

HOMILY FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT  
Sunday, 26February 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: 22

Reading 1 Gn 2:7-9; 3:1-7

The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground  
and blew into his nostrils the breath of life,  
and so man became a living being.

Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east,  
and placed there the man whom he had formed.  
Out of the ground the LORD God made various trees grow  
that were delightful to look at and good for food,  
with the tree of life in the middle of the garden  
and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals  
that the LORD God had made.

The serpent asked the woman,  
"Did God really tell you not to eat  
from any of the trees in the garden?"

The woman answered the serpent:  
"We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;  
it is only about the fruit of the tree  
in the middle of the garden that God said,  
'You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.'"

But the serpent said to the woman:

"You certainly will not die!  
No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it  
your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods  
who know what is good and what is evil."

The woman saw that the tree was good for food,  
pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom.  
So she took some of its fruit and ate it;  
and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her,  
and he ate it.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened,  
and they realized that they were naked;  
so they sewed fig leaves together  
and made loincloths for themselves.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14 and 17

R. (cf. 3a) Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.  
Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;  
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.  
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt  
and of my sin cleanse me.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.  
For I acknowledge my offense,  
and my sin is before me always:  
"Against you only have I sinned,  
and done what is evil in your sight."

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.  
A clean heart create for me, O God,  
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.

Cast me not out from your presence,  
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.  
Give me back the joy of your salvation,  
and a willing spirit sustain in me.

O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Reading 2 Rom 5:12-19

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.

And the gift is not like the result of the one who sinned.  
For after one sin there was the judgment that brought condemnation;  
but the gift, after many transgressions, brought acquittal.  
For if, by the transgression of the one,  
death came to reign through that one,  
how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace  
and of the gift of justification  
come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ.  
In conclusion, just as through one transgression  
condemnation came upon all,  
so, through one righteous act,  
acquittal and life came to all.  
For just as through the disobedience of the one man  
the many were made sinners,  
so, through the obedience of the one,  
the many will be made righteous.

Verse Before the Gospel Mt 4:4b

One does not live on bread alone,  
but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

Gospel Mt 4:1-11

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert  
to be tempted by the devil.

He fasted for forty days and forty nights,  
and afterwards he was hungry.

The tempter approached and said to him,

"If you are the Son of God,  
command that these stones become loaves of bread."

He said in reply,

"It is written:

*One does not live on bread alone,  
but on every word that comes forth  
from the mouth of God."*

Then the devil took him to the holy city,  
and made him stand on the parapet of the temple,  
and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down.  
For it is written:

For it is written:

*He will command his angels concerning you  
and with their hands they will support you,  
lest you dash your foot against a stone."*

Jesus answered him,

"Again it is written,

*You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test."*

Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain,  
and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence,  
and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you,  
if you will prostrate yourself and worship me."

At this, Jesus said to him,

"Get away, Satan!

It is written:

*The Lord, your God, shall you worship  
and him alone shall you serve."*

Then the devil left him and, behold,  
angels came and ministered to him.

## PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

The wild mustard has returned to our Valley. The rains of late January have turned our fields deep green and brought up numinous clouds of yellow flowers floating beneath the vines.

The other day, I was driving back to Sonoma from Petaluma. Coming down into the Valley from Stage Gulch, I saw the vineyards arrayed in wonderous yellow. I also saw a rainbow climbing in a graceful arc from the Sangiacomo vineyards all the way up to the water tower of the Sonoma Mission Inn up in the Springs.

Do you remember the story of Noah in the Book of Genesis? After the waters of the flood recede, Noah builds an altar to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord for his family's deliverance. And when the "sweet smell" of the sacrifice reaches up into the heavens, the Lord makes a covenant with Noah and his descendants forever. God promises never to devastate the world with a flood. Then, God stretches out a rainbow over the earth as a sign of this covenant. And the Lord says to Noah,

When the bow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature – every mortal being that is on earth.

The rainbow is a reminder to God of what he promised Noah. Here in Sonoma, I recommend that we look on the wild mustard as a reminder as well.

Every year, when the wild mustard begins to float over our fields, remind yourselves of what God originally intended for us.

