

HOMILY FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST THE KING

Sunday, 26 November 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: 160

Reading 1 EZ 34:11-12, 15-17

Thus says the Lord GOD:

I myself will look after and tend my sheep.

As a shepherd tends his flock
when he finds himself among his scattered sheep,
so will I tend my sheep.

I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered
when it was cloudy and dark.

I myself will pasture my sheep;

I myself will give them rest, says the Lord GOD.

The lost I will seek out,
the strayed I will bring back,
the injured I will bind up,
the sick I will heal,

but the sleek and the strong I will destroy,
shepherding them rightly.

As for you, my sheep, says the Lord GOD,
I will judge between one sheep and another,
between rams and goats.

Responsorial Psalm PS 23:1-2, 2-3, 5-6

R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

In verdant pastures he gives me repose.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.

He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.
R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Reading 2 1 COR 15:20-26, 28

Brothers and sisters:
Christ has been raised from the dead,
the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
For since death came through man,
the resurrection of the dead came also through man.
For just as in Adam all die,
so too in Christ shall all be brought to life,
but each one in proper order:
Christ the firstfruits;
then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ;
then comes the end,
when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father,
when he has destroyed every sovereignty
and every authority and power.
For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.
The last enemy to be destroyed is death.
When everything is subjected to him,
then the Son himself will also be subjected
to the one who subjected everything to him,
so that God may be all in all.

Alleluia MK 11:9, 10

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come!
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel MT 25:31-46

Jesus said to his disciples:
"When the Son of Man comes in his glory,
and all the angels with him,

he will sit upon his glorious throne,
and all the nations will be assembled before him.
And he will separate them one from another,
as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.
He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right,
'Come, you who are blessed by my Father.
Inherit the kingdom prepared for you
from the foundation of the world.
For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,
a stranger and you welcomed me,
naked and you clothed me,
ill and you cared for me,
in prison and you visited me.'

Then the righteous will answer him and say,
'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you,
or thirsty and give you drink?
When did we see you a stranger and welcome you,
or naked and clothe you?
When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?'

And the king will say to them in reply,
'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did
for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.'
Then he will say to those on his left,
'Depart from me, you accursed,
into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.
For I was hungry and you gave me no food,
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,
a stranger and you gave me no welcome,
naked and you gave me no clothing,
ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.'

Then they will answer and say,
'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty
or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison,
and not minister to your needs?'
He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you,
what you did not do for one of these least ones,
you did not do for me.'

And these will go off to eternal punishment,
but the righteous to eternal life."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

I am well aware that today is a Solemnity. We are celebrating Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

But, in truth, I am still thinking about a feast - Thanksgiving Day - which we celebrated last Thursday.

Today, let me offer a simple thought about the spiritual practice of giving thanks. I hope that what I have to say about giving thanks will also offer an insight into what we mean when we say that it is Christ who is our King.

There is a story in the Gospel according to Mark that you all know. Jesus is with his disciples in the Temple precincts, standing by the treasury of the Temple. Wealthy men approach the Temple officials and offer large sums to support the Temple.

And then,

A humble widow approached
and offered two small copper coins.

Jesus gathered his disciples around him and said.

I assure you: this poor widow has given more than all the others, for they have given out of their abundance.
She has given out of her poverty.

My thought to you as we remember Thanksgiving Day is really quite simple.

We are surrounded by poor widows who are offering us their two copper coins. We need to recognize that these holy ones are giving more than all the others - just as Jesus taught when he stood before the treasury of the Temple.

We are surrounded by people who are tired and spent and maybe even at wit's end. And when we make demands on these holy ones, they reach into their hearts and come up with just a couple of copper coins because it is all they have.

When this happens, I want us all to recognize the enormous importance of what's going on: I assure you, these poor ones are giving more than all the rest.

Today is not Thanksgiving. It is the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe.

In the Gospel for today, the King of the Universe assures us that he will welcome us into his kingdom...

For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,
a stranger and you welcomed me,
naked and you clothed me,
ill and you cared for me,
in prison and you visited me.'

When he says this, his disciples are confused. When did we do this? And the King of the Universe answers by saying,

Amen, I say to you, whatever you did
for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.

Think about this for a moment.

Christ the King is telling us that he is not to be found, enthroned, in the great palaces of this world. Our King is hidden within the hearts of those that are hungry and thirsty. The King of the Universe is found in the immigrant we welcome and the shivering family that we clothe, the wounded to whom we care and the prisoner we visit.

Most of all, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe, is right before us when the poor widows of the world offer us their two copper coins simply because that is all they have to give us.

I hope you had a happy Thanksgiving. We have a lot to be thankful for. The King of the Universe is standing humbly before us offering us all he has to give.

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?