

HOMILY FOR CHRISTMAS
Monday, 25 December 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: 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 which 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!

Tonight, I have a story to tell you. It's a story about Saint Leo's... by which I mean that it is a story about all of you.

I'm telling this story tonight for a simple reason: it's Christmas and I don't want you to lose hope.

On this Christmas Eve, 2023, the world is, without a doubt, a very troubled place. Horrible things are being done to families in different parts of the world. I don't need to remind you of this.

I perfectly understand that some of you are losing hope in the world, in our country, in our politics - and indeed: losing hope in one another.

And so, let me tell you a story about hope - *a story that is about you.*

This week, we found a place to live for a family that is seeking shelter from the cold. Saint Leo's did this.

It's a family of refugees. They are fleeing drug gangs and corruption. It's a mom and a dad and their two little boys. None of them speak English. The mom can clean houses and the dad can wash dishes and bus tables or prune vines or whatever.

This week, Saint Leo's found this family a place to live.

It's a remodeled garage. There's a full bathroom, but no kitchen. No problem. We got them a microwave and a hot plate. We'll take them up to the Church Mouse next week once mom and dad figure out what they need to set up housekeeping for the two boys.

And this remodeled garage is heated! There was no heat in the boarding house where they were staying.

The boys need to go to school. I don't worry about the younger child. He turned eight last week. He will soak up English like a dry sponge.

I worry more about the older boy. He's fourteen. School will be harder for him. He's frightened - I would be too. So, last week, I spoke with one of our high school kids who is preparing for confirmation.

She's a firecracker! She just won an award: "Student of the Year" (or something) at Sonoma High. She's a proud Dragon... but she's also one of us here at Saint Leo's as well.

So I asked her, "Do you speak Spanish?," knowing that she should be fluent.

Yes, Father,
I speak Spanish at home with my parents."

"Great," I said, "I need to tell you about a young fellow who will be starting at Sonoma High in January..."

Then, before I'm even finished explaining the situation, our girl says,

Father: I got it.
He's going to need some friends.
We can even set up a group that can translate for him in class.

That's right: we've got a place for this boy to stay. And now, he just needs a few friends.

In the Christmas story, when Quirinius was governor of Syria, Ceasar Augustus decreed that there would be a census of the whole world.

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 which is called Bethlehem,
because he was of the house and family of David,
to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed,
who was with child.

And there was no place for them to stay. There was no room in the inn for this family.

This whole world, I think at times, is just one big, demented inn, for whom there is no room for little people.

But there, in Bethlehem, someone had a barn and this is where Mary and Joseph took shelter.

While they were there,
the time came for her to have her child,
and she gave birth to her firstborn son.

Here at Saint Leo's, we are not perfect. We have our good days and our not-so-good days. But we do have people with renovated garages. We've got the Saint Vincent de Paul Society and people eager to support it. We've got the Church Mouse too.

And I assure you: we've got wonderful young people in our youth group, who are completely bilingual and preparing for Confirmation and eager to serve.

If that doesn't give you hope, I don't know what to tell you!

And most importantly of all, we have this new family - refugees from a failed state - a demented inn where there was no room for them. A family fleeing corruption and drug gangs. They have come knocking on our door asking for shelter.

So here is my advice to you for this Christmas and for this coming New Year:

Make your heart into a manger.

A manger is a trough for laying down hay to feed the animals in the barn. It doesn't seem very suitable for a newborn baby... but that was all Mary and Joseph had.

Make your heart into a manger.

The Santo Nino is the King of Kings and the Prince of Peace. Don't try to make it into a throne - just a manger. That will be more than enough.

I promise you, the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph will come knocking on your door asking for shelter.

Don't worry: we have the garage. Now all we need is a manger - and that is what you can do.

Make your heart into a manger.

Don't lose hope: It's Christmas ... and there's a mom and a dad who have found shelter for their two little boys. Now all they need is a manger.

Merry Christmas to you all!

[[[[]]]]

Feliz Navidad a todos!

Esta noche tengo una historia que contarles. Es una historia sobre San Leó... con lo que quiero decir que es una historia sobre todos ustedes.

les cuento esta historia por una sencilla razón: es la Navidad y no quiero que Uds pierdan la esperanza.

En esta Nochebuena de 2023, el mundo es, sin duda, un lugar muy convulso. Se están haciendo cosas horribles a familias en diferentes partes del mundo. No necesito recordarles a esto.

Entiendo perfectamente que algunos de ustedes estén perdiendo la esperanza en el mundo, en nuestro país, en nuestra política y, de hecho, están perdiendo la esperanza.

Entonces, déjanme contarles una historia sobre la esperanza, una historia que trata sobre Uds.

