

HOMILY FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 22 January 2023

- 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: 67

Reading 1 Is 8:23–9:3

First the Lord degraded the land of Zebulun
and the land of Naphtali;
but in the end he has glorified the seaward road,
the land west of the Jordan,
the District of the Gentiles.
Anguish has taken wing, dispelled is darkness:
for there is no gloom where but now there was distress.
The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom
a light has shone.
You have brought them abundant joy
and great rejoicing,
as they rejoice before you as at the harvest,
as people make merry when dividing spoils.
For the yoke that burdened them,
the pole on their shoulder,
and the rod of their taskmaster
you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 27:1, 4, 13-14

R. (1a) The Lord is my light and my salvation.
The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom should I fear?
The LORD is my life's refuge;
of whom should I be afraid?
R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.
One thing I ask of the LORD;
this I seek:
To dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,

That I may gaze on the loveliness of the LORD
and contemplate his temple.

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

I believe that I shall see the bounty of the LORD
in the land of the living.

Wait for the LORD with courage;

be stouthearted, and wait for the LORD.

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Reading 2 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that all of you agree in what you say,

and that there be no divisions among you,

but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose.

For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters,
by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you.

I mean that each of you is saying,

"I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos,"

or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ."

Is Christ divided?

Was Paul crucified for you?

Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel,
and not with the wisdom of human eloquence,

so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.

Alleluia Mt 4:23

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Jesus proclaimed the Gospel of the kingdom
and cured every disease among the people.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mt 4:12-23 or 4:12-17

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested,
he withdrew to Galilee.

He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea,
in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali,

that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet
might be fulfilled:

Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,

the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan,

Galilee of the Gentiles,

the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light,

on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death

light has arisen.

From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say,
"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers,
Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew,
casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen.

He said to them,

"Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."

At once they left their nets and followed him.

He walked along from there and saw two other brothers,
James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John.

They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets.

He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father
and followed him.

He went around all of Galilee,

teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom,
and curing every disease and illness among the people.

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

As many of you know, in October of this year, Pope Francis will gather with about 200 of our fellow Catholics, mostly bishops, but other Catholic leaders as well, for a "synod on synodality."

A synod is a meeting. But in Greek, it literally means "on the way together" (*syn-hodos*). A synod on the issue of the Church's "synodality," therefore, means that Pope Francis wants us to reflect on the Church as a community of faith spread throughout the world that is discerning how we are to begin anew the task of proclaiming the Good News to the world and serving to those who are in need.

This might seem like a daunting task, given the divisions that plague the Church today. Divisions are certainly a problem here in the United States where Pope Francis is not popular with most of our bishops.

Divisions in the Church, however, are nothing new. Just look at the second reading for today. Paul is writing a letter back to the Christian community in Corinth, a city in Greece.

Corinth was a notorious port town, famous for sexual license and its raucous pleasure quarter. But Corinth's Church was raucous as well: it was riddled with conflicts.

I urge you, brothers and sisters,
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that all of you agree in what you say,
and that there be no divisions among you,
but that you be united in the same mind and in
the same purpose.

"Chloe's people" have reported to Paul that there are "rivalries" dividing the community. People are saying,

"I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos,"
or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ."

Today, Catholics are divided over lots of issues. The place of LGBTQ+ people in the Church and even their human dignity is disputed by some. The same can be said of the ministry women in the Church are allowed to exercise. Welcoming the immigrants who sit next to us in the pews on Sunday can be an issue as well. Should the Church be trying to provide ethical guidance on climate change?

I am over seventy years old. Not much can scandalize me. But I must say, when I hear of young priests who prefer to celebrate mass in Latin facing a wall with their backs to the People of God, I am scandalized. And my heart aches when I think of the priests who I no longer want to have anything to do with because of they have been "credibly accused."

So, given the conflicts in the Church today, how are we to find a way to "be on the way together"?

Pope Francis has a few things to say about this. Speaking in Florence some years back, he said that we are not in "an era of change, but a change of eras." Therefore, "attempts at restoration always take us down a dead-end street."

This means that we need to resist the temptation to mistake fidelity to the Gospel with a nostalgia for the past. The Holy Spirit is slowly revealing the Church's future to us and we must work together to embrace this future as we find ourselves "on the way together."

In this "change of eras," the Pope likes to recommend what he calls "unfinished thinking" (*el pensamiento incompleto*). Claiming to have the "big picture" or obsessing with one issue: the Pope calls this a sign of an "anxious spirit." The future that the Holy Spirit is bringing about doesn't fit snugly into anybody's agenda (including my own). If we want to be faithful to the Spirit, our thinking should remain unfinished just like the work of the Spirit is unfinished.

The Pope's insight into the value of "unfinished thinking" brings me back to Paul's letter to our brothers and sisters in Corinth. Paul says something curious towards the end of this reading.

For Christ did not send me to baptize,
but to preach the gospel,

What do you make of this? I take it to mean that Paul doesn't feel the need to run the show in the Corinthian Church or to have the last word. He wants only to share the Good News with the community ("preach the gospel") as best he can.

And then, Paul writes something quite affecting.

He admits that he has not preached the gospel "with the wisdom of human eloquence." He is not pretending to have all the answers and doesn't need to have the last say over the Church in Corinth. Paul is trying to do the best he can to discern the way of faith in a puzzling world.

And then, Paul writes something quite insightful.

He writes that he is not troubled by his lack of eloquence. In fact, he sees his inarticulateness as a sign that God's mysterious purpose is being revealed. That

Paul doesn't have all the answers for the Church in Corinth is...

so that the cross of Christ
might not be emptied of its meaning.

This is a wonderful insight.

Our struggle to be "on the road together," with all our divisions, leads us to the foot of Christ's cross. Don't empty the cross of its mysterious meaning.

The synod this October will not solve all our problems. Pope Francis certainly doesn't expect this. But please pray that the synod be a time of "unfinished thinking." This is what the Holy Spirit demands of us, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its meaning as we make our way "on the way together."

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?