

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 23 July 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: 106

Reading 1 Wis 12:13, 16-19

There is no god besides you who have the care of all,
that you need show you have not unjustly condemned.
For your might is the source of justice;
your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all.
For you show your might
when the perfection of your power is disbelieved;
and in those who know you, you rebuke temerity.
But though you are master of might,
you judge with clemency,
and with much lenience you govern us;
for power, whenever you will, attends you.
And you taught your people, by these deeds,
that those who are just must be kind;
and you gave your children good ground for hope
that you would permit repentance for their sins.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16

R. (5a) Lord, you are good and forgiving.
You, O LORD, are good and forgiving,
abounding in kindness to all who call upon you.
Hearken, O LORD, to my prayer
and attend to the sound of my pleading.
R. Lord, you are good and forgiving.
All the nations you have made shall come
and worship you, O LORD,
and glorify your name.
For you are great, and you do wondrous deeds;
you alone are God.
R. Lord, you are good and forgiving.
You, O LORD, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in kindness and fidelity.

Turn toward me, and have pity on me;
give your strength to your servant.
R. Lord, you are good and forgiving.

Reading 2 Rom 8:26-27

Brothers and sisters:
The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness;
for we do not know how to pray as we ought,
but the Spirit himself intercedes
with inexpressible groanings.
And the one who searches hearts
knows what is the intention of the Spirit,
because he intercedes for the holy ones
according to God's will.

Alleluia Cf. Mt 11:25

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth;
you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mt 13:24-43

Jesus proposed another parable to the crowds, saying:
"The kingdom of heaven may be likened
to a man who sowed good seed in his field.
While everyone was asleep his enemy came
and sowed weeds all through the wheat,
and then went off.
When the crop grew and bore fruit,
the weeds appeared as well.
The slaves of the householder came to him and said,
'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?
Where have the weeds come from?'
He answered, 'An enemy has done this.'
His slaves said to him,
'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'
He replied, 'No, if you pull up the weeds
you might uproot the wheat along with them.
Let them grow together until harvest;
then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters,
'First collect the weeds
and tie them in bundles for burning;
but gather the wheat into my barn.'""

He proposed another parable to them.
"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed
that a person took and sowed in a field.
It is the smallest of all the seeds,
yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants.
It becomes a large bush, and the 'birds of the sky come and dwell
in its branches.'"

He spoke to them another parable.
"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast
that a woman took
and mixed with three measures of wheat flour
until the whole batch was leavened."

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables.
He spoke to them only in parables,
to fulfill what had been said through the prophet:
*I will open my mouth in parables,
I will announce what has lain hidden
from the foundation of the world.*

Then, dismissing the crowds, he went into the house.
His disciples approached him and said,
"Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."
He said in reply,
"He who sows good seed is the Son of Man,
the field is the world,
the good seed the children of the kingdom.
The weeds are the children of the evil one,
and the enemy who sows them is the devil.
The harvest is the end of the age,
and the harvesters are angels.
Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire,
so will it be at the end of the age.
The Son of Man will send his angels,
and they will collect out of his kingdom
all who cause others to sin and all evildoers.
They will throw them into the fiery furnace,
where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.
Then the righteous will shine like the sun
in the kingdom of their Father.
Whoever has ears ought to hear."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Somewhere in my readings, I came on a report about a conversation between a landlord and the manager of a large estate in England back in the Middle Ages. Apparently, the harvest had failed to produce enough food for the people working the land. In this account, the manager and the landlord discuss how to distribute millet in the storehouse of the manor from the previous year's harvest to feed the people.

The manager said to the landlord,

"Widow Sutton, I think, deserves more than Richard Wilkins, for though he has three children he is better able to work for them than this woman, who besides her own two small children maintains her husband's mother, who otherwise must be an immediate charge of the parish."

This exchange is revealing.

First, the manager (and his boss) presume that landowners are responsible for the wellbeing of those who live on the land and work it. This means that, when the harvest is meager, landlords are expected to provide for their tenant farmers out of their surplus.

Second, the two men seem to presume that caring for those who can't earn their keep, like the Widow Sutton and her kids and her mother-in-law, is not the responsibility of the Church. It is the responsibility of the landlord. The landlord has an obligation to make sure that the widow and her family don't become "an immediate charge of the parish."

But the manager says one more thing that is revealing about Mrs. Sutton. She is a widow with kids too little to work and a mother-in-law to care for. Therefore, she "deserves" more assistance from the landlord.

So, here is a question for you: If Widow Sutton "deserves" more assistance, is this a matter of charity from the landlord or is it a matter of justice demanded by God?

I think this is a good question for us to ask.

Here at Saint Leo's, we distribute groceries to people like the Widow Sutton – people who can't compete in our insanely competitive society. We do this just about every day of the week.

