

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 30 July 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: 109

Reading 1 1 Kgs 3:5, 7-12

The LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night.
God said, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you."

Solomon answered:

"O LORD, my God, you have made me, your servant,
King to succeed my father David;
but I am a mere youth, not knowing at all how to act.
I serve you in the midst of the people whom you have chosen,
a people so vast that it cannot be numbered or counted.
Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart
to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong.
For who is able to govern this vast people of yours?"

The LORD was pleased that Solomon made this request.

So God said to him:

"Because you have asked for this—
not for a long life for yourself, nor for riches,
nor for the life of your enemies,
but for understanding so that you may know what is right —
I do as you requested.
I give you a heart so wise and understanding
that there has never been anyone like you up to now,
and after you there will come no one to equal you."

Responsorial Psalm Ps 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130

R. (97a) Lord, I love your commands.

I have said, O LORD, that my part
is to keep your words.

The law of your mouth is to me more precious
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

R. Lord, I love your commands.

Let your kindness comfort me

according to your promise to your servants.
Let your compassion come to me that I may live,
for your law is my delight.
R. Lord, I love your commands.
For I love your command
more than gold, however fine.
For in all your precepts I go forward;
every false way I hate.
R. Lord, I love your commands.
Wonderful are your decrees;
therefore I observe them.
The revelation of your words sheds light,
giving understanding to the simple.
R. Lord, I love your commands.

Reading 2 Rom 8:28-30

Brothers and sisters:
We know that all things work for good for those who love God,
who are called according to his purpose.
For those he foreknew he also predestined
to be conformed to the image of his Son,
so that he might be the firstborn
among many brothers and sisters.
And those he predestined he also called;
and those he called he also justified;
and those he justified he also glorified.

Alleluia Cf. Mt 11:25

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth;
for you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mt 13:44-52

Jesus said to his disciples:
"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field,
which a person finds and hides again,
and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.
Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant
searching for fine pearls.
When he finds a pearl of great price,
he goes and sells all that he has and buys it.
Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea,
which collects fish of every kind.

When it is full they haul it ashore
and sit down to put what is good into buckets.
What is bad they throw away.
Thus it will be at the end of the age.
The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the
righteous
and throw them into the fiery furnace,
where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.

"Do you understand all these things?"
They answered, "Yes."
And he replied,
"Then every scribe who has been instructed
in the kingdom of heaven
is like the head of a household
who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old."

PART TWO: HOMILY

It's Friday morning and I am reflecting on the first reading
for mass on Sunday. I wonder if Pope Francis is doing the
same thing. Let's pretend he is. After all, he has to come up
with a homily just like me.

What is the Pope thinking?

I'll bet he's thinking about how hard it is to be the pope.
Our Church stretches over the whole globe at a time when
things have become really complicated.

Some time ago, in the parish of Santa Croce in Florence,
Pope Francis said something like this:

We are not living in a era of change.
We are living in a change of eras.

In saying this, the Pope was trying to help us do what
Christians must always do: Christians need to figure out
"what time it is."

By this, I mean that people of faith need to discern what's
really going on right in front of our noses so that we can be
the Church in a way that is more faithful to the Gospel and
more in service to those who are suffering.

So, what time is it?

Almost sixty years ago, the Roman Catholic Church had a general council. All the bishops of the world (over 2000 of them) came together in Rome to ask, "what time is it" in the hope of discerning how the Church might be renewed.

The word Good Pope John, the pope that called the Council, liked to use was *aggiornamento*, or "updating."

The Second Vatican Council produced wonderful statements on the Church as a people of faith, its service to the world, and the need to cultivate friendships with other Christians and with those who follow other religious paths. There was also an important statement made at the Council on the freedom of religion.

The Second Vatican Council opened in 1962. When it opened, we all thought that it was about *aggiornamento*. But, as is often the way with councils in the Church, we are only now beginning to see what the Council was really about.

The Second Vatican Council was really about the emergence of the Church as a global community of faith.

At the time of the Council, the European colonial system was breaking down. And at the Council, a Church that was no longer Euro-centric was becoming visible. A young and vibrant Church in Africa began to teach us wonderful things about faith. The local churches of Latin America began to teach us about solidarity with the poor and the need to resist not only Marxism, but savage capitalism as well. The church in the United States had important things to say about democracy and religious freedom. The local churches of Asia began to teach us about friendship with Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and others. At the Council, Jews reached out to us in friendship and hope after the Holocaust.

We didn't know it at the time, but the Second Vatican Council was really about the emergence of a Church which was getting ready for service in the world we have today: a

world where things we once thought unshakable have now begun to shake.

Something very beautiful has happened to the Church. We no longer have to be a beleaguered island of light sunk in a perilous sea of darkness.

I don't mean to imply that the modern world isn't screwed up. It certainly is. I don't even mean to imply that the Church isn't an island. In many ways it is. Or better to say: the Church is an archipelago of islands, connected by our scriptures, our sacraments, our devotions, and the beauty of our rituals. We a beautiful necklace of islands connected, most of all, by our deep faith. We speak Swahili and Tagalog, Croatian and Chinese, Urdu and Arabic. Here at Saint Leo's, we speak a lot of Spanish and English... but don't forget Malayalam - the language Father Jojo speaks with his Mom and Dad back in Kerela.

I'm betting that Good Pope Francis is thinking about all this right now as he reflects on the first reading and prays, like I do, that the Holy Spirit will give him something of value to say in his homily for this Sunday.

So, let's take a look at the first reading.

It's about King Solomon's dream and how he asked God in his dream for the gift of wisdom.

The LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night. God said, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you.

Solomon did not ask for a long life for himself or for riches. He didn't ask for the life of his enemies either. Instead, Solomon asked for wisdom:

Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong.

I'm thinking that Pope Francis is sitting up and paying attention to what Solomon asked for. Francis needs what Solomon, in his youth and inexperience, asks for: wisdom.

The Pope is also reflecting on the rest of Solomon's prayer:

I serve you in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a people so vast that it cannot be numbered or counted.

For who is able to govern this vast people of yours?"

Francis is trying to serve a Church that has become a global community and can no longer be governed by the central exercise of power. I think he gets this, although I also must say that he is not shy about making tough decisions when the Church needs a forceful leader.

But in this "change of eras," Francis must lead the Church by appealing to what is best in us, what is truest within us: our common faith in the Gospel.

Lastly, I suspect Pope Francis, as he reflects on Solomon's dream, is thinking about the synod he has called for this October - the synod on the Church's "synodality." Francis wants us to see that we are a global community of faith which is "on the road together."

In calling the Church to this synod, he wants to accompany us, not rule over us, as we try to discern "what time is it?" and as we make our way "on the road together."

It is an exciting time to be a Catholic, despite all the woes that afflict the Church. It is a wonderful time to be a people of faith "on the roads together," speaking Swahili and Chinese and Malayalam and English and Spanish and all the other languages God loves to speak.

Along with Good Pope Francis and along with King Solomon the Wise, let us come together and pray the Holy Spirit bless our people with wisdom.

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?