

HOMILY FOR THE THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME  
Sunday, 23 October 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: 150

Reading 1 Sir 35:12-14, 16-18

The LORD is a God of justice,  
who knows no favorites.  
Though not unduly partial toward the weak,  
yet he hears the cry of the oppressed.  
The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan,  
nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint.  
The one who serves God willingly is heard;  
his petition reaches the heavens.  
The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds;  
it does not rest till it reaches its goal,  
nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds,  
judges justly and affirms the right,  
and the Lord will not delay.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 34:2-3, 17-18, 19, 23

R. (7a) The Lord hears the cry of the poor.  
I will bless the LORD at all times;  
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.  
Let my soul glory in the LORD;  
the lowly will hear me and be glad.

R. The Lord hears the cry of the poor.  
The LORD confronts the evildoers,  
to destroy remembrance of them from the earth.  
When the just cry out, the LORD hears them,  
and from all their distress he rescues them.

R. The Lord hears the cry of the poor.  
The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;  
and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.  
The LORD redeems the lives of his servants;

no one incurs guilt who takes refuge in him.

R. The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

Reading 2 2 Tm 4:6-8, 16-18

Beloved:

I am already being poured out like a libation,  
and the time of my departure is at hand.

I have competed well; I have finished the race;  
I have kept the faith.

From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me,  
which the Lord, the just judge,  
will award to me on that day, and not only to me,  
but to all who have longed for his appearance.

At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf,  
but everyone deserted me.

May it not be held against them!

But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength,  
so that through me the proclamation might be completed  
and all the Gentiles might hear it.

And I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat  
and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom.

To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Alleluia 2 Cor 5:19

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,  
and entrusting to us the message of salvation.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Lk 18:9-14

Jesus addressed this parable  
to those who were convinced of their own righteousness  
and despised everyone else.

"Two people went up to the temple area to pray;  
one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector.

The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself,  
'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity --  
greedy, dishonest, adulterous -- or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.'

But the tax collector stood off at a distance  
and would not even raise his eyes to heaven

but beat his breast and prayed,  
'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.'  
I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former;  
for whoever exalts himself will be humbled,  
and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

## PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

This month marks the sixtieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, and so, a priest named Angelo Giovanni Roncalli (1881-1963) is on my mind.

Roncalli was one of eleven children, the son of a sharecropper in a small, impoverished village in northern Italy, Sotto il Monte. If sharecropping in Italy was anything like sharecropping in the United States, then young Angelo was well acquainted with what it means to be utterly at the mercy of those who wield power in this world. Apparently, he learned from his experience as a youth.

As a priest, Angelo Giovanni proved himself to be smart and a shrewd judge of character. He was also unassuming, and, when he wanted to be, quite disarming.

He rose quickly, first in his home diocese (Bergamo) and then in the Papal diplomatic corps, serving as nuncio (ambassador) in Hungary and Bulgaria. When the Second World War began, he was nuncio in Turkey and Greece.

In Bulgaria, Roncalli established a close personal friendship with King Boris III, despite the fact that he was a Roman Catholic and the King, naturally, was a member of the Eastern Orthodox Church. This friendship would prove very important once the War broke out in Europe. In fact, Roncalli's friendship with the King of Bulgaria is of great importance to the Church up until the present day.

Here's why.

King Boris kept German troops out of his country by assuring the Nazis of his cooperation and then finding excuses to avoid complying with Hitler's directives. This was especially true in regard to the deportation of Bulgarian Jews to the death camps in Poland. Meanwhile, the King

was welcoming Jewish refugees into Bulgaria (especially from Hungary) and providing them with Roman Catholic baptismal certificates and transit visas. These fake documents were coming from Roncalli, in Istanbul.

Roncalli had a close working relationship with Rabbi Yitzhak Hertzog in Palestine. With Roncalli's baptismal certificates, Jews, fleeing the *Shoah*, passed from Bulgaria to Turkey where they were sheltered by Roncalli. From Turkey, the Jews were transported to British Palestine where they were welcomed by Rabbi Hertzog.

Thousands of human beings were saved in this way.

In 1958, Angelo Giovanni Roncalli was elected Pope John XXIII. The following year, he called the Second Vatican Council, which gave us *Nostra Aetate*, the Church's historic expression of esteem for the Jewish people.

How did Angelo Roncalli come to this work during the War? I think there are two reasons for this.

First, Roncalli had the serenity to make friends with the Eastern Orthodox King of Bulgaria. In fact, Roncalli had a habit of making friends with those who were not Roman Catholics. I have no doubt that Roncalli became friends with not a few Jews along the way. (However, I don't think that Roncalli ever actually met Rabbi Hertzog).

Let us never underestimate the power of a friendship with someone who is not like us. Friendships like these humanize us in surprising ways. They also can require us to take ethical stances that we would never, otherwise, have been able to imagine. This is what happened to Roncalli.

Second, I suspect that the Jewish wisdom in the first reading helps us to understand Roncalli's commitment to the Jews.

Ben Sirach reminds us,

[The Lord] "hears the cry of the oppressed,

The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan,  
nor to the widow when she pours out her  
complaint.

As the Hebrew Prophets tell us, over and over, the Lord  
demands justice for “the widow, the orphan and the  
stranger in your land.”

