

HOMILY FOR THIRTIETH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME  
Sunday, 29 October 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: 148

Reading 1 Ex 22:20-26

Thus says the LORD:

"You shall not molest or oppress an alien,  
for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.  
You shall not wrong any widow or orphan.  
If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me,  
I will surely hear their cry.  
My wrath will flare up, and I will kill you with the sword;  
then your own wives will be widows, and your children orphans.

"If you lend money to one of your poor neighbors  
among my people,  
you shall not act like an extortioner toward him  
by demanding interest from him.  
If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge,  
you shall return it to him before sunset;  
for this cloak of his is the only covering he has for his body.  
What else has he to sleep in?  
If he cries out to me, I will hear him; for I am compassionate."

Responsorial Psalm Ps 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51

R. (2) I love you, Lord, my strength.  
I love you, O LORD, my strength,  
O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.  
My God, my rock of refuge,  
my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold!  
Praised be the LORD, I exclaim,  
and I am safe from my enemies.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.  
The LORD lives and blessed be my rock!  
Extolled be God my savior.  
You who gave great victories to your king  
and showed kindness to your anointed.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

Reading 2 1 Thes 1:5c-10

Brothers and sisters:

You know what sort of people we were among you for your sake.  
And you became imitators of us and of the Lord,  
receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit,  
so that you became a model for all the believers  
in Macedonia and in Achaia.

For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth  
not only in Macedonia and in Achaia,  
but in every place your faith in God has gone forth,  
so that we have no need to say anything.

For they themselves openly declare about us  
what sort of reception we had among you,  
and how you turned to God from idols  
to serve the living and true God  
and to await his Son from heaven,  
whom he raised from the dead,  
Jesus, who delivers us from the coming wrath.

Alleluia Jn 14:23

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord,  
and my Father will love him and we will come to him.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mt 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus  
had silenced the Sadducees,  
they gathered together, and one of them,  
a scholar of the law tested him by asking,  
"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

He said to him,  
"You shall love the Lord, your God,  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
and with all your mind.

This is the greatest and the first commandment.  
The second is like it:  
You shall love your neighbor as yourself.  
The whole law and the prophets depend  
on these two commandments."

## PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

I spoke with a friend last week and asked him about his wife and two boys. I have never met them in person, but I have spoken with them from time to time via the FaceTime app on my friend's cellphone.

This family is from Venezuela, a country that has been corrupted by oil companies and demagogues. My friend's hometown is now a hostage of drug gangs. The streets are too dangerous for his boys. Inflation is high and jobs are scarce. So, my friend brought his wife and sons to Columbia as refugees and then came north to Sonoma. Now he longs to be reunited with his wife and the two boys.

To my surprise, my friend told me last week that his family has left Columbia in an attempt to reach the United States.

As I type these words, a mother and her two boys (ages 15 and 13), are making their way through what is known as the Darien Gap.

They call it a "gap" because the engineers couldn't figure out how to build the Pan American Highway through this stretch of jungle, swamps and mountains in southern Panama. It's a gap in the Pan American Highway.

People regularly die making this passage through the Gap. My friend told me that he stepped over dead bodies as he made his way through the Gap. That



was months ago. Now his wife and his two boys will try to make this passage.

This is insane. The trip is too dangerous for a woman with two kids in tow. A woman with children is easy prey for hoodlums. Here in Sonoma, with the grape-harvest over, my friend has no steady job. Saint Leo's can supply them with food. But boys, I've noticed, eat a lot. Generous people at Saint Leo's will get them a couple of hundred bucks a month - but hardly enough for rent. No one in the family speaks English.

These three souls are coming to Sonoma with little more than their deep faith in God and their love for the man who is their father and husband.

I considered, for a moment, asking my friend to reconsider this plan. But I knew what he would say: the alternative is worse. The streets of his town in Venezuela are too dangerous for his boys. They might even join a gang for protection.

This would break their father.

I do not pretend that I can imagine what it is like to be this desperate. I don't think you should pretend to do so either.

Neither do I have any clever ideas about what the United States should do about immigration. But clever ideas about immigration are not my responsibility or, for that matter, the Church's responsibility. Our responsibility is to show the world what God demands of us all.

Look at the first reading.

Thus says the LORD:  
"You shall not molest or oppress an alien,  
for you were once aliens yourselves  
in the land of Egypt.  
You shall not wrong any widow or orphan.  
If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me,  
I will surely hear their cry.

In the Book of Exodus, after the telling the story of how God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, God commands the people to respect the dignity of immigrants and to remember that they were once aliens in a hostile land.

You shall not molest or oppress an alien,  
for you were once aliens yourselves  
in the land of Egypt.

This is not an isolated passage. You can find this commandment many times, not only in the Torah, but in the Prophets and the Psalms as well. Again and again, we are commanded to protect "the widow, the orphan and the stranger in your land."

Here is another passage from the Book of Deuteronomy:

When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf [of grain] in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger in your land, the orphan and for the widow.

In the days of Jesus, the rabbis were busy compiling a commentary on the Law of Moses called the Mishna. Here is what the Mishna says about our first reading:

He Who spoke and called the universe into being, made a covenant with them, that whenever they will cry out against violence, they shall be answered, even as it is said: "For if they cry at all unto Me, I will surely hear their cry."

Let me say again, the Church has no clever ideas about how to solve the problem of immigration. Here at Saint Leo's we shouldn't pretend to know how to stop oil and cocaine and greed from making life unlivable for the widow, the orphan and the stranger in our land.

But, as people of faith, we are commanded to open our hearts to those who are desperate.

Pray for this woman and her two boys as they make their way through the Darien Gap. This is commanded of us.

And until the time when this world is no longer corrupted by our greed and heartlessness, we are commanded to welcome this family, remembering that once we were all aliens, sojourning in the land of Egypt.

### 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?

