

HOMILY FOR THE THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 30 October 2022

- 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: 153

Reading 1 Wis 11:22-12:2

Before the LORD the whole universe is as a grain from a balance
or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth.
But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things;
and you overlook people's sins that they may repent.
For you love all things that are
and loathe nothing that you have made;
for what you hated, you would not have fashioned.
And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it;
or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you?
But you spare all things, because they are yours,
O LORD and lover of souls,
for your imperishable spirit is in all things!
Therefore you rebuke offenders little by little,
warn them and remind them of the sins they are committing,
that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in you, O LORD!

Responsorial Psalm Ps 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13, 14

R. (cf. 1) I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.
I will extol you, O my God and King,
and I will bless your name forever and ever.
Every day will I bless you,
and I will praise your name forever and ever.
R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.
The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and of great kindness.
The LORD is good to all
and compassionate toward all his works.
R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.
Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD,
and let your faithful ones bless you.
Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom

and speak of your might.

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

The LORD is faithful in all his words

and holy in all his works.

The LORD lifts up all who are falling

and raises up all who are bowed down.

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

Reading 2 2 Thes 1:11-2:2

Brothers and sisters:

We always pray for you,

that our God may make you worthy of his calling

and powerfully bring to fulfillment every good purpose

and every effort of faith,

that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you,

and you in him,

in accord with the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask you, brothers and sisters,

with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

and our assembling with him,

not to be shaken out of your minds suddenly, or to be alarmed

either by a "spirit," or by an oral statement,

or by a letter allegedly from us

to the effect that the day of the Lord is at hand.

Alleluia

Gospel Acclamation Jn 3:16

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,

so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel: Lk 19:1-10

At that time, Jesus came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town.

Now a man there named Zacchaeus,

who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man,

was seeking to see who Jesus was;

but he could not see him because of the crowd,

for he was short in stature.

So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus,

who was about to pass that way.

When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said,

"Zacchaeus, come down quickly,

for today I must stay at your house."
And he came down quickly and received him with joy.
When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying,
"He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner."
But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord,
"Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor,
and if I have extorted anything from anyone
I shall repay it four times over."
And Jesus said to him,
"Today salvation has come to this house
because this man too is a descendant of Abraham.
For the Son of Man has come to seek
and to save what was lost."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Pope Francis has a great metaphor for the Church.
He likes to talk about the Church as a "field hospital
in the midst of a battle."

Life can be brutal. There are lots of wounded people
around us. The Church is not in business to serve
itself. We are at the service of those who are
wounded. When a wounded soldier shows up at the
entrance to a field hospital, the nurses should not be
asking what side the soldier is on. They should
simply ask where the wound is and go from there.

In Francis' view, the Church must do the same.

Today, I would like to propose another metaphor for
the Church. (When it comes to the Church, the more
metaphors the better).

I recommend that we think of the Church as a
sycamore tree.

This brings us to today's Gospel.

Jericho is on the north shore of the Dead Sea. Jesus
is passing through town and a crowd has gathered.
Zacchaeus, who is short in stature, is having trouble
seeing the rabbi whose has caused such a fuss with
his exorcisms and healings.

Zacchaeus can't see Jesus because he is short. But I think it safe to say that he wants to see Jesus because he is despised.

Zacchaeus is a tax collector. The Romans collected their taxes using a franchise system. An entrepreneur would pay a sum to the Roman authorities, and in return, he would have the legal right to collect an equal amount from the people in taxes plus a percentage extra as his profit. This system was ready-made for corruption. The businessmen grew very rich. People like Zacchaeus were despised and marginalized.

Zacchaeus can't see Jesus because he is short. Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus because he is despised. So, Zacchaeus climbs into a sycamore tree to get a better view.

The Church should be a sycamore tree. We need to be a place where those who are despised and marginalized can find a way to see the Lord as he is passing by.

This is more than enough for us to do. We should just try to be a place where people can get a glimpse. As in the story of Zacchaeus in today's Gospel, the Lord will do the rest.

This sycamore-metaphor is my own, but Catholics all around the world seem to be saying the same thing. For over a year, Catholics have been contributing to the preparations for next October's Synod on Synodality. Pope Francis wants us to reflect on our faith and the future of the Church's service to the world. We are a people "on the road together" (*synhodos*).

Now we are entering into the "continental phase" before next October's Synod. The Local Churches throughout the world have gathered their people together, listened to their concerns, fears and hopes, and sent reports to Rome. Now thirty

Catholic leaders, meeting in the little town of Frascati in the vineyards outside Rome, have prepared a summary of these reports and, importantly, sent it back to us. Pope Francis wants the Local Churches to listen to what their fellow Catholics are saying in different parts of the world so that we can reflect on our own situation in greater depth. Only then will we be ready for the Synod in Rome.

Catholics all around the world are talking about people who are divorced, the poor, indigenous people, and people who have been forced to immigrate due to poverty, war and gang violence.

Catholics in very different parts of the world are talking about women as well: women who have been trafficked; women who live in polygamous marriages, women who have had to terminate their pregnancies, as well as women who have been excluded from leadership in their parishes and dioceses.

Catholics are also talking about LGBTQ+ people and children who have been abused and priests who are lonely or who don't listen (or both).

For example, in Bolivia, our fellow Catholics are saying,

"As the Bolivian Church, we are saddened that we have not been able to effectively reach out to the poor on the peripheries and in the most remote places."

In Lesotho, the Local Churches report that they are struggling with something unprecedented:

"There is a new phenomenon in the Church that is absolutely new in Lesotho: same-sex relationships. [...] This novelty is disturbing for Catholics and for those who consider it a sin. Surprisingly, there are Catholics in Lesotho who have started practicing this behaviour and expect the Church to accept them

and their way of behaving. [...] This is a problematic challenge for the Church because these people feel excluded.”

In addition, the people of the Local Churches of Bolivia and Lesotho are being asked to reflect on what Catholics are saying here in the United States:

“People ask that the Church be a refuge for the wounded and broken, not an institution for the perfect. They want the Church to meet people wherever they are, to walk with them rather than judge them, and to build real relationships through caring and authenticity, not a purpose of superiority.”

You can think of the Church as a field hospital during a battle. Or, you can think of the Church as a sycamore tree, welcoming those who are despised and excluded to climb up in order to get a glimpse of the Lord as he passes by.

All we need to do is give them a strong and sturdy branch that will support them. The Lord will do the rest, just as he did with Zacchaeus.

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?