Esta semana pasada encontramos un lugar donde vivir para una familia que busca refugio del frío. San Leó hizo esto.

Es una familia de refugiados. Huyen de las bandas de narcotraficantes y de la corrupción. Una mamá, un papá y sus dos hijos pequeños. Ninguno de ellos habla inglés. La mamá puede limpiar casas y el papá puede lavar platos o trabajar en los campos o lo que sea.

Esta semana, Saint Leo's encontró para esta familia un lugar para vivir.

Es un garaje remodelado. Hay un baño completo, pero no hay cocina. Ningún problema. Les conseguimos un microondas y un plato caliente. Los llevaremos al Church Mouse la próxima semana que mamá y papá averigüen qué necesitan para organizar la limpieza de los dos niños.

¡Y este garaje remodelado tiene calefacción! En la pensión donde se alojaban no había calefacción.

Los niños necesitan ir a la escuela. No me preocupo por el niño más pequeño. Cumplió ocho años la semana pasada. Absorberá el inglés como una esponja seca.

Me preocupo más por el chico mayor. Tiene catorce años. La escuela será más difícil para él. Él está asustado; yo también lo estaría. Entonces, la semana pasada hablé con uno de nuestros niños de secundaria que se está preparando para la confirmación.

¡Es un petardo! ¡Ella está disparando a todos los cilindros!

Acaba de ganar un premio: "Estudiante del año" (o algo así) en Sonoma High. Ella es una Dragón orgullosa... pero también es una de nosotros aquí en San Leo.

Entonces Yo le pregunté: "¿Hablas español?", sabiendo que eso sería fluido.

Si padre, Hablo español en casa con mis padres".

“Bueno”, le dije, “Necesito hablar contigo sobre un joven que comenzará en Sonoma High en enero...”

Y entonces, antes de termine de explicar la situación, nuestra chica dijo:

Padre: ¡Comprendo!
El no mas necesitará algunos amigos.
También, podemos formar un grupo que pueda traducirle en clase.

Verdad: este niño tiene lugar donde vivir. Y ahora sólo necesita algunos amigos.

En la historia de Navidad, cuando Quirino era gobernador de Siria, César Augusto decretó que se haría un censo en todo el mundo.

Todos iban a empadronarse,
cada uno en su propia ciudad;
así es que también José, perteneciente a
la casa y familia de David,
se dirigió desde la ciudad de Nazaret,
en Galilea, a la ciudad de David,
llamada Belén, para empadronarse,
juntamente con María, su esposa,
que estaba encinta.

A veces pienso que este mundo es no mas una gran posada demente, para la que no hay lugar para los humildes de la tierra.

Pero allí, en Belén, alguien tenía un granero o establo y aquí se refugiaron María y José.

Mientras estaban ahí, le llegó a María
el tiempo de dar a luz
y tuvo a su hijo primogénito;
lo envolvió en pañales
y lo recostó en un pesebre,

porque no hubo lugar para ellos en la posada.

Aquí en Saint Leo no somos perfectos. Tenemos nuestros días buenos y nuestros días no tan buenos. Pero seguro que sí tenemos gente con garajes renovados. Tenemos la Sociedad de San Vicente de Paúl y gente dispuestos por apoyarla.

Y les aseguro: tenemos jóvenes maravillosos en nuestro grupo juvenil, que son completamente bilingües, se están preparando para la Confirmación y están dispuestos - ansiosos por servir.

Si eso no les da esperanzas, ¡no sé qué decirles!

Y lo más importante de todo es que tenemos esta nueva familia (refugiados de un Estado fallido), una posada decente donde no había lugar para ellos. Una familia que huye de la corrupción y las bandas de narcotraficantes. Han venido a llamar a nuestra puerta pidiendo refugio.

Y mi consejo para esta Navidad y para el próximo Año Nuevo:

Hagan de tu corazón un pesebre.

Un pesebre es un abrevadero donde se deposita heno para alimentar a los animales en el establo. No parece muy adecuado para un bebé recién nacido... pero eso era todo lo que tenían María y José.

Haz de tu corazón un pesebre.

El Santo Niño es el Rey de Reyes y el Príncipe de Paz. No es necesario convertir su corazón en un trono, sólo en un pesebre. Eso será suficiente para el Santo Niño.

les prometo a Uds que la Santísima Virgen y San José vendrán a tocar a su puerta pidiendo refugio.

No les preocupen: ya tenemos el garaje. Ahora todo lo que necesitamos es un pesebre - y eso es lo que ustedes pueden hacer.

Haz de tu corazón un pesebre.

No pierdas la esperanza: es la Navidad... y hay una mamá y un papá que ya han encontrado refugio para sus dos muchachos. Ahora todo lo que necesitan es un pesebre.

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?