

## **HOMILY FOR THE EIGHTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME**

Sunday, 27 February 2022

- 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: 84

#### **Reading I Sir 27:4-7**

When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear;  
so do one's faults when one speaks.  
As the test of what the potter molds is in the furnace,  
so in tribulation is the test of the just.  
The fruit of a tree shows the care it has had;  
so too does one's speech disclose the bent of one's mind.  
Praise no one before he speaks,  
for it is then that people are tested.

#### **Responsorial Psalm Ps 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16**

R (cf. 2a) Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.  
It is good to give thanks to the LORD,  
to sing praise to your name, Most High,  
To proclaim your kindness at dawn  
and your faithfulness throughout the night.  
R Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.  
The just one shall flourish like the palm tree,  
like a cedar of Lebanon shall he grow.  
They that are planted in the house of the LORD  
shall flourish in the courts of our God.  
R Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.  
They shall bear fruit even in old age;  
vigorous and sturdy shall they be,  
Declaring how just is the LORD,  
my rock, in whom there is no wrong.  
R Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

#### **Reading II 1 Cor 15:54-58**

Brothers and sisters:  
When this which is corruptible

clothes itself with incorruptibility  
and this which is mortal clothes itself with immortality,  
then the word that is written shall come about:

*Death is swallowed up in victory.*

*Where, O death, is your victory?*

*Where, O death, is your sting?*

The sting of death is sin,  
and the power of sin is the law.  
But thanks be to God who gives us the victory  
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters,  
be firm, steadfast,  
always fully devoted to the work of the Lord,  
knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

**Alleluia Phil 2:15d, 16a**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Shine like lights in the world  
as you hold on to the word of life.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel Lk 6:39-45**

Jesus told his disciples a parable,  
"Can a blind person guide a blind person?  
Will not both fall into a pit?  
No disciple is superior to the teacher;  
but when fully trained,  
every disciple will be like his teacher.  
Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye,  
but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?  
How can you say to your brother,  
'Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,'  
when you do not even notice  
the wooden beam in your own eye?  
You hypocrite!  
Remove the wooden beam from your eye first;  
then you will see clearly  
to remove the splinter in your brother's eye.

"A good tree does not bear rotten fruit,  
nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit.  
For every tree is known by its own fruit.  
For people do not pick figs from thornbushes,

nor do they gather grapes from brambles.  
A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart  
produces good,  
but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil;  
for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks.”

## **PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS**

Given what is taking place in Ukraine right now, I want to reflect on what remains a mystery to me: Why do humiliated people think that they can restore their lost honor by humiliating others?

Some commentators are saying that Mr. Putin is motivated by fear. I won't argue with this assessment. But I also think he feels humiliated and, for some reason, believes that he can restore his lost honor if only he can humiliate someone else.

In this, Mr. Putin has much to teach us about ourselves.

Every human being I have ever met has suffered one humiliation or another. Humiliation has become part of the human condition ever since our Fall from grace in the Garden of Eden.

After tasting of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve “realized they were naked.” And the first order of business after our original humiliation was to cover over our nakedness with fig leaves and to hide from God in the Garden lest he see our humiliation.

This is a profound teaching about us all. We cannot bear to be the finite, embodied, creature we were created by God to be. In our Fall from grace, we have been humiliated by our own humanity.

The humiliation we feel is not God's doing. Our humiliation (“and they realized they were naked”), and the desperate need to regain our lost honor (“so they covered themselves with fig leaves”) is our own doing.

That we do this to ourselves is also a humiliation that must be covered over and denied. What better way to do this than humiliating someone else?

Abel's sacrifices were more pleasing to God than his brother's. So Cain covers over his humiliation by murdering Abel. And this is what is happening today in Ukraine: Cain is murdering his brother once again.

I have never met Mr. Putin, but I am told that he was deeply humiliated by the collapse of the Soviet Union. There are others who can tell this story better than I. Mr. Putin remembers the days when people in Eastern Europe feared him. To be feared, apparently, is to be honored. To no longer be feared is to be humiliated.

Human beings will do terrible things to escape the feeling of humiliation. Cain must kill Abel as a way to cover over his humiliation with the fig leaves of honor.

We see "honor killings" in various parts of the world. What Mr. Putin is doing in Ukraine is an honor killing. He is killing in order to make Russia great again.

Here in America, we need to be aware of the power that demagogues can wield over a humiliated people with the cynical promise to make them great again.

In Charlottesville Virginia, people marched with torches insisting that, "Jews will not replace us!" These Americans think they have been humiliated by Jews. As Christians, we must never forget what humiliated men and women have done to Jews in the perfidious hope of restoring their lost honor.

A police officer lynched an African American man by kneeling on his neck for nine-minutes in Minneapolis. After watching the video, a friend recently observed to me that this police officer had "the same dead eyes as Vladimir Putin."

This is an important insight. Humiliation blinds us to our own God-given dignity and compels us to restore our lost honor

by humiliating someone else. We scapegoat one another with blind eyes.

Why we do this to other human beings remains a mystery to me. Why do we think that we can create honor for ourselves by humiliating our neighbors?

But here, a great truth of our faith must be announced: Our self-inflicted humiliation is the place where our redemption begins.

This is not our doing. This is what God has chosen to do for us. God has come to be with us *precisely* where we have most radically rejected God.

Let me say this more simply: Christ humiliated himself in order to take on our humiliated humanity. Christ has become our humiliation. This is what our "dead eyes" finally see when they look on the Cross of Christ.

Certainly, Christ has taken on the humiliation of those who have been humiliated by the cruel injustices and outrages perpetrated by the empires of this world.

But more mysteriously for me at least, Christ has taken on the humiliation of those deluded souls who, like Mr. Putin, believe they can bring honor to themselves by humiliating others. The blood of Abel cries out to heaven for vengeance, but, in response, Christ has taken on Cain's humiliation.

This has enormous consequences for us. One of my students wrote to me a few days ago. She is quickly becoming an accomplished theologian and will serve the Church well with her skills.

My student was born in Russia, the land of Chagall and Rublev, Dostoyevsky and Chekov, Mendeleyev and Pavlov, Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, Mussorgsky and Shostakovich. She is born into one of the great cultures of the world.

After expressing her grief and sadness over what is happening to the people of Ukraine, she wrote,

Sadness isn't all there is obviously. We need hope too. I'm a Russian American and the situation in Ukraine is breaking my heart.

I certainly don't have any control over what happened or what happens moving forward. But I do have my faith. My faith tells me to "act justly" and to "love kindness," and to live with mercy in my heart.

Let me add this to my student's fine words: if we will only allow it, we will all feel the ancient humiliation in our hearts - the humiliation we have imposed on ourselves. But, as my student teaches, if we look deep enough, we will also find mercy in our troubled hearts.

Let there be no doubt: this mercy is a sign that Christ is taking on our humiliation.

### **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?