

## **HOMILY FOR THE SECONND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME**

Sunday, 23 January 2022

- 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: 69

#### **Reading I Neh 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10**

Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly,  
which consisted of men, women,  
and those children old enough to understand.

Standing at one end of the open place that was before the  
Water Gate,

he read out of the book from daybreak till midday,  
in the presence of the men, the women,  
and those children old enough to understand;

and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law.

Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform  
that had been made for the occasion.

He opened the scroll

so that all the people might see it

– for he was standing higher up than any of the people –;

and, as he opened it, all the people rose.

Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God,

and all the people, their hands raised high, answered,

“Amen, amen!”

Then they bowed down and prostrated themselves before  
the LORD, their faces to the ground.

Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God,

interpreting it so that all could understand what was read.

Then Nehemiah, that is, His Excellency, and Ezra the priest-  
scribe and the Levites who were instructing the people  
said to all the people:

"Today is holy to the LORD your God.  
Do not be sad, and do not weep"—  
for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of  
the law.  
He said further: "Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks,  
and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared;  
for today is holy to our LORD.  
Do not be saddened this day,  
for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!"

**Responsorial Psalm Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 15**

R. (cf John 6:63c) Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.  
The law of the LORD is perfect,  
refreshing the soul;  
The decree of the LORD is trustworthy,  
giving wisdom to the simple.  
R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.  
The precepts of the LORD are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
The command of the LORD is clear,  
enlightening the eye.  
R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.  
The fear of the LORD is pure,  
enduring forever;  
The ordinances of the LORD are true,  
all of them just.  
R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.  
Let the words of my mouth and the thought of my heart  
find favor before you,  
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.  
R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

**Reading II 1 Cor 12:12-30**

Brothers and sisters:  
As a body is one though it has many parts,  
and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body,  
so also Christ.  
For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,

whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons,  
and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Now the body is not a single part, but many.

If a foot should say,

“Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body, “  
it does not for this reason belong any less to the body.

Or if an ear should say,

“Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body, “  
it does not for this reason belong any less to the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?

If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of  
smell be?

But as it is, God placed the parts,  
each one of them, in the body as he intended.

If they were all one part, where would the body be?

But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you, “  
nor again the head to the feet, “I do not need you.”

Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker  
are all the more necessary,

and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable  
we surround with greater honor,

and our less presentable parts are treated with greater  
propriety,

whereas our more presentable parts do not need this.

But God has so constructed the body  
as to give greater honor to a part that is without it,

so that there may be no division in the body,

but that the parts may have the same concern for one  
another.

If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it;

if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.

Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it.

Some people God has designated in the church

to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers;

then, mighty deeds;

then gifts of healing, assistance, administration,  
and varieties of tongues.

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?  
Do all work mighty deeds? Do all have gifts of healing?  
Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

OR:

1 Cor 12:12-14, 27

Brothers and sisters:

As a body is one though it has many parts,  
and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body,  
so also Christ.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,  
whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons,  
and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Now the body is not a single part, but many.  
You are Christ's body, and individually parts of it.

**Alleluia Cf. Lk 4:18**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Lord sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,  
and to proclaim liberty to captives.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21**

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the  
events that have been fulfilled among us,  
just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning  
and ministers of the word have handed them down to us,  
I too have decided,  
after investigating everything accurately anew,  
to write it down in an orderly sequence for you,  
most excellent Theophilus,  
so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings  
you have received.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit,  
and news of him spread throughout the whole region.  
He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all.

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up,  
and went according to his custom  
into the synagogue on the sabbath day.  
He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet  
Isaiah.  
He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was  
written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring glad tidings to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.*

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and  
sat down,  
and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him.  
He said to them,  
"Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

## **PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS**

Many years ago, in the middle of the beautiful, blue Pacific  
Ocean, Grandma Rollos told the story.

No one had asked her to do so. In fact, no one was paying any  
attention when she began to tell the story. Most of her kids  
where there, gathered in a house in the highlands above Pearl  
Harbor, in Hawai'i. Lots of her grandkids where there. There  
was plenty of good food, of course. The tv was blaring. The  
house was full of family chatter and laughter.

And then, in the midst of all that life, Grandma began to tell the  
story of her life and her family.

I am happy to say that I was sitting very near Grandma when she began to tell the story. I immediately sat up and paid attention. Shirley and Rose and then Hank and Don were paying attention to her as well. Someone had the good sense to turn off the tv. All the grandkids crowded around.

Grandma was telling the story.

Grandma left her home in a unbelievably remote part of the Philippines when she was just a girl. She took a ship to Manila and then a steamer to San Francisco. By then, she had about two dollars in her pocket.

