

HOMILY FOR PENTECOST SUNDAY
Sunday, 28 May 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: 63

Reading I Acts 2:1-11

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled,
they were all in one place together.
And suddenly there came from the sky
a noise like a strong driving wind,
and it filled the entire house in which they were.
Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire,
which parted and came to rest on each one of them.
And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit
and began to speak in different tongues,
as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

Now there were devout Jews
from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem.
At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd,
but they were confused
because each one heard them speaking in his own language.
They were astounded, and in amazement they asked,
"Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans?
Then how does each of us hear them in his native language?
We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites,
inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia,
Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,
Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene,
as well as travelers from Rome,
both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs,
yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues
of the mighty acts of God."

Responsorial Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34

R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.
Bless the LORD, O my soul!

O LORD, my God, you are great indeed!
How manifold are your works, O LORD!
the earth is full of your creatures.
R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.
May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD be glad in his works!
Pleasing to him be my theme;
I will be glad in the LORD.
R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.
If you take away their breath, they perish
and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth.
R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

Reading II Ez 37:1-14

The hand of the LORD came upon me,
and he led me out in the spirit of the LORD
and set me in the center of the plain,
which was now filled with bones.
He made me walk among the bones in every direction
so that I saw how many they were on the surface of the plain.
How dry they were!

He asked me:
Son of man, can these bones come to life?
I answered, "Lord GOD, you alone know that."

Then he said to me:
Prophesy over these bones, and say to them:
Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!
Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones:
See! I will bring spirit into you, that you may come to life.
I will put sinews upon you, make flesh grow over you,
cover you with skin, and put spirit in you
so that you may come to life and know that I am the LORD.

I, Ezekiel, prophesied as I had been told,
and even as I was prophesying I heard a noise;
it was a rattling as the bones came together,
bone joining bone.
I saw the sinews and the flesh come upon them,
and the skin cover them, but there was no spirit in them.

Then the LORD said to me:
Prophecy to the spirit, prophesy, son of man,
and say to the spirit:
Thus says the Lord GOD:
From the four winds come, O spirit,
and breathe into these slain that they may come to life.
I prophesied as he told me, and the spirit came into them;
they came alive and stood upright, a vast army.

Then he said to me:
Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.
They have been saying,
"Our bones are dried up,
our hope is lost, and we are cut off."
Therefore, prophesy and say to them:
Thus says the Lord GOD:
O my people, I will open your graves
and have you rise from them,
and bring you back to the land of Israel.
Then you shall know that I am the LORD,
when I open your graves and have you rise from them,
O my people!
I will put my spirit in you that you may live,
and I will settle you upon your land;
thus you shall know that I am the LORD.
I have promised, and I will do it, says the LORD.

Alleluia
R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Jn 20:19-23

On the evening of that first day of the week,
when the doors were locked, where the disciples were,
for fear of the Jews,
Jesus came and stood in their midst
and said to them, "Peace be with you."
When he had said this, he showed them his hands and
his side.
The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
And when he had said this,
he breathed on them and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit.
Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,
and whose sins you retain are retained."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Today is Pentecost Sunday and the Church gives us the great vision of the Prophet Ezekiel - the vision of the dry bones.

Ezekiel, remember, is the prophet raised up by God to accompany the Jewish people during the Babylonian exile. His poetry is filled with hope in God's fidelity to his people. The God of Abraham will not abandon his people in their exile.

The vision given to Ezekiel is mysterious:

The hand of the LORD came upon me,
and he led me out in the spirit of the LORD
and set me in the center of the plain.

The plain is a wasteland of dry bones.

He made me walk among the bones
in every direction
so that I saw how many they were on the surface
of the plain. How dry they were!

These are the bones of the people of Israel in their exile.
These are the bones of our fallen humanity, crumbling
into dust.

Then the Lord God asks Ezekiel the great question. The greatest of all questions. I mean the question that arises, inescapably, out of our mortality and sinfulness and then confronts us all.

Son of man, can these bones come to life?

And Ezekiel, in his fear and trembling, spoke to the Ancient of Days, saying,

“Lord GOD, you alone know that.”

The Lord God has asked the question that haunts us:
Can the dry bones of our fallen humanity ever come back to life?

The Lord God asks Ezekiel this question, I think, because he is eager to give us the answer.

Pay close attention to the Lord says to Ezekiel:

Prophesy over these bones, and say to them:
Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!
Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones:
See! I will bring spirit into you,
that you may come to life.
I will put sinews upon you,
make flesh grow over you,
cover you with skin, and put spirit in you
so that you may come to life
and know that I am the LORD.

In his fidelity to his people, the Lord God will breathe his Spirit into the dry bones and bring them back to life.

But Ezekiel’s vision must be understood correctly. It is a retelling of what happened in the Book of Genesis. God created us by fashioning a body out of the dust of the earth and then breathing the Divine Life into it,

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

In Hebrew, “living being” (נֶפֶשׁ) means the wholeness, serenity, and innocence of our original humanity. This is what we have lost in being expelled from the Garden of Eden and exiled onto the plain of the dry bones.

And now, the Creator is re-creating us. He is forming us again out of the dust. He is re-creating our sinews and restoring our flesh. He is covering us with skin.

And, just as in our first creation, the Lord God is breathing his spirit into the dust he has formed into a body.