We also help to support parents who have been injured on the job, can't work, and can't make the rent at the end of the month.

Is this charity or is it justice?

Look closely at the first reading. It is a difficult reading, but well worth the effort.

The author of the Book of Wisdom is wrestling with this question of justice and charity and offers us a valuable insight into what the God of Christian faith demand of us.

The reading begins simply:

There is no god besides you who have the care of all, that you need show you have not unjustly condemned.

Think of Widow Sutton. Her husband has died and left her with two little kids and an elderly mother-in-law. And God cares for all, including those who cannot earn their keep.

We are not allowed to think this woman is being punished by God.

We often try to convince ourselves that the poor are irresponsible and somehow deserve to be poor. From this, it is a very short step to presuming that our prosperity is a sign of Divine favor, a reward we have been given for our virtues.

The Book of Wisdom also gives an instruction to all the landlords in the world today:

Those who are just must also be kind.

This needs to be shouted from the rooftops today. Too often we think of justice in terms of what is "fair" or "equitable." If we are to be pleasing in the eyes of God, then we must realize that doing justice means being kind.

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En mis lecturas, encontré un informe sobre una conversación entre un dueño de una hacienda y su mayordomo en Inglaterra en la Edad Media. La cosecha no había producido suficientes alimentos para las personas que trabajaban la tierra. En este relato, el mayordomo y el patrón discuten cómo distribuir el maíz en el almacén del señorío de la cosecha del año anterior para alimentar a la gente.

El mayordomo le dijo al patrón:

"Creo que la viuda Sutton merece más que Richard Wilkins, porque aunque el tiene tres hijos, el puede trabajar. La viuda, que además de sus dos hijos pequeños mantiene a su suegra, que de lo contrario debe ser un inmediato a cargo de la parroquia".

Creo que este intercambio entre el mayordomo y el patrón es revelador.

En primer lugar, el mayordomo y su jefe asumen que los terratenientes son responsables del bienestar de quienes viven en la tierra y la trabajan. Esto significa que, cuando la cosecha no es suficiente, se espera que los terratenientes mantengan a sus arrendatarios con sus excedentes.

En segundo lugar, los dos hombres parecen suponer que cuidar de aquellos que no pueden competir, como la viuda Sutton y sus hijos y su suegra, no es responsabilidad de la Iglesia. Es responsabilidad del patrón. Los dos tienen la obligación de asegurarse de que la viuda y su familia no se conviertan en "un cargo inmediato de la parroquia".

Pero el mayordomo dice una cosa más que es reveladora sobre la Sra. Sutton. Ella es una viuda con hijos demasiado

pequeños para trabajar y con una suegra que cuidar. Por lo tanto, ella "merece" más ayuda del patrón.

Entonces, aquí hay una pregunta para ustedes: si la viuda Sutton "merece" más ayuda, ¿es esto una cuestión de caridad del patrón o es una cuestión de justicia exigida por Dios?

Creo que esta es una buena pregunta para nosotros.

Aquí en Saint Leo distribuimos comestibles a personas como la viuda Sutton, personas que no pueden competir en nuestra sociedad increíblemente competitiva, casi todos los días de la semana.

También estamos acompañando a los padres que se han lesionado en el trabajo, no pueden trabajar y no pueden pagar el alquiler a fin de mes.

¿Esto es caridad o justicia?

Fijase bien en la primera lectura. Es una lectura difícil, pero vale la pena el esfuerzo leerlo cuidadosamente.

El autor del Libro de la Sabiduría está luchando con esta cuestión de la justicia y la caridad y nos ofrece una visión valiosa del Dios de la fe cristiana.

La lectura comienza simplemente:

No hay más Dios que tú, Señor,
que cuidas de todas las cosas.
No hay nadie a quien tengas
que rendirle cuentas
de la justicia de tus sentencias.

Piensen, todos, en la viuda Sutton. Su esposo murió y la dejó con dos niños pequeños y una suegra anciana. Y Dios se preocupa por todos nosotros, incluidos aquellos que no pueden competir.

No nos permite pensar que esta mujer está siendo castigada por Dios.

A menudo tratamos de convencernos de que los pobres son irresponsables y merecen ser pobres. De esto, hay un paso muy corto para presumir que nuestra prosperidad es una señal del favor divino, una recompensa que se nos ha dado por nuestras virtudes.

El Libro de la Sabiduría también da una instrucción a todos los terratenientes del mundo de hoy:

Con todo esto has enseñado a tu pueblo
que el justo debe ser humano

Esto hay que gritarlo a los cuatro vientos hoy. Con demasiada frecuencia pensamos en la justicia en términos de lo que es "justo" o "equitativo". Si queremos ser agradables a los ojos de Dios, entonces debemos darnos cuenta de que hacer justicia significa ser amable a los humildes.

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?