

HOMILY
Sunday, 25 June 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: 94

Reading 1 Jer 20:10-13

Jeremiah said:

"I hear the whisperings of many:

'Terror on every side!

Denounce! let us denounce him!'

All those who were my friends
are on the watch for any misstep of mine.

'Perhaps he will be trapped; then we can prevail,
and take our vengeance on him.'

But the LORD is with me, like a mighty champion:
my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph.

In their failure they will be put to utter shame,
to lasting, unforgettable confusion.

O LORD of hosts, you who test the just,
who probe mind and heart,

let me witness the vengeance you take on them,
for to you I have entrusted my cause.

Sing to the LORD,

praise the LORD,

for he has rescued the life of the poor
from the power of the wicked!"

Responsorial Psalm Ps 69:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35

R. (14c) Lord, in your great love, answer me.

For your sake I bear insult,
and shame covers my face.

I have become an outcast to my brothers,
a stranger to my mother's children,

Because zeal for your house consumes me,
and the insults of those who blaspheme you fall upon me.

R. Lord, in your great love, answer me.

I pray to you, O LORD,

for the time of your favor, O God!
In your great kindness answer me
with your constant help.
Answer me, O LORD, for bounteous is your kindness;
in your great mercy turn toward me.
R. Lord, in your great love, answer me.
"See, you lowly ones, and be glad;
you who seek God, may your hearts revive!
For the LORD hears the poor,
and his own who are in bonds he spurns not.
Let the heavens and the earth praise him,
the seas and whatever moves in them!"
R. Lord, in your great love, answer me.

Reading 2 Rom 5:12-15

Brothers and sisters:
Through one man sin entered the world,
and through sin, death,
and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned—
for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world,
though sin is not accounted when there is no law.
But death reigned from Adam to Moses,
even over those who did not sin
after the pattern of the trespass of Adam,
who is the type of the one who was to come.

But the gift is not like the transgression.
For if by the transgression of the one the many died,
how much more did the grace of God
and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ
overflow for the many.

Alleluia Jn 15:26b, 27a

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
The Spirit of truth will testify to me, says the Lord;
and you also will testify.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mt 10:26-33

Jesus said to the Twelve:
"Fear no one.
Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed,
nor secret that will not be known.
What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light;

what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.
And do not be afraid of those
who kill the body but cannot kill the soul;
rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy
both soul and body in Gehenna.
Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin?
Yet not one of them falls to the ground
without your Father's knowledge.
Even all the hairs of your head are counted.
So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.
Everyone who acknowledges me before others
I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father.
But whoever denies me before others,
I will deny before my heavenly Father."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

I don't like being yelled at. I especially don't like being yelled at after mass. But this has happened to me from time to time over the years.

I certainly don't like it, but I believe being yelled at after mass is part of the job of being a priest.

I say this because the Gospel sometimes requires us - all of us - to take stances that are not always popular. This means that, if a priest is going to preach the Gospel, he is probably going to be yelled at after mass, at least from time to time.

A while ago and far from Sonoma, I spoke out against the torture going on at the naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The newly elected president, Barack Obama, had promised to close the base (although I regret to say that this proved politically impossible). I praised Mr. Obama for making this promise. After mass, a gentleman began to yell at me.

"You're nothing but a stupid liberal college professor... I pity your students... These terrorists torture people too... I'm gonna call the bishop."

I thought he was going to assault me. I even remember leaning back on my cane in anticipation of the blow. I'm glad to say that he didn't assault me, but he did call the bishop.

(The bishop, by the way, thanked me for my service to the diocese).

I didn't yell back at this man. I was frightened. I told the gentleman, in a voice that was low and calm, that I would take seriously what he was saying to me.

And I did.

The man yelling at me was wrong. Opposing torture does not make one a "liberal." In addition, I don't think that my students should be pitied, although I admit that I had good days and not such good days in the classroom. I always tried to inculcate a moral compass in my students.

Moreover, arguing that we are justified in torturing terrorists because they engage in such atrocities is the moral reasoning of an eight-year-old.

Several years ago, the United States Government forcibly began to separate parents from their children at our border with Mexico. The scenes were harrowing. I can't imagine any practical difficulty that could justify such a violation of human dignity.

I said as much from the pulpit and was yelled at after mass.

I think I did my job right: My homily was a careful presentation of the Church's teaching on human dignity. I also acknowledged that US immigration policy was "complicated." I tied my criticism of what the government was doing in with passages from the Bible as well.

Moreover, I had a responsibility to speak out against this horrific sin being committed by the US government.

Getting yelled at after mass, I think, is just part of my job - at least if I'm doing the job right. The Gospel brings with it

huge ethical obligations that have political repercussions that may not be popular.

This brings us to the first reading.

God raised up Jeremiah to preach God's Holy Word to a people that didn't want to hear it. God's politics isn't always popular. In fact, God's politics can be downright unpopular, at least in the eyes of some.

Jeremiah was obedient to God's command to preach an unpopular message, and I guess we can say that he got yelled at after mass.

Jeremiah said:
"I hear the whisperings of many:
'Terror on every side!
Denounce! let us denounce him!"

Jeremiah was arrested, beaten, held in stocks and then forced into exile down in Egypt. Today, we associate Jeremiah with the Book of Lamentations.

I hope you can see why I thought of the times when I was yelled at after mass when I read over this passage from Jeremiah. Remembering these unpleasant experiences, I feel a great deal of affinity for the Prophet.

But as I made my way down deeper into the reading, I came on verses that brought me up short:

O LORD of hosts, you who test the just,
who probe mind and heart,
let me witness the vengeance you take on them.

Yes: there is a part of me that wants the Lord God Almighty to take vengeance on those who yell at me after mass.

Even though this thirst for vengeance is alive and kicking inside me, I am ashamed to say this from a pulpit.

And rightly, I should be ashamed. I try to remember this teaching:

The anger of the creature cannot hope
to fulfill the justice of the Creator.

So, let me offer some practical wisdom to all those who
would try to preach God's Word.

I want you all to get yelled at after mass - at least from time
to time. It's just part of the job.

And when you get yelled at after mass, take what is being
said to you seriously. Do this because a preacher needs to
recognize how easy it is to preach his own word instead of
God's Word.

But also let me say, if you never get yelled at, maybe you're
not doing your job right. Maybe you're not standing up for
what's right in the eyes of God.

Lastly, let me say, when you get yelled at, remember
Jeremiah and then come and talk to me about it. I promise
to be sympathetic. I don't like getting yelled at either.

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?