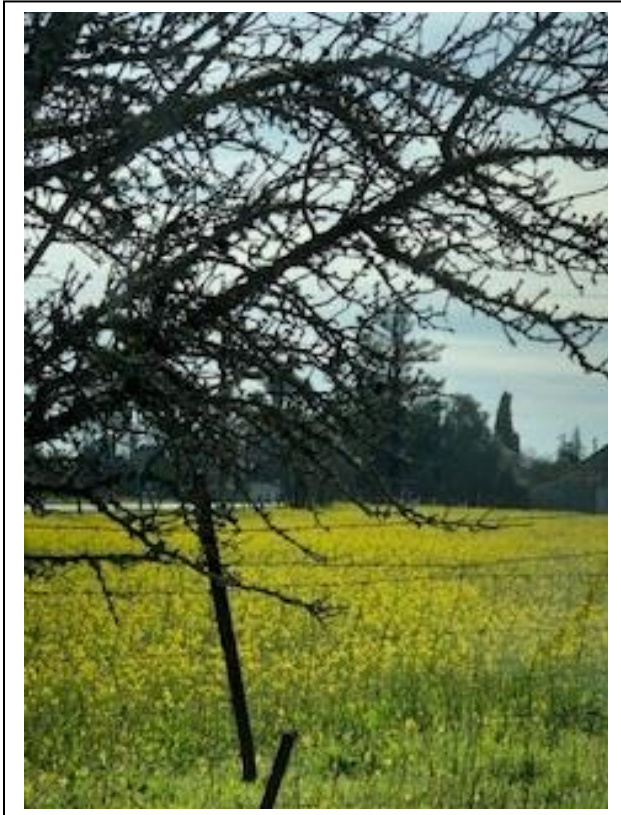
God did not create us and then abandon us to a desert. He wanted a garden for us.

Look at the first reading:

Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed.

When you see the wild mustard, remember that it was the custom of the Lord to walk with the man "in the garden during the cool of the day." This is what the Creator intended for us all.

When the wild mustard comes up every year, remind yourself that God did not abandon us to a desert. The Lord created us and placed us in a beautiful garden so He could walk with us "in the cool of the day."



When you see the wild mustard, remind yourself that the inhumanity of this world was never part of God's plan for us. God did not create us to seek security in guns or to stick cocaine up our nose or to send cluster bombs down onto the heads of children.

When you see the wild mustard, remind yourself that something catastrophic and unintended has befallen us: we have fallen out of our original innocence and our friendship with our Creator.

And the catastrophe is that we have gone to war with ourselves. By this, I mean not only that we are at war with one another. I

mean that there is a war going on within ourselves: our bodies and our souls are at war with one another.

Here again, the myth of the Garden of Eden is full of insight.

The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.

We are a contradictory mix of opposites: the clay of the earth and God's breath of life. And yet God sees us as a single "living being," not two incompatible things. And the catastrophe of our fall from our original innocence is that we cannot bear to be this one "living being" that God created us to be. After eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil,

The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

We cover up our nakedness with racism and nationalism, with will to power and with sacralized violence. But the Lord intended none of this for His creatures.

The Lord created us and placed us in a garden. Remind yourself of this as well whenever you see the wild mustard.

But also, remember that, in the Gospel for today's mass, we do not find Jesus in a garden. After his baptism, Jesus was "led by the Spirit into the desert."

And the reason for this should be plain for all to see. The children of Adam and Eve no longer dwell in the garden of Eden. We have lost our original innocence and now live "East of Eden," in a desert where we are at war with ourselves.

The Spirit leads Jesus into the desert because that is where Jesus will find the "poor banished children of Eve." For we are all wandering in the desert now after our Original Sin and expulsion from the Garden.

When rainbows arc across our Valley from the Sangiacomo fields in the south all the way up to the water tower in the Springs, let

the Lord be reminded of his promise to Noah. And when the wild mustard comes up in our fields, let the children of Adam remember what the Maker of Heaven and of Earth intended for us when He created us out of clay and breathed the breath of life into us:

He wanted a garden for us. And, in his faithful love for all that He has created, He is leading us out of our desert into a Kingdom where the green fields abound with wild mustard.

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La mostaza silvestre ha vuelto a nuestro Valle. Los campos están verde, y las lluvias de enero han traído nubes de flores amarillas que flotan bajo las vides.

El otro día, estaba manejando de regreso a Sonoma desde Petaluma. Bajando al valle desde Stage Gulch, vi los viñedos adornados con un amarillo maravilloso. También vi un arco-íris ascendiendo en un elegante arco desde los viñedos de Sangiacomo hasta la torre de agua del Sonoma Mission Inn en Boyes Hot Springs.