Somehow, she got from San Francisco to Seattle. I think she knew someone up there. She got a job and eventually married and had a few kids. Like herself, her husband was an immigrant from the Philippines. He worked in a factory, and when he tried to organize a union, they shot him dead. Grandma shed her tears but then, of course, she had to get on with life.

The world doesn't have a lot of time for tears.

The kids went to school and married well and had beautiful kids of their own. And then, the grandkids had their own beautiful kids.

When Grandma was in her mid-eighties, she was still walking every morning to her job as a seamstress in a local hospital up in Seattle. I don't think she ever drove a car. One of her daughters married a handsome young fellow from Maui and they eventually settled on Oahu. Another daughter and her family followed.

In her last years, a young woman came from the Philippines to live with Grandma. She was a distant relative, if I remember correctly. And Grandma took good care of her as well. Grandma love us all.

And then, in the midst of it all that life, Grandma told the story of the family to us all. She didn't call for silence or pound a podium to get our attention. In the midst of all that life, she just began to tell the story.

Grandma Rollos is not my grandmother. I am a friend of the family. But the story she told is a story about our faith. For this reason, it is a story for everyone with sense enough to sit up and listen.

A little over fifty years ago, the Church held the Second Vatican Council. Bishops from every diocese in the world gathered in Rome. Pope John XXIII, to the surprise of all, called the Council. He didn't want to condemn anyone or reject any new theology. Like Grandma, Good Pope John realized that the time had come for us to tell the story once again.

When Grandma told the story, the family had the grace to sit up and pay attention right away. Scholars say that it takes about one hundred years for the Church to sit up and pay attention to a council like Vatican II. I suppose we should expect the world to take even longer.

In the spirit of Pope John and the Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis is asking us to come together and tell the story once again. This is what he means when he says that we must become a "synodal" Church. A synodal Church, as I have said before, is a Church that is "on the path together" (*syn-hodos*). Today, I'm saying that a synodal Church is a story-telling Church.

A synodal Church is by no means unprecedented. In fact, telling the story is part of our inheritance from the Jewish people, the first to hear the Word of God and tell the story.

Look at the first reading for today's mass. It's taken from the Book of Nehemiah.

Almost six hundred years before the time of Jesus, something unimaginable happened to the Jewish people. Jerusalem fell to King Nebuchadnezzar and his army. The Temple was destroyed. A good portion of the people were sent off to Babylon in exile.

This exile lasted a whole generation. Children were born in Babylon who had never seen Jerusalem. But in the midst of their exile, the Lord raised up great storytellers for his people.

They told the old stories about the creation of the world and God's love for what He has created. They told the stories about Abraham, the first Jew, who set out into the desert in response to God's promise. They told stories about Moses and how God remembered his promise to His people when they had fallen into slavery down in Egypt.

"In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth..."

"And the Lord spoke to Abraham, saying, 'leave your father's house for a land I will show you...'"

"And there came to Egypt a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph..."

Scholars think that the first rabbis put these stories together in what the Jewish people today call the Torah, the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses is the first five books of the Bible.

Eventually, the people were released from their exile and returned to Jerusalem. And there, in the ruins of the Temple,

Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which consisted of men, women, and those children old enough to understand. Standing at one end of the open place that was



before the Water Gate,  
he read out of the book from daybreak till midday,  
in the presence of the men, the women,  
and those children old enough to understand;  
and all the people listened attentively to the book of  
the Law.

Like Grandma, Ezra was telling the story.

Look at the Gospel for today as well. Luke is saying that the  
time has come to tell the story anew.

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of  
the events that have been fulfilled among us,  
just as those who were eyewitnesses from the  
beginning and ministers of the word have handed  
them down to us,  
I too have decided,  
after investigating everything accurately anew,  
to write it down in an orderly sequence for you,  
most excellent Theophilus,  
so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings  
you have received.

Like Grandma, speaking quietly in the midst of the life of her  
wonderful, boisterous family, Luke knows it's time to tell the  
story.

Pope Francis is inviting us to come together on the path so  
that we might, once again, tell the story of our faith. Like  
Grandma's family when she began to speak, the world isn't  
paying attention right now. (Some in the Church aren't  
paying attention either).

I recommend that we tell the story the way Grandma told  
the story. She was sitting in the midst of all that life and just  
began speaking in her soft, fragile voice. Grandma didn't

demand that we pay attention to her, but we sat up and listened to her every word.

We are a synodal Church. We are on the path together. We are a story-telling Church. Don't be afraid: it's the Lord who is giving us the story to tell.

Let us sit up and pay attention.

### **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?