

HOMILY FOR THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD
(MASS DURING THE NIGHT)

Sunday, 25 December 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: 14

Reading I 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 II 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: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Merry Christmas to you all. I am praying that you and your
loved ones are safe and healthy and at peace this Christmas.

It's the Nativity of the Lord and I am thinking of the Blessed
Virgin and the many women whose faith has touched my heart
this year.

As I think back over the year, I have many stories to tell about
women and their faith. But let me share with you a story that
has stayed with me over the years - forty-six years to be
precise.

When I was just starting out as a priest, in San Francisco, I knew a woman who was poor. She had been deserted by her husband. She was lonely. She had two boys, and now she also had a little baby. This young mother expected little from life. But she wanted for all the world to have the baby baptized and was afraid that the parish would refuse because the father was not in the picture.

I assure you, we would never do such a heartless thing. The pastor asked me to do the baptism. So, I visited the mother in her apartment.

I couldn't believe how small the apartment was - a studio with the bathroom down the hall. Her two boys slept on makeshift shelves in the closet and the baby was snug and sleeping peacefully in an open drawer in the kitchenette.

I shudder to think of how expensive diapers have become since those days.

I thought of this mother when I read the Christmas story in Matthew's Gospel:

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.

A manger is a kind of trough or box used to feed livestock in a barn. There was no room in the inn, so Mary made do with what she had. The same is true of the mother whose baby I baptized so long ago.

This Christmas, I want to remember women of faith - women who make do with what they have; women who somehow survive and manage to do right by their children despite all odds.

Merry Christmas to you all.

I am praying that you and your loved ones are safe and healthy this Christmas. And, like that little baby sleeping in the drawer

in the kitchenette in San Francisco, I hope you sleep in heavenly peace this Christmas night.

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?