¿Recuerdan Uds la historia de Noé en el Libro del Génesis? Después de que bajan las aguas del diluvio, Noé construye un altar para ofrecer un sacrificio de acción de gracias al Señor por la liberación de su familia. Y cuando el "dulce olor" del sacrificio llega hasta los cielos, el Señor hace un pacto con Noé y su descendencia para siempre. Dios promete nunca devastar el mundo con una inundación. Entonces, Dios extiende un arcoíris sobre la tierra como señal de este pacto. Y el Señor le dice a Noé:

Cuando aparezca el arco en las nubes, lo veré y me acordaré del pacto eterno entre Dios y toda criatura viviente, todo ser mortal que está en la tierra.

El arcoíris es un recordatorio para Dios de lo que le prometió a Noé. Aquí en Sonoma, recomiendo que veamos la mostaza silvestre también como un recordatorio.

Cada año, cuando la mostaza silvestre comience a flotar sobre nuestros campos, recuerden lo que Dios planeó originalmente para nosotros...

Mira la primera lectura:

Entonces el Señor plantó un jardín en Edén,  
al oriente, y puso allí al hombre que había formado.

Cuando vean Uds la mostaza silvestre, recuerde que era  
costumbre del Señor caminar con Adán "en el jardín durante el  
aire del día". Esto es lo que el Creador quiso para todos nosotros.



Cuando la mostaza silvestre surge en Febrero, recuerdan Uds  
que Dios no nos abandonó en un desierto. El Señor nos creó y  
nos colocó en un hermoso jardín para poder caminar con  
nosotros "al aire del día".

Cuando vean la mostaza silvestre, recuerdan Uds que la  
inhumanidad de este mundo nunca fue parte del plan de Dios  
para nosotros. Dios no nos creó para buscar seguridad en las  
armas o para usar cocaína o para lanzar bombas de racimo sobre  
las cabezas de los niños.



Cuando vean la mostaza silvestre, recuerdan Uds que algo catastrófico nos ha sucedido: hemos perdido nuestra inocencia original y nuestra amistad con nuestro Creador.

Y la catástrofe es que ahora hacemos la guerra contra nosotros mismos. Con esto quiero decir no solo que estamos en guerra unos con otros. Quiero decir que hay una guerra dentro de nosotros mismos: nuestro cuerpo y nuestra alma están en guerra.

Aquí, el mito del Jardín del Edén está lleno de perspicacia.

El Señor formó al hombre del barro de la tierra y sopló en sus narices aliento de vida, y así el hombre se convirtió en un ser viviente.

Somos una mezcla contradictoria de opuestos: el barro de la tierra y el aliento de vida de Dios. Y, sin embargo, Dios nos ve como un solo "ser viviente", no como dos cosas incompatibles. Y la catástrofe de nuestra caída de nuestra inocencia original es que no podemos soportar ser este "ser viviente" que Dios nos creó para ser. Después de comer el fruto del conocimiento del bien y del mal,

Los ojos de ambos se abrieron,  
y se dieron cuenta de que estaban desnudos;  
así que cosieron hojas de higuera y se hicieron taparrabos.

Cubrimos nuestra desnudez con racismo y nacionalismo, con infatuación con poder y con violencia sacralizada. Pero el Señor no quiso nada de esto para Sus criaturas.

El Señor nos creó y nos puso en un jardín. Recuérdate esto también cada vez que veas la mostaza silvestre.

Pero también, recordad que, en el Evangelio de la misa de hoy, no encontramos a Jesús en un jardín. Después de su bautismo, Jesús fue "llevado por el Espíritu al desierto".

Y la razón de esto debería ser clara para que todos la vean. Los hijos de Adán y Eva ya no moran en el jardín del Edén. Hemos perdido nuestra inocencia original y ahora vivimos "al Este del Edén", en un desierto donde estamos en guerra con nosotros mismos.

El Espíritu lleva a Jesús al desierto porque allí es donde Jesús encontrará a los “pobres hijos de Eva desterrados”. Porque todos andamos vagando por el desierto ahora después de nuestro Pecado Original y nuestra expulsión del Jardín.

Cuando los arcoíris crucen nuestro valle desde los campos de Sangiacomo en el sur hasta la torre de agua en Boyes, ojalá que el Señor recuerde su promesa a Noé. Y cuando la mostaza silvestre brote en nuestros campos, ojalá que los hijos de Adán recuerden lo que el Señor quiso para nosotros cuando nos creó:

El Señor quería un jardín para nosotros. Y, en su amor fiel por todo lo que Él ha creado, nos está sacando de nuestro desierto hacia un Reino donde los campos verdes abundan con mostaza silvestre.

### 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?