

HOMILY FOR THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 27 June 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: 98

Reading I Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24

God did not make death,
 nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.
For he fashioned all things that they might have being;
 and the creatures of the world are wholesome,
and there is not a destructive drug among them
 nor any domain of the netherworld on earth,
 for justice is undying.
For God formed man to be imperishable;
 the image of his own nature he made him.
But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world,
 and they who belong to his company experience it.

Responsorial Psalm 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11, 12, 13

R. (2a) I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.
I will extol you, O LORD, for you drew me clear
 and did not let my enemies rejoice over me.
O LORD, you brought me up from the netherworld;
 you preserved me from among those going down into the pit.
R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.
Sing praise to the LORD, you his faithful ones,
 and give thanks to his holy name.
For his anger lasts but a moment;
 a lifetime, his good will.
At nightfall, weeping enters in,
 but with the dawn, rejoicing.
R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.
Hear, O LORD, and have pity on me;
 O LORD, be my helper.
You changed my mourning into dancing;

O LORD, my God, forever will I give you thanks.
R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

Reading II 2 Cor 8:7, 9, 13-15

Brothers and sisters:

As you excel in every respect, in faith, discourse,
knowledge, all earnestness, and in the love we have for you,
may you excel in this gracious act also.

For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that though he was rich, for your sake he became poor,
so that by his poverty you might become rich.

Not that others should have relief while you are burdened,
but that as a matter of equality
your abundance at the present time should supply their needs,
so that their abundance may also supply your needs,
that there may be equality.

As it is written:

*Whoever had much did not have more,
and whoever had little did not have less.*

Alleluia Cf. 2 Tm 1:10

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Our Savior Jesus Christ destroyed death
and brought life to light through the Gospel.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 5:21-43 or 5:21-24, 35b-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat
to the other side,
a large crowd gathered around him, and he stayed close to the sea.
One of the synagogue officials, named Jairus, came forward.
Seeing him he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, saying,
“My daughter is at the point of death.
Please, come lay your hands on her
that she may get well and live.”
He went off with him,
and a large crowd followed him and pressed upon him.
While he was still speaking,
people from the synagogue official’s house arrived and said,
“Your daughter has died; why trouble the teacher any longer?”
Disregarding the message that was reported,
Jesus said to the synagogue official,
“Do not be afraid; just have faith.”
He did not allow anyone to accompany him inside

except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.
When they arrived at the house of the synagogue official,
he caught sight of a commotion,
people weeping and wailing loudly.
So he went in and said to them,
“Why this commotion and weeping?
The child is not dead but asleep.”
And they ridiculed him.
Then he put them all out.
He took along the child’s father and mother
and those who were with him
and entered the room where the child was.
He took the child by the hand and said to her, “*Talitha koum*,”
which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise!”
The girl, a child of twelve, arose immediately and walked around.
At that they were utterly astounded.
He gave strict orders that no one should know this
and said that she should be given something to eat.

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

Lilly died last week.

Everyone at Saint Leo’s will remember that we have been praying at mass for a young woman, only twenty-two years old, who fell ill on the day of her graduation from college. After a month of struggle, some kind of infection overcame Lilly’s immune system. Doctors are still trying to figure out what happened.

I am told that, at the time of her death, Lilly was being held by her family, in her hospital bed. For all the enormous sadness of this loss, I also must say that Lilly died what Catholics call, “a beautiful death.” I say this cautiously out of a concern that I might somehow paint-over the sadness of Lilly’s death with words that are superficial and insipidly pious. We must never use our faith to paint-over sorrow. Authentic faith leads us to embrace our grief, and, at times, even our anger. Lilly’s death is an enormous loss. But when I think of Lilly’s family gathered around her and holding her as she died, I cannot help but say she died a beautiful death.

When I was informed that Lilly was being held by her family when she died, I thought of a little custom that I have when I baptize children. During the ritual, just before I pour the water over the baby’s head, I ask all the kids at the ceremony to gather around me.

I make sure to tell them, before the ceremony begins, that I will need their help. The kids have sat patiently through the readings, my homily, and the profession of faith. Then, when the time to pour the water has finally come, I ask the smallest kids to stand right in front of me by the baptismal font and the older kids to stand behind the little ones.

Then I say to the kids:

“Touch the baby! Touch the baby when I baptize the baby!”

This practice is not in the ritual book. There are no “little red letters” instructing the priest to invite the kids to gather around the baptismal font. I just think it is a good custom to follow.

The kids need no theological explanation of this little embellishment of the rite. Of course, we should touch the baby. Babies need to be touched. We all need to be touched. This is true when we are being baptized and it is true when we are dying. We need to be touched.

The Gospel for this Sunday is about being touched. Jairus is a synagogue official distraught over a sickness that has overcome his daughter. He prostrates himself on the ground before Jesus and begs him to come into his house.

“My daughter is at the point of death.
Please, come lay your hands on her
that she may get well and live.”

Jairus believes that Jesus can heal his daughter if only he can touch her through the “laying on of hands.” (By the way, there is a laying on of hands in the Rite of Baptism as well).

Jesus sets off with Jairus followed by a large crowd. But soon, people from Jairus’s household show up and tell the father that his daughter has died.

“Why trouble the teacher any longer?”

Jesus will have none of this.

“Do not be afraid; just have faith.”

People in Jairus’s house ridicule Jesus when he tells them that the little girl is asleep. But, entering the child’s room,

He took the child by the hand and said to her, “*Talitha koum*,”
which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise!”

I think this is what Jesus said to Lilly as she lay in her hospital bed, her family holding her like they held her on the day she was baptized. I think Jesus said, *Talitha koum* to Lilly.

Are these two little words the most beautiful in all the scriptures?

Babies need to be touched. If you need an explanation, just ask one of the little kids who crowd around me when I'm baptizing a baby.

"Touch the baby! Touch the baby when I baptize the baby!"

The kids get it. We need to feel the touch of human tenderness when we are baptized into Christ's death as infants. We need to feel the touch of human tenderness when our baptism is finally completed at our death.

Lilly died last week. It was a beautiful death. Her family was holding her, touching her. And as they did so, the Risen Christ, the Great Healer of Souls, was imposing his hands on Lilly. Just as he did with Jairus's little daughter, the Lord, in his steadfast love, turned to Lilly and said,

"Talitha koum"

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?

