

HOMILY FOR THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME  
Sunday, 24 July 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: 111

Reading 1 Gn 18:20-32

In those days, the LORD said:

"The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great,  
and their sin so grave, that I must go down and see whether or not their actions  
fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me.  
I mean to find out."

While Abraham's visitors walked on farther toward Sodom,  
the LORD remained standing before Abraham.

Then Abraham drew nearer and said:

"Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty?  
Suppose there were fifty innocent people in the city;  
would you wipe out the place, rather than spare it  
for the sake of the fifty innocent people within it?  
Far be it from you to do such a thing,  
to make the innocent die with the guilty  
so that the innocent and the guilty would be treated alike!  
Should not the judge of all the world act with justice?"

The LORD replied,

"If I find fifty innocent people in the city of Sodom,  
I will spare the whole place for their sake."

Abraham spoke up again:

"See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord,  
though I am but dust and ashes!  
What if there are five less than fifty innocent people?  
Will you destroy the whole city because of those five?"

He answered, "I will not destroy it, if I find forty-five there."

But Abraham persisted, saying "What if only forty are found there?"  
He replied, "I will forbear doing it for the sake of the forty."  
Then Abraham said, "Let not my Lord grow impatient if I go on.  
What if only thirty are found there?"  
He replied, "I will forbear doing it if I can find but thirty there."  
Still Abraham went on,  
"Since I have thus dared to speak to my Lord,  
what if there are no more than twenty?"  
The LORD answered, "I will not destroy it, for the sake of the twenty."  
But he still persisted:  
"Please, let not my Lord grow angry if I speak up this last time.  
What if there are at least ten there?"  
He replied, "For the sake of those ten, I will not destroy it."

Responsorial Psalm Ps 138:1-2, 2-3, 6-7, 7-8

R.(3a) Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.  
I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart,  
for you have heard the words of my mouth;  
in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise;  
I will worship at your holy temple  
and give thanks to your name.  
R. Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.  
Because of your kindness and your truth;  
for you have made great above all things  
your name and your promise.  
When I called you answered me;  
you built up strength within me.  
R. Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.  
The LORD is exalted, yet the lowly he sees,  
and the proud he knows from afar.  
Though I walk amid distress, you preserve me;  
against the anger of my enemies you raise your hand.  
R. Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.  
Your right hand saves me.  
The LORD will complete what he has done for me;  
your kindness, O LORD, endures forever;  
forsake not the work of your hands.  
R. Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.

Reading 2 Col 2:12-14

Brothers and sisters:  
You were buried with him in baptism,  
in which you were also raised with him  
through faith in the power of God,

who raised him from the dead.  
And even when you were dead  
in transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh,  
he brought you to life along with him,  
having forgiven us all our transgressions;  
obliterating the bond against us, with its legal claims,  
which was opposed to us,  
he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross.

Alleluia Rom 8:15bc

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

You have received a Spirit of adoption,  
through which we cry, Abba, Father.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Lk 11:1-13

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished,  
one of his disciples said to him,  
"Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples."  
He said to them, "When you pray, say:  
Father, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come.  
Give us each day our daily bread  
and forgive us our sins  
for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us,  
and do not subject us to the final test."

And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend  
to whom he goes at midnight and says,  
'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread,  
for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey  
and I have nothing to offer him,'  
and he says in reply from within,  
'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked  
and my children and I are already in bed.  
I cannot get up to give you anything.'  
I tell you,  
if he does not get up to give the visitor the loaves  
because of their friendship,  
he will get up to give him whatever he needs  
because of his persistence.

"And I tell you, ask and you will receive;  
seek and you will find;

knock and the door will be opened to you.  
For everyone who asks, receives;  
and the one who seeks, finds;  
and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.  
What father among you would hand his son a snake  
when he asks for a fish?  
Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg?  
If you then, who are wicked,  
know how to give good gifts to your children,  
how much more will the Father in heaven  
give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

#### PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Pope Francis has raised a bit of a ruckus about how we ought to say the Lord's Prayer - at least how we say it in English. His Holiness doesn't like the way we pray the sixth petition in the Lord's Prayer.

