

HOMILY FOR THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 11 July 2021

- 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: 110

Reading I 2 Kgs 4:42-44

A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing to Elisha, the man of God, twenty barley loaves made from the first fruits, and fresh grain in the ear.

Elisha said, "Give it to the people to eat."

But his servant objected,

"How can I set this before a hundred people?"

Elisha insisted, "Give it to the people to eat."

"For thus says the LORD,

'They shall eat and there shall be some left over.'"

And when they had eaten, there was some left over, as the LORD had said.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 145:10-11, 15-16, 17-18

R. (cf. 16) The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD,

and let your faithful ones bless you.

Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom

and speak of your might.

R. The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

The eyes of all look hopefully to you,

and you give them their food in due season;

you open your hand

and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

R. The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

The LORD is just in all his ways

and holy in all his works.

The LORD is near to all who call upon him,

to all who call upon him in truth.

R. The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.

Reading II Eph 4:1-6

Brothers and sisters:

I, a prisoner for the Lord,
urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received,
with all humility and gentleness, with patience,
bearing with one another through love,
striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace:
one body and one Spirit,
as you were also called to the one hope of your call;
one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all.

Alleluia Lk 7:16

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

A great prophet has risen in our midst.

God has visited his people.

R. Alleluia, alleluia

.

Gospel Jn 6:1-15

Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee.

A large crowd followed him,
because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick.

Jesus went up on the mountain,
and there he sat down with his disciples.

The Jewish feast of Passover was near.

When Jesus raised his eyes
and saw that a large crowd was coming to him,
he said to Philip,

“Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?”

He said this to test him,
because he himself knew what he was going to do.

Philip answered him,
“Two hundred days’ wages worth of food would not be enough
for each of them to have a little.”

One of his disciples,
Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him,
“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish;
but what good are these for so many?”

Jesus said, “Have the people recline.”
Now there was a great deal of grass in that place.
So the men reclined, about five thousand in number.

Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks,
and distributed them to those who were reclining,

and also as much of the fish as they wanted.
When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples,
“Gather the fragments left over,
so that nothing will be wasted.”
So they collected them,
and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments
from the five barley loaves
that had been more than they could eat.
When the people saw the sign he had done, they said,
“This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world.”
Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off
to make him king,
he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

Today, I want to give you advice about raising children.

Normally, I wouldn't have the temerity to give any parent advice about such a daunting task. I certainly couldn't do it. I think I have the patience to raise kids. It's the courage that I lack. I once watched my older brother give his teenage daughter the keys to his car. This is the little girl who used to sit on my lap as I told her stories. She kissed her dad and then her uncle and then, off she went, her ponytail bobbing from side to side.

And all I could do was turn to my brother and say, “you must have nerves of steel!”

But today, I will make an exception to my rule. Here is some advice on how to raise children – or more precisely, how NOT to raise children.

Many years ago (in a galaxy far away), I was having dinner with a family – mom, dad and two little kids. The kids were doing a good job pushing their parents' buttons by not eating their dinner. Those of you who are parents will know that there are multiple ways kids can avoid eating their dinner. These two kids knew every trick in the book.

As the adults finished their meal, the father said to me,

“Don't worry – I know how to fix this.”

Then he took a small dish and put some of his little girl's dinner on one side of it and some of his little boy's dinner on the other side and began to feed the little girl. Immediately the little boy protested angrily and demanded to be fed. Once the little boy got a spoonful of dinner in his chops, the little girl protested that she was being left out. You get the picture.

DON'T DO THIS.

DON'T EVER DO THIS.

Parents should never suggest to their children that there isn't enough food to go around. More to my point for this Sunday, parents should never teach their kids that there isn't enough love to go around. Children need to be brought up in families where there is a glut of love.

A child who knows there is more than enough love to go around will grow up to be lavish, even prodigal, with love as an adult.

I think this teaching takes us into what I call "the logic of abundance" that we find in the Bible. Our scriptures are full of stories about extravagance and abundance. There is more than enough love to go around.

