

## HOMILY FOR THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS)

Friday, 25 December 2020

- 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: 14

#### Reading 1 Is 9:1-6

The people who walked in darkness

have seen a great light;

upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom

a light has shone.

You have brought them abundant joy

and great rejoicing,

as they rejoice before you as at the harvest,

as people make merry when dividing spoils.

For the yoke that burdened them,

the pole on their shoulder,

and the rod of their taskmaster

you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.

For every boot that tramped in battle,

every cloak rolled in blood,

will be burned as fuel for flames.

For a child is born to us, a son is given us;

upon his shoulder dominion rests.

They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero,

Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.

His dominion is vast

and forever peaceful,

from David's throne, and over his kingdom,

which he confirms and sustains

by judgment and justice,

both now and forever.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this!

#### Responsorial Psalm Ps 96: 1-2, 2-3, 11-12, 13.

R. (Lk 2:11) Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.

Sing to the LORD a new song;

sing to the LORD, all you lands.  
Sing to the LORD; bless his name.  
R. Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.  
Announce his salvation, day after day.  
    Tell his glory among the nations;  
    among all peoples, his wondrous deeds.  
R. Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.  
Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice;  
    let the sea and what fills it resound;  
    let the plains be joyful and all that is in them!  
Then shall all the trees of the forest exult.  
R. Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.  
They shall exult before the LORD, for he comes;  
    for he comes to rule the earth.  
He shall rule the world with justice  
    and the peoples with his constancy.  
R. Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.

### **Reading 2 Ti 2:11-14**

Beloved:  
The grace of God has appeared, saving all  
and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires  
and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age,  
as we await the blessed hope,  
the appearance of the glory of our great God  
and savior Jesus Christ,  
who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness  
and to cleanse for himself a people as his own,  
eager to do what is good.

### **Alleluia Lk 2:10-11**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.  
I proclaim to you good news of great joy:  
today a Savior is born for us,  
Christ the Lord.  
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

### **Gospel Lk 2:1-14**

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus  
that the whole world should be enrolled.  
This was the first enrollment,  
when Quirinius was governor of Syria.  
So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town.  
And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth

to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem,  
because he was of the house and family of David,  
to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.  
While they were there,  
the time came for her to have her child,  
and she gave birth to her firstborn son.  
She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger,  
because there was no room for them in the inn.  
Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields  
and keeping the night watch over their flock.  
The angel of the Lord appeared to them  
and the glory of the Lord shone around them,  
and they were struck with great fear.  
The angel said to them,  
“Do not be afraid;  
for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy  
that will be for all the people.  
For today in the city of David  
a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord.  
And this will be a sign for you:  
you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes  
and lying in a manger.”  
And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel,  
praising God and saying:  
“Glory to God in the highest  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

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

Merry Christmas.

I want to share a memory of a Christmas past which, I hope will help you to create a manger in your hearts. Mangers are where we find the Christ-child.

On a Christmas Eve, many, many years ago, my mom was in the kitchen, baking up a storm (walnut crescents and butter cookies shaped like Christmas trees). We almost always have seafood on the *cena della vigilia* (as the Italians call this meal). Usually, we have a crab salad with a louie-sauce, but last night, we had a *cioppino*. The crab-boats aren't going out for some reason.

That Christmas Eve, I was stewing. I didn't have a homily for Christmas Day. One of the worst feelings in the world is getting vested for mass at Saint Leo's without something worthwhile to share with the people.

My mom interrupted my stewing.

“Jim, the bread is on order at the French Bakery. Go and pick it up for me.”

Do you remember the sour dough we used to get at the French Bakery here in town? If you do, you’ve been around a long time!

Down I went to the Plaza still thinking about something to say at Mass. Of course, the line went out the door of the bakery and down the block. I queued dutifully. Still no ideas for a homily.

Then suddenly, the lady standing in line in front of me turned around and said,

“You’re a priest, aren’t you?”

For some reason, my stomach tightened a little bit when she asked this. I told myself:

“You’re not going to be able to lie your way out of this.”

I forced a smile and then said,

“Yes, I am. I help out at Saint Leo’s.”

The lady then said,

“Father, I’m sure you’re very busy, this being Christmas Eve and all, but I wonder if you could come to my ranch tonight and say mass for my ranch-hands. They are all alone.”

I thought for a stumbling moment, and then I concluded that, in fact, now it was time to tell a lie.

“Sure, I will be glad to say mass for your ranch-hands tonight.”

I brought the bread home and told my mom that I would be a little late for dinner. She wasn’t a bit happy about this. I probably said something snarky to her like,

“Don’t you know that I must be about my Father’s business?”

She got the reference, but... no, my mom was not a bit happy about this.

I packed an alb and stole and a mass kit and drove up Highway 12 to the ranch. The lady greeted me at the house and told me that the men were in the barn. As it turned out, the barn had no heat, and believe me, the night was cold. A single light bulb was suspended from the ceiling, casting harsh shadows on the horses and the men who were gathered around a little side-table with a cloth over it.

The lady had placed a candle on the altar, and I lit it with a match.

*En el nombre del Padre, del Hijo, y del Espirito Santo...*

The men didn't know their part of the mass, so I filled in with the responses as best I could. I was just going through the drill and not much more. My heart wasn't in it. I was thinking of that crab-salad and the sour dough and how mad my mom was and how I didn't have a homily for Christmas Day.

For the Gospel, I read the account of the birth of Jesus in Luke. It's such a sweet story.

"A decree went out from Caesar Augustus..."

Eventually I came to the part about Mary giving birth to her first-born son.

She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Then something I will never forget happened.

A dog came into the barn. The pup just trotted in from the yard, sniffed around a little, then came right up and sniffed me standing there in my alb and stole. Satisfied with his inspection of the premises, including myself, the dog lay down beside me right in front of the little altar and gently rested his snout on his front paws.

The dog looked up at me with that worried expression some dogs have. It was as if he was hanging on to my every word as I began to preach a little homily in my rusty Spanish. His ears would turn about occasionally in that charming way dogs have. I was thinking the dog may be getting more out of my homily than the ranch-hands.

It was then that I remembered something important about Christmas.

Jesus was born in a barn.

Today, I'm so glad that lady asked me if I were a priest. And I'm glad that I lied when I told her that I would be happy to say mass for her ranch-hands that Christmas Eve. She is like one of the angels that appeared to the shepherds that first Christmas so long ago, saying...

"Do not be afraid..."

Don't be afraid, the angel said to the shepherds. There is a barn in Bethlehem. And this is where you will find the Savior of the world waiting for you.

Do you have the COVID blues? I fear that most of us will be separated from our loved ones this Christmas. This whole year has been difficult for many reasons. The Year of Our Lord 2020 has been a long cold night in a dimly lit barn.

“Do not be afraid.”

If an angel should appear to you when you’re waiting in line for bread at the French Bakery, and your mom is mad at you and you don’t have a good homily for Christmas, tell the angel a lie...

“Oh sure, I will be glad to visit to your barn tonight.”

Go to that cold barn and then wait for the dog to sniff about and curl up in front of you as you do the best you can. Then remember what the angels said to the shepherds,

“And this will be a sign for you:  
you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes  
and lying in a manger.”

Merry Christmas everybody. I can’t be with you for mass this Christmas, but I am so grateful to be your priest.

### **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.

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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?