But in reading this passage from the Old Testament,  
Roncalli also was confronted with the truth that,

The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds;  
it does not rest till it reaches its goal,  
nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds,  
judges justly and affirms that which is right.

If this is true – if the cry of the oppressed “pierces the  
clouds” and ascends to the throne of God Himself – then  
how can we, who dwell on this earth, pretend that we do  
not hear this cry?

Like Angelo Roncalli, who was a friend to King Boris and the  
Jews of Bulgaria, we would do well to befriend those who  
are desperate and despised. They have much to teach us  
about how God judges the earth.

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Este mes marca el sexagésimo aniversario de la apertura  
del Concilio Vaticano II, por lo que tengo en mente a un  
sacerdote llamado Angelo Giovanni Roncalli (1881-1963).

Roncalli era uno de once hijos, hijo de un aparcerero en un  
pequeño pueblo empobrecido en el norte de Italia, Sotto il  
Monte. Si la aparcería en Italia era algo así como la  
aparcería en los Estados Unidos, entonces el joven Angelo  
sabía muy bien lo que significa estar completamente a  
merced de quienes ejercen el poder en este mundo.  
Aparentemente, aprendió de su experiencia cuando era  
joven.

Como sacerdote, Angelo Giovanni demostró ser inteligente y un astuto juez de carácter. También era modesto y, cuando quería serlo, bastante cautivador.

Ascendió rápidamente, primero en su diócesis (Bérgamo) y luego en el cuerpo diplomático del Vaticano, sirviendo como nuncio (embajador) en Hungría y Bulgaria. Cuando comenzó la Segunda Guerra Mundial, era nuncio en Turquía y Grecia.

En Bulgaria, Roncalli estableció una estrecha amistad personal con el rey Boris III, a pesar de que era católico romano y el rey, naturalmente, era miembro de la Iglesia ortodoxa oriental. Esta amistad resultaría muy importante una vez que estallara la guerra en Europa. De hecho, la amistad de Roncalli con el Rey de Bulgaria es de gran importancia para la Iglesia hasta el día de hoy.

Este es el por qué.

El rey Boris mantuvo a las tropas alemanas fuera de su país asegurándoles a los nazis su cooperación y luego encontrando excusas para evitar cumplir con las directivas de Hitler. Esto fue especialmente cierto con respecto a la deportación de judíos búlgaros a los campos de exterminio en Polonia. Mientras tanto, el rey estaba recibiendo a refugiados judíos en Bulgaria (especialmente de Hungría) y proporcionándoles certificados de bautismo católicos romanos y visas de tránsito. Estos documentos falsos venían de Roncalli, en Estambul.

Roncalli tenía una estrecha relación de trabajo con el rabino Yitzhak Hertzog en Palestina. Con los certificados de bautismo de Roncalli, los judíos, huyendo de la Shoah, pasaron de Bulgaria a Turquía, donde Roncalli los acogió. Desde Turquía, los judíos fueron transportados a la Palestina británica donde fueron recibidos por el rabino Hertzog.

Miles de seres humanos se salvaron de esta manera.

En 1958, Angelo Giovanni Roncalli fue elegido Papa Juan XXIII. Al año siguiente, convocó el Concilio Vaticano II, que

nos dio Nostra Aetate, la histórica expresión de estima de la Iglesia por el pueblo judío.

¿Cómo llegó Angelo Roncalli a este trabajo durante la Guerra? Creo que hay dos razones para esto.

Primero, Roncalli tuvo la serenidad de entablar amistad con el rey ortodoxo oriental de Bulgaria. De hecho, Roncalli tenía la costumbre de hacerse amigo de quienes no eran católicos romanos. No tengo ninguna duda de que Roncalli se hizo amigo de no pocos judíos en el camino. (Sin embargo, no creo que Roncalli haya conocido al rabino Hertzog).

Nunca subestimemos el poder de una amistad con alguien que no es como nosotros. Amistades como estas nos humanizan de maneras sorprendentes. También nos pueden exigir adoptar posturas éticas que, de otro modo, nunca habríamos podido imaginar. Esto es lo que le pasó a Roncalli.

En segundo lugar, sospecho que la sabiduría judía de la primera lectura nos ayuda a comprender el compromiso de Roncalli con los judíos.

Ben Sirach nos recuerda,

[El Señor] “escucha el clamor de los oprimidos,  
El Señor no es sordo al llanto del huérfano,  
ni a la viuda cuando derrama su queja.

Como nos dicen los profetas hebreos, una y otra vez, el Señor demanda justicia para “la viuda, el huérfano y el extranjero en vuestra tierra”.

Pero al leer este pasaje del Antiguo Testamento, Roncalli también se enfrentó a la verdad de que,

La oración de los humildes traspasa las nubes;  
no descansa hasta que alcanza su meta,  
ni se retirará hasta que el Altísimo responda,  
juzga con justicia y afirma lo que es justo.

Si esto es cierto, si el grito de los oprimidos “atraviesa las nubes” y asciende al trono de Dios mismo, entonces ¿Cómo podemos nosotros, que moramos en esta tierra, pretender que no escuchamos este grito?

Como Angelo Roncalli, que fue amigo del rey Boris y de los judíos de Bulgaria, haríamos bien en ser amigos de los desesperados y despreciados. Tienen mucho que enseñarnos acerca de cómo Dios juzga la tierra.

### 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?