See! I will bring spirit into you,
that you may come to life.
I will put sinews upon you,
make flesh grow over you,
cover you with skin, and put spirit in you
so that you may come to life
and know that I am the LORD.

Last Sunday, I told you about an ancient tradition in the Church. Christ was crucified above the grave of Adam. The blood of the Savior fell from his wounds, staining the earth and sinking into the tomb of Adam. The bones of long-lost Adam are being revived by the blood of the crucified Savior.

Here begins the resurrection of our humanity and, indeed, the resurrect of all creation into the Mystery of the God who created us.

And today, on this Pentecost Sunday, the Church gives us Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones.

We are being re-created. This is the meaning of Pentecost. In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit over our dry bones, we are being raised up into a New Creation.

Thus says the Lord GOD:
O my people, I will open your graves
and have you rise from them,
and bring you back to the land of Israel.
Then you shall know that I am the LORD...
O my people!
I will put my spirit in you that you may live,
and I will settle you upon your land;
thus you shall know that I am the LORD.
I have promised, and I will do it, says the LORD.

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Hoy es Domingo de Pentecostés y la Iglesia nos da la visión misteriosa del Profeta Ezequiel - la visión de los huesos secos.

Ezequiel es el profeta que Dios levantó para acompañar al pueblo judío durante el exilio babilónico. Su poesía está llena de esperanza en la fidelidad de Dios a su pueblo. El Dios de Abraham no abandonará a su pueblo en el exilio.

La visión dada a Ezequiel me encanta:

En aquellos días, la mano del Señor se posó sobre mí, y su espíritu me trasladó y me colocó en medio de un campo lleno de huesos. Me hizo dar vuelta en torno a ellos. Había una cantidad innumerable de huesos sobre la superficie del campo y estaban completamente secos.

Estos son los huesos del pueblo de Israel en su destierro. También, estos son los huesos de nuestra humanidad caída, desmoronándose en polvo.

Luego, el Señor Dios le hace a Ezequiel una gran pregunta, me refiero a la pregunta que surge, inevitablemente, de nuestra mortalidad y luego nos confronta a todos.

“Hijo de hombre, ¿podrán acaso revivir estos huesos?”

Y Ezequiel, en su temor y temblor, habló al Anciano de Días, diciendo:

“Señor, solo tú lo sabes”.

El Señor Dios ha hecho la pregunta que nos confronta a todos: ¿Pueden los huesos secos de nuestra humanidad caída volver a la vida?

El Señor Dios le hace esta pregunta a Ezequiel, creo, porque está ansioso por darnos la respuesta.

Prestan, todos, mucha atención en lo que dice el Señor a Ezequiel:

Él me dijo: "Habla en mi nombre a estos huesos y diles: 'Huesos secos, escuchen la palabra del Señor. Esto dice el Señor Dios a estos huesos: He aquí que yo les infundiré el espíritu y revivirán. Les pondré nervios, haré que les brote carne, la cubriré de piel, les infundiré el espíritu y revivirán. Entonces reconocerán ustedes que yo soy el Señor' ".

En su fidelidad a su pueblo, el Señor Dios soplará su Espíritu en los huesos secos y los devolverá a la vida.

La visión de Ezequiel debe entenderse correctamente. Es un recuento de lo que sucedió en el Libro de Génesis. Dios creó el cuerpo humano del polvo de la tierra y luego insuflando la Vida Divina en él,

El Señor Dios formó al hombre del polvo de la tierra y sopló en su nariz aliento de vida, y el hombre se convirtió en un ser viviente.

Y ahora, el Creador nos está recreando. Él nos está formando de nuevo del polvo. Él está recreando nuestros tendones y restaurando nuestra carne. Él nos está cubriendo con la piel.

Tal como en nuestra primera creación, el Señor Dios está soplando su espíritu en el polvo que ha formado en un cuerpo.

Les pondré nervios, haré que les brote carne, la cubriré de piel, les infundiré el espíritu y revivirán. Entonces reconocerán ustedes que yo soy el Señor' ".

El domingo pasado hablé de una antigua tradición en la Iglesia. Cristo fue crucificado sobre la tumba de Adán. La sangre del Salvador cayó de sus heridas, manchando la tierra y hundiéndose en la tumba de Adán. Los huesos del perdido Adán están siendo revivificados por la sangre del Salvador crucificado.

Aquí comienza la resurrección de nuestra humanidad y, de hecho, la resurrección de toda la creación en el Misterio del Dios que nos creó.

Y hoy, en este domingo de Pentecostés, la Iglesia nos regala la visión de Ezequiel sobre los huesos secos.

Estamos siendo recreados. Este es el significado de Pentecostés. En el derramamiento del Espíritu Santo sobre nuestros huesos secos, estamos siendo elevados a una Nueva Creación.

'Esto dice el Señor: Pueblo mío, yo mismo abriré sus sepulcros, los haré salir de ellos y los conduciré de nuevo a la tierra de Israel. Cuando abra sus sepulcros y los saque de ellos, pueblo mío, ustedes dirán que yo soy el Señor. Entonces les infundiré mi espíritu y vivirán, los estableceré en su tierra y sabrán que yo, el Señor, lo dije y lo cumplí' ".

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?