

HOMILY FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME  
Sunday, 29 January 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: 70

Reading 1 Zep 2:3; 3:12-13

Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth,  
who have observed his law;  
seek justice, seek humility;  
perhaps you may be sheltered  
on the day of the LORD's anger.

But I will leave as a remnant in your midst  
a people humble and lowly,  
who shall take refuge in the name of the LORD:  
the remnant of Israel.  
They shall do no wrong  
and speak no lies;  
nor shall there be found in their mouths  
a deceitful tongue;  
they shall pasture and couch their flocks  
with none to disturb them.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

R. (Mt 5:3) Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs!  
The LORD keeps faith forever,  
secures justice for the oppressed,  
gives food to the hungry.  
The LORD sets captives free.  
R. Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs!  
The LORD gives sight to the blind;  
the LORD raises up those who were bowed down.  
The LORD loves the just;  
the LORD protects strangers.  
R. Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs!  
The fatherless and the widow the LORD sustains,  
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.

The LORD shall reign forever;  
your God, O Zion, through all generations. Alleluia.  
R. Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs!

Reading 2 1 Cor 1:26-31

Consider your own calling, brothers and sisters.  
Not many of you were wise by human standards,  
not many were powerful,  
not many were of noble birth.  
Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise,  
and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong,  
and God chose the lowly and despised of the world,  
those who count for nothing,  
to reduce to nothing those who are something,  
so that no human being might boast before God.  
It is due to him that you are in Christ Jesus,  
who became for us wisdom from God,  
as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,  
so that, as it is written,  
"Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord."

Alleluia Mt 5:12a

R. Alleluia, alleluia.  
Rejoice and be glad;  
your reward will be great in heaven.  
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mt 5:1-12a

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain,  
and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him.  
He began to teach them, saying:  
"Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are they who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the land.  
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be satisfied.  
Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.  
Blessed are the clean of heart,  
for they will see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called children of God.  
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you  
and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me.  
Rejoice and be glad,  
for your reward will be great in heaven."

## PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

I have been reflecting, from time to time, about the synod that will take place in Rome this October. Pope Francis has called for a synod on the Church's "synodality." Synodality means that we are a people "on the road together" (*syn-hodos*).

Today, let me give you a little historical background to what the Pope is doing.

In 1962, good Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council. He wanted the bishops of the world to reflect on how the Church might be of better service to a troubled world.

During the last session of the Council (1965), Pope Paul VI asked that groups of bishops come to Rome periodically (about every three years) as a "synod" to discuss the challenges facing the Church and the world. These synods are meant to be a continuation of the Second Vatican Council and the on-going renewal of the Church.

Earlier in the Council, the bishops of the world had put together a "dogmatic constitution" on the Church (*Lumen gentium*). The Church is a community of people united by their faith that God has not abandoned what He has created. There is a universal call to holiness that all have received through the sacrament of baptism. Before the Church is a hierarchical institution, divided into clergy and laity, and before we are Catholics and Protestants and Orthodox

Christians, we are one people, called to holiness in the eyes of God through service to the world.

But the bishops of Vatican II were not satisfied yet. They called for another statement on the Church, a "pastoral constitution." This document would be addressed to the many peoples of the world.

I think we should pay attention to the fact that Pope Paul VI called for these periodic synods at the same time that the bishops of the Council were working on this pastoral constitution - the document we know today as *Gaudium et spes*.

What did they come up with? Here is the opening paragraph -

The joys and the hopes (*gaudium et spes*), the griefs and the anxieties of the peoples of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.

Let me draw your attention to the last sentence.

Nothing that is genuinely human can fail to raise an echo in our hearts.

This is what I want for us here at Saint Leo's. I want us to commit ourselves to living lives in which nothing that is genuinely human fails to speak eloquently within us and to challenge us. I want us to be a community eager to recognize what is "genuinely human" and eager to embrace that humanity as the Holy Spirit leads us into the world.

Like Jesus before the grave of Lazarus, his friend, I want us to be "moved by the deepest emotions" when we are confronted by "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the peoples of this age." And I want this to be especially true when it comes to the poor and afflicted.

And so, the opening paragraph of *Gaudium et spes* continues,

That is why this community [the Church] realizes that it is truly linked with the human family and its history by the deepest of bonds.

We live in a time when our ability to imagine the humanity of our fellow human beings is being impoverished. The poor among us have become invisible. Our hearts are being numbed by computer games, fake news, and a cacophony of soundbites.

Please don't let this happen to us at Saint Leo's. This must not happen to the Church. If our faith does not open our hearts to the humanity all around us and call us to service, then we must ask ourselves if our faith is truly authentic.

*Gaudium et spes* provides a background to Pope Francis' call for a synod on the Church's synodality. We are "on the road together." This includes the whole world beyond the Church.

So, I want to invite you to befriend today's Gospel as a *lectio divina* (see below for instructions on this spiritual practice).

The Gospel today is taken from the Sermon on the Mount. Don't skim over these teachings, even though you have heard them before. Let them sink in and speak to you.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are they who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek,

for they will inherit the land.  
Blessed are they who hunger  
and thirst for righteousness,  
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for they will be called children of God.  
Blessed are they who are persecuted  
for the sake of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are you when they insult you  
and persecute you and utter every kind of evil  
against you falsely because of me.  
Rejoice and be glad,  
for your reward will be great in heaven."

Living a life that rises out of these teachings can be hard. I won't pretend otherwise. But in my experience of you as your priest, living such a life can be extraordinarily joyful as well.

As we draw near the synod, don't forget the opening words of *Gaudium et Spes*.

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the peoples of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.

Pope Francis is telling us: we are a people "on the road together," and we need to accompany all the peoples of this world, Catholic or not, as they make their way through this troubled world. We must make their "joys and hopes" and their "griefs and anxieties" our own.

### 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?