

HOMILY FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

Sunday, 21 November 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: 161

Reading I Dn 7:13-14

As the visions during the night continued, I saw
one like a Son of man coming,
on the clouds of heaven;
when he reached the Ancient One
and was presented before him,
the one like a Son of man received dominion, glory, and kingship;
all peoples, nations, and languages serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that shall not be taken away,
his kingship shall not be destroyed.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 93:1, 1-2, 5

R. (1a) The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty.

The LORD is king, in splendor robed;
robed is the LORD and girt about with strength.

R. The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty.

And he has made the world firm,
not to be moved.

Your throne stands firm from of old;
from everlasting you are, O LORD.

R. The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty.

Your decrees are worthy of trust indeed;
holiness befits your house,
O LORD, for length of days.

R. The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty.

Reading II Rv 1:5-8

Jesus Christ is the faithful witness,
the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,
who has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father,
to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.
Behold, he is coming amid the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him.
All the peoples of the earth will lament him.
Yes. Amen.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, " says the Lord God,
"the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty."

Alleluia Mk 11:9, 10

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come!
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Jn 18:33b-37

Pilate said to Jesus,
"Are you the King of the Jews?"
Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own
or have others told you about me?"
Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I?
Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me.
What have you done?"
Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world.
If my kingdom did belong to this world,
my attendants would be fighting
to keep me from being handed over to the Jews.
But as it is, my kingdom is not here."
So Pilate said to him, "Then you are a king?"
Jesus answered, "You say I am a king.
For this I was born and for this I came into the world,
to testify to the truth.
Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

Today is the Solemnity of Christ the King - or more precisely,
"Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe."

Of all Christ's many titles, "King of the Universe" is, perhaps,
among the least understood. What I have to say today is
somewhat paradoxical: We misunderstand the kingship of

Christ because we do not understand what it means to be poor. Christ is King of the Universe only because he became poor for our sake. The King, who has made himself poor, is found among the world's poor and, of course, found within the poverty of our hearts as well.

Some time ago, I stopped by the house of one of our families at Saint Leo's to say a rosary. The matriarch of the family had died down in Mexico and, here in Sonoma, the family was going to say a rosary around a home altar for the deceased.

As I arrived at the house, I was greeted by the family and their friends. Soon, I saw a young man, not more than twenty years old, with his leg in a cast. His crutches were on the floor by his side. I had never seen him before.

Since he was young, I spoke to him in English.

"Looks like you broke your leg."

He answered me in Spanish, so I continued in Spanish.

"How'd you break your leg?"

In reply, I thought he said,

"I fell off a wall."

I missed it. Actually, he said,

"I fell off THE Wall."

A drug gang was causing trouble for his family in his little village in Jalisco and his mom, fearing he would be killed, told him to flee. He came North. After taking a bus to the border, he lost his balance going over the Wall.

His leg is broken in two places.

I sat down with him after the rosary, placing my cane atop his crutches, and we spoke for some time. His life hasn't been easy. In the midst of his story, he began to weep like a

frightened little boy coming to grips with the fact that this world doesn't care about him at all.

At one point in our conversation, with great gentleness, he rested his hands on my knees, leaned over and began to weep.

I could see the tears dropping onto his hands.

At the end of our time sitting with one another, my cane and his crutches still lying in a jumble beside us, I placed my hands with equal gentleness on his head and gave him a blessing.

I think this story is about Christ the King. I say this because it is a story about poverty.

Let me explain.

Most of us, naturally, think of poverty as a social and economic problem. This is certainly correct.

For the Church, however, poverty is first and foremost a spiritual reality. God impoverished himself in taking on our flesh. God was so determined to share in our suffering that he became our poverty. In assuming our poor flesh, the Lord has endowed our poverty with a depth of spiritual meaning.

Our poverty has become a revelation of Christ, the King of the Universe who made himself poor in order to be with the poor.

In his letter to the Philippians, Saint Paul quotes a hymn that the people were already singing at mass as early as the year 50 AD.

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also
yours in Christ Jesus,
Who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God something to be
grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,

coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

This is the poverty of Christ. This is the spiritual meaning, the true meaning, of poverty as it is revealed on the cross. In Christ, God empties himself in order to become a slave. God has robed himself in the poverty of our fragile, impoverished flesh.

If the Incarnation of the Word is about poverty, the story of my encounter with the young man with the broken leg is about poverty as well. It's hard for me to imagine how poor this young man is. He has no bank account and trades no stocks. He holds no real estate and has no job. He can only place his hands on the knees of a priest and weep as he confesses his sins.

My encounter with the young man led me to reflect on my poverty as well. As I listened to him, I searched within myself and found very few words of advice to give him.

Of course, he wasn't looking for advice.

My words of comfort were pretty flat-footed too.

His was a poverty of material resources. I guess my poverty came from being "poor in spirit."

If we are to hail Christ as "King of the Universe," we must understand that our King has taken on our poverty. In doing so, he has endowed it with an incomparable spiritual meaning. This includes the poverty of those who lack material resources and those, like me, who are just poor in spirit.

Christ is not like those kings that lord it over their people. Neither is Christ a king that is found in the great palaces of this world.

Christ the King is hidden among the poor and forlorn, among those who are far from home. He is found among those with broken bones and broken souls.

Christ the King became poor for our sake and today, he is enthroned wherever human beings find a way to embrace one another out of their poverty, their helplessness, and their humility.

In today's Gospel, with some confusion, Pontius Pilate says to Jesus,

"Are you the King of the Jews?"

Pilate was talking to a king who has hidden himself among the poor.

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:

- o 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?