. But the Pope never said this would be easy. We can see this in the second reading.

The second reading makes a lot more sense if you know that the Church in Ephesus was a culturally mixed community of Jews and Gentiles. This local Church was riven by conflicts. Accepting Gentiles who were not

observing the Law of Moses was difficult for Jewish Christians with their ancient customs about diet and purity.

Paul exhorts Jews and Gentiles to come together, even as he is aware of how culturally different they are from one another.

Brothers and sisters:
In Christ Jesus you who once were far off
have become near by the blood of Christ.

Paul is not just aware of the cultural differences, he seems to be emphasizing them. A few verses later, he writes,

He came and preached peace to you who were far off.

But the Jews and Gentiles of Ephesus must learn to be patient. Christ is creating in himself "one new person in place of the two" (Jews and Gentiles).

Most important of all, Paul assures the Church in Ephesus that Jews and Gentiles are being reconciled "through the cross."

Like a priest at a wedding in Croatia, Paul is asking the Jews and Gentiles in the Church in Ephesus to recognize that they have been given a cross and now must find a way to carry this cross together.

This is what the Church is like: we come from every nation on earth. We speak different languages. We have different customs. We have different needs. We don't always get along very well.

But we are a pilgrim people "on the road together." And we should recognize that Christ is telling the Church what the priest says at weddings in Croatia:

You have found your cross;
now treasure it and carry it together.

Being a synodal Church, being a people "on the road together," is hard. Being married can be hard too.

But we have been given to one another. We have been entrusted to one another. Now we must take care of one another.

In the Church, we have found our cross. Now, let us treasure this cross and carry it together.

[] []

Los católicos en Croacia tienen una maravillosa costumbre que han incorporado a la liturgia nupcial.

La novia lleva una cruz a la iglesia. Durante la misa, ella sostiene la cruz ante el novio y él cubre su mano. Luego, el sacerdote envuelve con su estola las manos de los novios y bendice la cruz. Luego de esto, el sacerdote da una instrucción a la pareja, diciendo algo como lo siguiente:

Uds. han encontrado su cruz;
ahora atesórenlo y llévenlo juntos.

Al final de la bendición nupcial, antes de que los nuevos maridos se besen, los dos besan la cruz.

Creo que hay gran sabiduría y profundidad espiritual en esta costumbre. El matrimonio es un sacramento porque la familia es "un lugar privilegiado de la revelación de Dios", como enseña el Papa Francisco. Nada menos que el Misterio de Cristo se revela en la vida de la familia.

Y el Misterio de Cristo es siempre el Misterio de la cruz de Cristo. El matrimonio requiere que cultivemos muchas virtudes: abnegación y humildad, generosidad y paciencia.

Éstas, por supuesto, son las virtudes reveladas en la cruz del salvador. Recuerde la instrucción del sacerdote:

Uds. han encontrado su cruz;
ahora atesórenlo y llévenlo juntos.

Me gusta esta costumbre croata porque no sentimentaliza el matrimonio. Tampoco romantiza la vocación que abrazamos cuando ofrecemos nuestras vidas unos a otros en este gran sacramento.

El Papa tiene razón al decir que la familia es un lugar privilegiado de la revelación de Dios. Y en verdad, el Misterio que se revela en la vida de nuestras familias es el Misterio de una cruz que es un don que nos ha dado Cristo. Esta es la cruz que los casados han encontrado y deben atesorar y llevar siempre juntos.

Recomiendo que tengamos presente esta costumbre croata al reflexionar sobre la segunda lectura de hoy. Es una lectura sobre la dificultad vivir en la iglesia con paz.

El Papa Francisco nos ha llamado a pensar en nosotros mismos como una comunidad de fe que está “juntos en camino”, confiando en que Dios nos mostrará el camino a seguir.

El Papa Francisco nunca dijo que esto sería fácil. Podemos ver esto en la segunda lectura.

La segunda lectura tiene mucho más sentido si saben que la Iglesia en Éfeso era una comunidad culturalmente mixta de judíos y gentiles. Esta Iglesia local estaba dividida por conflictos. Aceptar a los gentiles que no observaban la Ley de Moisés era difícil para los cristianos de origen judío con sus antiguas costumbres sobre la dieta y la pureza.

Pablo exhorta a judíos y gentiles a unirse, aun cuando es consciente de cuán diferentes culturalmente son unos de otros.

Hermanos: Ahora, unidos a Cristo Jesús, ustedes, que antes estaban lejos, están cerca, en virtud de la sangre de Cristo.

Pablo no sólo es consciente de las diferencias culturales, sino que parece enfatizarlas. Unos versos más tarde, escribe:

Vino para anunciar la buena nueva de la paz, tanto a ustedes, los que estaban lejos, como a los que estaban cerca.

Pero los judíos y gentiles de Éfeso deben aprender a ser pacientes. Cristo está creando en sí mismo "una nueva persona en lugar de dos" (judíos y gentiles).

Lo más importante de todo es que Pablo asegura a la iglesia en Éfeso que judíos y gentiles están siendo reconciliados "mediante la cruz".

Como un sacerdote en una boda en Croacia, Pablo está pidiendo a los judíos y gentiles en la Iglesia en Éfeso que reconozcan que se les ha dado una cruz y que ahora deben encontrar una manera de llevarla juntos.

Así es la Iglesia: venimos de todas las naciones de la tierra. Hablamos diferentes idiomas. Tenemos diferentes costumbres. Tenemos diferentes necesidades. No siempre nos llevamos muy bien.

Pero somos un pueblo peregrino "juntos en el camino". Y debemos reconocer que Cristo le está diciendo a la Iglesia lo que dice el sacerdote en las bodas en Croacia:

Has encontrado tu cruz;
ahora atesórenlo y llévenlo juntos.

Ser Iglesia sinodal, ser un pueblo "en camino juntos", es difícil. Estar casado también puede ser difícil.

Pero nos hemos entregado unos a otros. Hemos sido confiados el uno al otro. Ahora debemos cuidarnos unos a otros.

En la Iglesia hemos encontrado nuestra cruz. Ahora, atesoremos esta cruz y carguémosla juntos.

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?