Take today's first reading for example.

Elisha is God's prophet, "the man of God." A man comes to him with loaves baked with flour ground from barley picked at the very beginning of the harvest (the "first fruits"). Barley ripens before wheat. After a long winter eating bread baked from stale flour, people were eager to harvest the barley and make really good bread. These "first fruits," however, were reserved for God. This is why the man brings the bread to Elisha, God's prophet.

In Jewish tradition, dedicating the "first fruits" to God is an act of faith. The Lord is providing for us. Take the best of what comes first out of your fields and dedicate it to the Lord. Don't be afraid. There will be enough bread to go around.

Then, Elisha says to his servant,

"Give it to the people to eat."

And the servant, exercising common sense, objects that there won't be enough bread to go around.

"How can I set this before a hundred people?"

But Elisha is thinking with the logic of abundance.

"Give it to the people to eat."

"For thus says the LORD,

'They shall eat and there shall be some left over.'"

And when they had eaten, there was some left over,
as the LORD had said.

The story of Elisha from the Old Testament helps us to see how this Jewish “logic of abundance” is at work in the account of the loaves and fishes in John’s Gospel.

Jesus has caused quite a sensation as a charismatic healer. He tries to get away from the crowds with his disciples for some solitude, but the crowd follows him.

When Jesus raised his eyes
and saw that a large crowd was coming to him,
he said to Philip,
“Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?”

Jesus is “testing” Philip in order to teach him the logic of abundance. And Philip takes the bait:

Philip answered him,
“Two hundred days’ wages worth of food would not be enough
for each of them to have a little.”

Then Andrew points out that there is a boy with five barley loaves and two fish.

“... but what good are these for so many?”

This is the point in the story where the logic of abundance begins to work. Everyone eats and there is a ridiculous amount of food leftover.

“Gather the fragments left over,
so that nothing will be wasted.”
So they collected them,
and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments
from the five barley loaves
that had been more than they could eat.

In telling this story, John includes a detail that might seem unimportant at first. The miracle of the loaves and fishes takes place when “the Jewish feast of Passover was near.”

Passover, of course, is the feast during which Jews celebrate their liberation from slavery in Egypt. Here too, the “logic of abundance” is at work.

I am reminded of a very happy memory. Years ago, a Jewish family invited me to join them in their *seder* – the Passover supper. There was grandpa and grandma, the parents and a *minyán* of little kids. After the feast, the family sang a folksong that tells the story of the Exodus.

Da, da-yenu, da da-yenu...

It's Hebrew and the words mean, "it would have been enough." In the Exodus story, God tells Moses to tell Pharaoh to let his people go... "and it would have been enough, it would have been enough," but there was more! Then Moses went to Pharaoh... "and it would have been enough, it would have been enough," but there was more! The crossing of the Red Sea...

You get the idea. Grandparents singing the verses. Kids singing the chorus. Everyone clapping. There was more than enough food to go around that wonderful evening – and, I assure you, more than enough love to go around as well.

I also think we need to recognize that there are times when there is NOT enough food to go around. One reason that people are leaving Central America and heading North is that five years of drought have begun to affect the lives of subsistence farmers. I also have a friend from Ethiopia. He has horrible stories about famines there.

The Jewish logic of abundance should be a comfort to us. It has to be a challenge as well. Where there is not enough food, we must make sure that there is enough. The same goes for jobs and education and health care and everything else that contributes to preserving human dignity. Most of all, wherever human beings are brought low by a fear that there might not be enough love to go around, we must ensure that there is a super-abundance.

This is the "logic of abundance" which is at work in the Bible, and which drives our faith.

I'm sorry for presuming to tell you how to raise your children. But when my little grandnieces and grandnephews sit on my lap and I tell them stories about how their parents also used to sit on my lap, I want to fill them with this "logic of abundance," so that they might grow up, never being afraid that there might not be enough love to go around.

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?