

HOMILY FOR THE TWENTIETH-FIFTH SUNDAY OF
ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 22 September 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: 134

Reading 1 Wis 2:12, 17-20

The wicked say:

Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us;
he sets himself against our doings,
reproaches us for transgressions of the law
and charges us with violations of our training.

Let us see whether his words be true;
let us find out what will happen to him.

For if the just one be the son of God, God will defend him
and deliver him from the hand of his foes.

With revilement and torture let us put the just one to the
test

that we may have proof of his gentleness
and try his patience.

Let us condemn him to a shameful death;
for according to his own words, God will take care of him.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 54:3-4, 5, 6 and 8

R. The Lord upholds my life.

O God, by your name save me,
and by your might defend my cause.

O God, hear my prayer;
hearken to the words of my mouth.

R. The Lord upholds my life.

For the haughty men have risen up against me,
the ruthless seek my life;
they set not God before their eyes.

R. The Lord upholds my life.

Behold, God is my helper;
the Lord sustains my life.
Freely will I offer you sacrifice;
I will praise your name, O LORD, for its goodness.
R. The Lord upholds my life.

Reading 2 Jas 3:16 - 4:3

Beloved:

Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist,
there is disorder and every foul practice.
But the wisdom from above is first of all pure,
then peaceable, gentle, compliant,
full of mercy and good fruits,
without inconstancy or insincerity.
And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace
for those who cultivate peace.

Where do the wars
and where do the conflicts among you come from?
Is it not from your passions
that make war within your members?
You covet but do not possess.
You kill and envy but you cannot obtain;
you fight and wage war.
You do not possess because you do not ask.
You ask but do not receive,
because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Alleluia Cf. 2 Thes 2:14

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

God has called us through the Gospel
to possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 9:30-37

Jesus and his disciples left from there
and began a journey through Galilee,
but he did not wish anyone to know about it.
He was teaching his disciples and telling them,
"The Son of Man is to be handed over to men
and they will kill him,
and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise."
But they did not understand the saying,
and they were afraid to question him.

They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house,
he began to ask them,
"What were you arguing about on the way?"
But they remained silent.
They had been discussing among themselves on the way
who was the greatest.
Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them,
"If anyone wishes to be first,
he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."
Taking a child, he placed it in their midst,
and putting his arms around it, he said to them,
"Whoever receives one child such as this in my name,
receives me; and whoever receives me,
receives not me but the One who sent me."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

This last week, the pope was in Singapore. He was gathered for a meeting with young people of many different religions. In his address, he said something that has become controversial.

"All religions are a path to God."

Some have complained that this is religious relativism. One religion is just as good as any other. Actually, the Pope was exhorting the young people to engage one another in interreligious dialogue. Learning to dialogue when we are young, he said, will make us better at dialogue when we grow up.

Over the years, I have spoken to people who insist that all religions are different trails leading to the top of the same mountain. When we reach the peak of the mountain by these different trails, we will all enjoy the same view.

I don't like this teaching for several reasons. First, how anyone can know this in advance? People who say this must be on the top of the mountain already waiting for the rest of us to catch up. They appear to be tolerant. They are really being condescending.

More troubling to me, this seems to imply that no religion is different than any other religion in any significant way. I don't think this is true. Religions can be remarkably similar in some ways, and remarkably different in other ways.

But worst of all, this teaching also implies that somebody else's religion has nothing challenging to teach us. All religions are just different versions of the same thing. In my experience of interreligious dialogue, other religions are much more interesting than this.

Pope John Paul II taught that every single human being is touched by the grace of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Christians should expect to discover the work of the Holy Spirit in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and the other religions. Catholics need to discover this by means of dialogue with our neighbors who follow other religious paths.

Building on John Paul, Pope Francis urges Catholics to discover the presence of the Holy Spirit in our neighbors who follow other religious paths by working side by side with those who follow other religious paths to make a better world. He calls this a "dialogue of fraternity."

When I reflected on the Gospel for this morning's mass, I thought of a Buddhist nun I've known for many years. She is from South Korea. She and I met Pope Francis together when we were in Rome for an interreligious dialogue. Later, she visited me here in Sonoma.

Over lunch, she told me that, in South Korea, her Buddhist religious order runs a grammar school for the children of refugee families who have escaped from North Korea.

(Sadly, she also told me that some of the children in her school were conceived by women who had been assaulted after they crossed the Yalu River into China fleeing the madness of Kim Jung Un).

My friend loves the Catholic Church. She certainly loves Pope Francis. Best of all, she wants Catholics to join her in serving the children in her school.

By the way, Pope Francis thought this was a great idea.

Why did I think of this good woman when I began to reflect on the Gospel for today's mass? I thought of her because Jesus says something important about children in today's Gospel.

Like last Sunday, Jesus tells his disciples that the Messiah (the "Son of Man") must suffer. But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him. Apparently, they weren't paying attention, because Jesus must ask,

"What were you arguing about on the way?"

At this, the disciples fall into a guilty silence... and for good reason: they were arguing about "who was the greatest."

This is when Jesus instructs them,

"If anyone wishes to be first,
he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."

And to make his point, Jesus places a child in their midst. Putting his arms around the child, he says to them,

"Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me."

My friend is a Buddhist, not a Christian. But she takes care of children who are refugees from North Korea. Read the Gospel for today. This Buddhist nun has something important to teach us about what Jesus said to his disciples.

The Second Vatican Council was way back in the 1960s. But it was an anticipation of the new millennium. In this new millennium, the world is changing very quickly and in ways that can be bewildering. Catholics need to reach out to their fellow Christians and to Buddhists and to people of all the religious paths. We need to build bonds of solidarity with one another. We need to be a blessing to one another. And together, with this Buddhist nun, we

need to take care of the refugee children of the world, no matter what their religion might be.

Then, we can sit down for a great Korean meal and we can ask one another what Jesus meant when he said,

“Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me.”

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?