

HOMILY FOR THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 30 June 2024

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: 98

Reading 1 Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24

God did not make death,
nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.
For he fashioned all things that they might have being;
and the creatures of the world are wholesome,
and there is not a destructive drug among them
nor any domain of the netherworld on earth,
for justice is undying.
For God formed man to be imperishable;
the image of his own nature he made him.
But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world,
and they who belong to his company experience it.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11, 12, 13

R. (2a) I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.
I will extol you, O LORD, for you drew me clear
and did not let my enemies rejoice over me.
O LORD, you brought me up from the netherworld;
you preserved me from among those
going down into the pit.

R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.
Sing praise to the LORD, you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.
For his anger lasts but a moment;
a lifetime, his good will.
At nightfall, weeping enters in,
but with the dawn, rejoicing.

R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.
Hear, O LORD, and have pity on me;
O LORD, be my helper.

You changed my mourning into dancing;
O LORD, my God, forever will I give you thanks.
R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

Reading 2 2 Cor 8:7, 9, 13-15

Brothers and sisters:

As you excel in every respect, in faith, discourse,
knowledge, all earnestness,
and in the love we have for you,
may you excel in this gracious act also.

For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that though he was rich, for your sake he became poor,
so that by his poverty you might become rich.
Not that others should have relief while you are burdened,
but that as a matter of equality
your abundance at the present time
should supply their needs,
so that their abundance may also supply your needs,
that there may be equality.

As it is written:

*Whoever had much did not have more,
and whoever had little did not have less.*

Alleluia Cf. 2 Tm 1:10

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Our Savior Jesus Christ destroyed death
and brought life to light through the Gospel.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 5:21-43 or 5:21-24, 35b-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat
to the other side,
a large crowd gathered around him,
and he stayed close to the sea.

One of the synagogue officials, named Jairus,
came forward.

Seeing him he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with
him, saying,

"My daughter is at the point of death.

Please, come lay your hands on her
that she may get well and live."

He went off with him,

and a large crowd followed him and pressed upon him.

There was a woman
afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years.
She had suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors
and had spent all that she had.
Yet she was not helped but only grew worse.
She had heard about Jesus
and came up behind him in the crowd
and touched his cloak.
She said, "If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured."
Immediately her flow of blood dried up.
She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.
Jesus, aware at once that power had gone out from him,
turned around in the crowd and asked,
"Who has touched my clothes?"
But his disciples said to Jesus,
"You see how the crowd is pressing upon you,
and yet you ask, 'Who touched me?'"
And he looked around to see who had done it.
The woman, realizing what had happened to her,
approached in fear and trembling.
She fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth.
He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you.
Go in peace and be cured of your affliction."

While he was still speaking,
people from the synagogue official's house
arrived and said,
"Your daughter has died;
why trouble the teacher any longer?"
Disregarding the message that was reported,
Jesus said to the synagogue official,
"Do not be afraid; just have faith."
He did not allow anyone to accompany him inside
except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James.
When they arrived at the house of the synagogue official,
he caught sight of a commotion,
people weeping and wailing loudly.
So he went in and said to them,
"Why this commotion and weeping?
The child is not dead but asleep."
And they ridiculed him.
Then he put them all out.
He took along the child's father and mother

and those who were with him
and entered the room where the child was.
He took the child by the hand and said to her,

"Talitha koum,"

which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!"
The girl, a child of twelve,
arose immediately and walked around.
At that they were utterly astounded.
He gave strict orders that no one should know this
and said that she should be given something to eat.

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

The story of the healing of Jairus' daughter fills my heart with feelings that are deep and complex. Perhaps it's because, although I have no daughters of my own, I have many nieces whose love for me affects me greatly.

Moreover, in a few weeks' time, I'm going to baptize Amelia, a little baby girl who is the daughter of a woman I baptized when she was a little baby girl.

Whenever I read Mark's story of the awakening of Jairus' daughter, I also think of Lilly.

Lilly died three years ago this week. She was only twenty-two years old. She fell ill on the day of her graduation from college. Some kind of blood infection suddenly overcame Lilly's immune system. I don't think doctors ever figured out what happened.

I was told that, at the time of her death, Lilly was being held by her family as she lay in her hospital bed.

For all the enormous sadness of this loss, I also must say that Lilly died what Catholics call, "a beautiful death." I say this cautiously out of a concern that I might somehow paint-over the sadness of Lilly's death with words that are superficial and insipidly pious. We must never use our faith to paint over sorrow. Authentic faith leads us to embrace our grief, and, at times, even our anger over the death of the innocent.

Lilly's death is an enormous loss. But when I think of Lilly's family gathered around her and holding her as she died, I cannot help but say she died a beautiful death.

As I said above, I will baptize a little baby girl, Amelia, in a few weeks' time. I have a little custom that I practice when I baptize children. During the ritual, just before I pour the water over the baby's head, I ask all the kids at the ceremony to gather around me. I make sure to tell them, before the ceremony begins,

Children,
I will need your help when I baptize the baby.

The kids have sat patiently through the readings. They have sat patiently through my homily and even the profession of faith. Then, when the time to pour the water has finally come, I ask the smallest kids to stand right in front of me by the baptismal font and the older kids to stand behind the little ones.

Then, I tell them,

Touch the baby!
Touch the baby when I baptize the baby!

All the kids place a hand on the baby and only then do I pour the water of Holy Baptism over the head of the baby.

This practice is not in the ritual book for the Sacrament of Baptism. There are no "little red letters" (rubrics) instructing the priest to invite the kids to gather around the baptismal font. I just think it is a good custom to follow.

The kids need no theological explanation of this little embellishment of the rite. Amelia's cousins will know that we should touch the Amelia when she is baptized.

Babies need to be touched.

Of course, we all need to be touched. This is true when we are being baptized and it is true when we are dying. We all need to be touched.

The Gospel for this Sunday is about being touched.

Jairus is a synagogue official distraught over a sickness that has fallen heavily on his daughter. He prostrates himself on the ground before Rabbi Jesus and begs him to come into his house.

My daughter is at the point of death.
Please, come lay your hands on her
that she may get well and live.

Jairus believes that Jesus can heal his daughter if only he can touch her through the "laying on of hands."

(By the way, there is a laying on of hands in the Rite of Baptism as well).

Jesus sets off with Jairus followed by a large crowd. But soon, people from Jairus' household show up and tell the father that his daughter has died.

Why trouble the teacher any longer?

This is a merciless thing to say to a father who has just lost his daughter to the darkness of the grave.

And Jesus will have none of it.

Do not be afraid; just have faith.

People in Jairus' household ridicule Jesus when he tells them that the little girl is asleep. But, entering the child's room,

He took the child by the hand and said to her,
"Talitha koum,"
which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!"

I think this is what our Lord and Savior said to Lilly as she lay in her hospital bed, comatose, her family holding her like they held her on the day she was baptized.

Yes: as she lay dying, I think Jesus took Lilly by the hand and said,

Talitha koum!

Are not these two little words the most beautiful words in all the scriptures?

I want all the kids to gather around the baptismal font when I baptize the little baby Amelia. As always, I'm going to tell the kids,

Touch the baby!
Touch the baby when I baptize the baby!

The kids get it. We need to feel the touch of human tenderness when we are baptized into Christ's death as infants. We need to feel the touch of human tenderness when what has begun in our baptism is finally completed at the time of our death.

In Jairus' house, they laughed at Jesus and he would have none of it. Instead, he took the little girl by the hand and said,

Talitha koum!

And this is what the Lord will say to Amelia when we baptize her in a few weeks. This is what Jesus says to us all.

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 homily 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?