

## HOMILY FOR TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 30 August 2020

- 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: 124

#### Reading 1 JER 20:7-9

You duped me, O LORD, and I let myself be duped;  
you were too strong for me, and you triumphed.

All the day I am an object of laughter;  
everyone mocks me.

Whenever I speak, I must cry out,  
violence and outrage is my message;  
the word of the LORD has brought me  
derision and reproach all the day.

I say to myself, I will not mention him,  
I will speak in his name no more.  
But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart,  
imprisoned in my bones;  
I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.

#### Responsorial Psalm PS 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

R. (2b) **My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.**

O God, you are my God whom I seek;  
for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts  
like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.

R. **My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.**

Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary  
to see your power and your glory,  
For your kindness is a greater good than life;  
my lips shall glorify you.

R. **My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.**

Thus will I bless you while I live;  
lifting up my hands, I will call upon your name.

As with the riches of a banquet shall my soul be satisfied,  
and with exultant lips my mouth shall praise you.

**R. My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.**

You are my help,  
and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy.  
My soul clings fast to you;  
your right hand upholds me.

**R. My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.**

**Reading 2 ROM 12:1-2**

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God,  
to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,  
holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.  
Do not conform yourselves to this age  
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,  
that you may discern what is the will of God,  
what is good and pleasing and perfect.

**Alleluia EPH 1:17-18**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ  
enlighten the eyes of our hearts,  
that we may know what is the hope  
that belongs to our call.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel MT 16:13-27**

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and  
he asked his disciples,  
"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"  
They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah,  
still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."  
He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"  
Simon Peter said in reply,  
"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."  
Jesus said to him in reply,  
"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.  
For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.  
And so I say to you, you are Peter,  
and upon this rock I will build my church,

and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.  
I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven.  
Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven;  
and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”  
Then he strictly ordered his disciples  
to tell no one that he was the Christ

Jesus began to show his disciples  
that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly  
from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes,  
and be killed and on the third day be raised.  
Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him,  
“God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.”  
He turned and said to Peter,  
“Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me.  
You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”

Then Jesus said to his disciples,  
“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself,  
take up his cross, and follow me.  
For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,  
but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.  
What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world  
and forfeit his life?  
Or what can one give in exchange for his life?  
For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father’s glory,  
and then he will repay all according to his conduct.”

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

Last June, when we celebrated the Feast of the Holy Trinity, I noted that an alarming number of Americans, at this time in our nation’s history, are looking for a strong man to solve our problems. Actually, people in various parts of the world are looking for strong men.

Christians do not think of God as a strong man. In our faith, God is more like a community of persons. In my homily, I said that the mystery of the Trinity speaks directly to us Americans today by challenging our misplaced faith in a strong man. Much the same can be said of the Gospel this Sunday: the messiah, long hoped for by the Jewish people, will not be a strong man. The messiah, in fact, must be humiliated, must suffer and die if the people are to be redeemed.

If you find this part of our faith troubling, then good, you have company. I find it troubling as well.

The Gospel this Sunday is a continuation of the reading from Matthew that we had last Sunday. Jesus has a memorable discussion with his disciples about the much-anticipated messiah.

Jesus begins the dialogue with an innocent-enough question:

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

“Son of Man” is a title for the messiah. The disciples all knew that in the book of Daniel, the Prophet wrote,

“And I saw one coming on the clouds like a Son of Man.”

The title “Son of Man” (*ben adam* in Hebrew) indicates that the messiah will be a “New Adam,” the first born of a new humanity built out of the ashes of our old humanity. And of course, the Apostle Paul speaks of the Resurrected Christ as the “New Adam,” the great sign of the future restoration of our fallen humanity.

And in answer to Jesus’s question, the disciples tell their rabbi what they were hearing in the street.

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

Then Jesus ups the stakes in this conversation.

He said to them, “But who do YOU say that I am?”

And Peter, true to form, gets everything right in completely the wrong way.

Simon Peter said in reply,  
“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

“Christ,” as you may know, is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “messiah.” Peter has just recognized Jesus as the messiah, and Jesus lavishes praise on him.

“And so I say to you, you are Peter,  
and upon this rock I will build my church,  
and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.”

Matthew goes out of his way to tell us that this encounter between Jesus and Peter takes place near a city called Caesarea Philippi. This is not without meaning. Palestine, in Jesus’s day, was a powder-keg waiting to explode. Peasants were restless. The Roman Empire responded to resistance to its rule by setting its heavy heel on the neck of the Jewish people and letting it rest there. The chief priests, associated with the Temple in Jerusalem, and the

leading Jewish families, the Sanhedrin, were cooperating with the Roman authorities hoping to keep things in control (business was good under Roman rule for the elites). Caesarea Philippi was a Roman garrison town, a citadel of foreign power in the northern part of the Holy Land, an easy day's march to Jerusalem in case the political situation got out of hand.

This town, by the way, was administered by a Roman procurator, an ambitious young man from a prominent Roman family, the Piloti, named Pontius. In time, Pontius Pilot will leave Caesarea Philippi and go down to Jerusalem to help keep order during the annual Passover celebration. The chief priests will bring him an insurrectionist from Nazareth who, they said, had claimed to be the king of the Jews.

All this happened in the Gospel reading last week. This week, as the conversation continues, things heat up.

In response to Peter's abrupt recognition of Jesus as the messiah,

Jesus began to show his disciples  
that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly  
from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes,  
and be killed and on the third day be raised.

Peter will have none of this talk.

Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him,  
"God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you."

And Jesus will have none of Peter's talk.

He turned and said to Peter,  
"Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me.  
You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Matthew is nothing if not a great storyteller. Jesus tells Peter that he's thinking "not as God does, but as human being do," right after telling him that God in heaven, and no mere mortal, has revealed to him that Jesus is the messiah.

The messiah will not be the strong man that Peter is looking for. The Son of Man will have to go up to Jerusalem, suffer and die. The messiah will not be a strong man. Far from it. The messiah will be the Suffering Servant that the Prophet Isaiah foretold in his poetry:

Like a sheep that is led to the slaughterhouse,  
Like a lamb that is dumb in front of its shearers,  
Like these, he never opens his mouth.  
He has been humiliated and has no one to defend him.

Who will ever talk about his descendants,  
Since his life on earth has been cut short? [Is 53:7-8]

After this rebuke to Peter, Jesus turns to all the others and lays out, in no uncertain terms, the cost of discipleship.

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself,  
take up his cross, and follow me.  
For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,  
but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Century after century, in our fear and confusion, sinful human beings have begged God to send them a strong man to save them. And century after century, God invites us to renounce our craving to be saved by power, to turn away from the illusions proffered by strong men, to deny ourselves and to take up the cross that, for reasons that transcend human comprehension, has been prepared for each and every one of us.

The redemption of the world is not found in the schemes of strong men. Our redemption is revealed on the cross of the messiah – the cross that unveils the folly of strong men and the woe that comes to us when we place our faith in them.

Jesus is asking us a pointed question:

“What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world  
and forfeit his life? “

Strong men promise the whole world. Life, on the other hand, comes from a costly transcendence that Americans – and many others around the world – are being asked to embrace. Life – the New Life that Jesus has promised us – comes from selfless service to our neighbor, from showing hospitality to the stranger, from seeking justice, from placing our faith in God’s steadfast and providential love and from the humility to take up our cross and follow in the footsteps of our crucified messiah.

### **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?