And lead us not into temptation...

Pope Francis objects to the suggestion that God might tempt us. God, he tells us, is not a source of temptation, but rather only a source of blessing and forgiveness.

The Pope, therefore, likes very much the way we recite the *Padre Nuestro* in Spanish at Saint Leo's.

*No les dejes caer in tentación...*

The Spanish, literally translated, means,

Do not let us fall into temptation...

So, in Spanish at least, the sixth petition does not suggest that God leads us into temptation. Rather, in the sixth petition, we beg God to protect us from being tempted.

The Pope is from Argentina and a native speaker of Spanish. Perhaps we should not be surprised by his preference for "do not let us fall into temptation," instead of "lead us not into temptation."

The Pope has gone so far as to endorse a new version of the Italian translation. "*E non ci indurre in tentazione...*" will become, "*non farlo cadere in tentazione*" (do not let us fall into temptation).

The Pope may have a point. In the Letter of James, we are told,

No one, when tempted, should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one.

God does NOT lead us into temptation. We can, however, ask our Father, who art in heaven, to not let us fall into temptation.

But with all due respect to the Bishop of Rome, if Pope Francis objects to the English translation of the sixth petition, he must also object to the way our German brothers and sisters translate it as well:

*"und führe uns nicht in Versuchung..."*

And, for that matter, the French,

*Et ne nous soumet pas à la tentation...*

And, for that matter, the Japanese,

私たちを誘惑におちいらせず

(I'll stop with the Japanese).

They all say what we say in English:

lead us not into temptation...

These translations suggest that God, at times at least, deliberately leads us into temptation. There is a good reason for this. "Lead us not into temptation" is what the original Greek says. In the original Greek, the sixth petition asks God to refrain from "bringing us" or "carrying us" (εἰσενέγκης) to a "test" or "temptation" (πειρασμόν) where we might miss the mark and fail to live up to what is required of us.

Let me make an observation, which, I hope, might be helpful.

Remember the story as Luke tells it in today's Gospel:

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him,  
"Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples."

Jesus did not intend this prayer for everyone. It is not a generic prayer suitable for just anybody. Jesus has crafted this prayer for those who have chosen to follow the path of discipleship. In other words, the Lord's Prayer is a prayer for those who have been baptized.

And what happened to Jesus after his baptism?

Matthew tells us that, after his baptism,

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Mark's account is even more emphatic. After his baptism,

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan.

In Matthew, the Spirit "leads" Jesus into temptation. In Mark, the Spirit "drives" Jesus into temptation. Either way, the temptation is God's doing. Being led into the wilderness of temptation is what God does to us after our baptism.

Therefore, those who live a life of discipleship need to be ready to deal with the wilderness of temptation. We enter this wilderness whenever we are required to act on our baptism in this complicated world.

The Spirit of God leads us into the wilderness of temptation when we are required to stand up and give justice to "the widow, the orphan and the stranger in your land." Doing this is hard, and when this happens, we are being tested.

The Spirit of God leads us into the wilderness of temptation when we are required to "leave your gift at the altar, go out and be reconciled to your brother." Doing this is hard as well. Forgiving those who have offended us is a test.

The Spirit of God leads us into the wilderness of temptation when we are called to put down our guns and make peace. This too is hard. It is a test.

Should we be surprised that a prayer that Jesus gave specifically to his disciples would include the petition,

lead us not into temptation?

I think not. Jesus knew what it is like to endure temptation. He spent forty days in the wilderness, led by the Spirit into temptation.

Being put to the test is hard. It is a burden, but it is a part of the life of discipleship.

And lead us not into temptation...

These are words that should be on the lips of all who have been baptized.

### 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?