

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
21 September 2025

Fr. Jim Fredericks

Part One: the readings for the day
Part Two: reflections on the readings
Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY
Lectionary: 135

Reading 1 Amos 8:4-7

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy
and destroy the poor of the land!
"When will the new moon be over," you ask,
"that we may sell our grain,
and the sabbath, that we may display the wheat?
We will diminish the ephah,
add to the shekel,
and fix our scales for cheating!
We will buy the lowly for silver,
and the poor for a pair of sandals;
even the refuse of the wheat we will sell!"
The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
Never will I forget a thing they have done!

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 113:1-2, 4-6, 7-8

R. Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

Praise, you servants of the LORD,
praise the name of the LORD.
Blessed be the name of the LORD
both now and forever.

R. Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

High above all nations is the LORD;
above the heavens is his glory.
Who is like the LORD, our God,
who is enthroned on high
and looks upon the heavens and the earth below?
R. Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

He raises up the lowly from the dust;
from the dunghill he lifts up the poor
to seat them with princes,
with the princes of his own people.
R. Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

Reading 2 1 Timothy 2:1-8

Beloved:

First of all, I ask that supplications, prayers,
petitions, and thanksgivings be offered
for everyone,
for kings and for all in authority,
that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life
in all devotion and dignity.
This is good and pleasing to God our savior,
who wills everyone to be saved
and to come to knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God.
There is also one mediator between God and men,
the man Christ Jesus,
who gave himself as ransom for all.
This was the testimony at the proper time.
For this I was appointed preacher and apostle
– I am speaking the truth, I am not lying –,
teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should
pray,
lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument.

Alleluia Cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Though our Lord Jesus Christ was rich,
he became poor,
so that by his poverty you might become rich.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Luke 16:1-13

Jesus said to his disciples,
"A rich man had a steward
who was reported to him
for squandering his property.
He summoned him and said,

'What is this I hear about you?
Prepare a full account of your stewardship,
because you can no longer be my steward.'
The steward said to himself, 'What shall I do,
now that my master is taking
the position of steward away from me?
I am not strong enough to dig
and I am ashamed to beg.
I know what I shall do so that,
when I am removed from the stewardship,
they may welcome me into their homes.'
He called in his master's debtors one by one.
To the first he said,
'How much do you owe my master?'
He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.'
He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note.
Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.'
Then to another the steward said,
'And you, how much do you owe?'
He replied, 'One hundred kors of wheat.'
The steward said to him,
'Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty.'

And the master commended
that dishonest steward for acting prudently.

"For the children of this world
are more prudent
in dealing with their own generation
than are the children of light.
I tell you, make friends for yourselves
with dishonest wealth, so that when it fails,
you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.
The person who is trustworthy in very small matters
is also trustworthy in great ones;
and the person who is dishonest
in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones.
If, therefore, you are not trustworthy
with dishonest wealth,
who will trust you with true wealth?
If you are not trustworthy
with what belongs to another,
who will give you what is yours?
No servant can serve two masters.

He will either hate one and love the other,
or be devoted to one and despise the other.
You cannot serve both God and mammon."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Some months ago, I sat with one of our teenagers and listened as he told me how his heart was aching. Holding back tears, he said,

It's not fair! It's just not fair!

My heart always aches when I hear such words because, to be honest, this teenager is right: it isn't fair. The world isn't fair. The world has never been fair.

So, what is my job as your priest when I sit down with our young people and my heart breaks as they struggle with their own heartbreak?

Let me reflect on the parable in today's Gospel.

This parable is about the unfairness of the world and the ugly things we have to do to survive this unfairness and how God, somehow, will make it all okay.

The parable is about a "rich man." This means a man who knows how to get his own way in the business world, whether it's fair or not. Someone tells the rich man that his steward is cheating him and the rich man calls his steward on the carpet.

What is this I hear about you?
Prepare a full account of your stewardship,
because you can no longer be my steward.

Realizing he is going to be fired, the dishonest steward decides to survive by ingratiating himself to the people who do business with his boss. He calls on the people who owe his boss money and cuts them a deal. To the one that owes one hundred measures of olive oil, the dishonest steward lets the guy go with just fifty.

Remember: the boss wants to fire his steward for squandering his property and now the steward is preparing a soft landing for himself by doing exactly that! He has figured out how to survive in a world that is "just not fair."

When the master finds out about how his dishonest steward is cheating him, he does something absurd. He commends the wily steward for acting "prudently."

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? The dishonest steward cheats his boss and then the boss commends his employee for his "prudence"?

Let me try to make sense of this.

Jesus' parable is not about fairness. His parable is about the dishonest things we have to do to survive in a world that isn't fair.

And that teenager I was sitting with? The one whose heart was breaking over the unfairness of the world? I have no doubt that he went home and began the painful, rather cynical process of figuring out how he is going to survive in a world that isn't fair.

But, to tell the truth, I don't think this parable is about fairness. I think it's about justice.

Let me be clear: this parable is not about man's justice. It's about God's justice - the justice that will arrive with the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Teenagers think that justice and fairness are the same thing. In fact, they insist that justice and fairness must be the same thing. And their hearts break when they face the fact that the world is neither fair nor just.

But God's justice is not the same as man's justice. God's justice is about mercy, not fairness. In the Mystery of God, justice and mercy are not two different things. Look at Psalm 85: "in God, justice and mercy shall kiss."

This is really hard for me to understand. The world is neither fair nor just – I get this. But in the Kingdom of God, justice will be fulfilled not by fairness but by mercy. I must confess that there is still a teenage boy within my broken heart that is complaining bitterly over the unfairness of the world.

The steward does what he has to do in order to survive. He cheats. He cuts deals behind his boss's back. When I was a teenager, I learned how to survive the same way. I learned how to compromise my ideals, to cut corners and look the other way.

I'm not proud of myself. But, like all of us, I had to figure out how to survive in a world that is not fair. And that teenager whose heart was breaking over the unfairness of the world? I'm sure he went home after talking to me and began the sad process of figuring out how to survive as well.

The Church needs to sit with teenagers and assure them that they are going to be okay. Even as they are forced to compromise their ideals and learn how to cut corners – we need to assure them that they all are going to be okay.

Jesus' parable is difficult. It's about the unfairness of the world and we have to learn how to survive in it. But in the parable, remember: the rich man praises his dishonest steward for being "prudent." This is bold. This almost sounds cynical. But I think this means that God understands that we all have to learn how to survive in a world that isn't fair.

God isn't fair. God is just. And in the Mystery of God, justice is fulfilled in the mercy he shows to all the teenagers who had to learn how to survive in a world that isn't fair.

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?