

HOMILY FOR THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 31 July 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: 114

Reading 1 Ecc 1:2; 2:21-23

Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth,
vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!

Here is one who has labored with wisdom and knowledge and skill,
and yet to another who has not labored over it,
he must leave property.

This also is vanity and a great misfortune.

For what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart
with which he has labored under the sun?

All his days sorrow and grief are his occupation;
even at night his mind is not at rest.

This also is vanity.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14 and 17

R. (1) If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

You turn man back to dust,
saying, "Return, O children of men."

For a thousand years in your sight
are as yesterday, now that it is past,
or as a watch of the night.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

You make an end of them in their sleep;
the next morning they are like the changing grass,
Which at dawn springs up anew,
but by evening wilts and fades.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain wisdom of heart.

Return, O LORD! How long?

Have pity on your servants!

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness,
that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.
And may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours;
prosper the work of our hands for us!
Prosper the work of our hands!
R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Reading 2 Col 3:1-5, 9-11

Brothers and sisters:
If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above,
where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.
Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.
For you have died,
and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
When Christ your life appears,
then you too will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly:
immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire,
and the greed that is idolatry.
Stop lying to one another,
since you have taken off the old self with its practices
and have put on the new self,
which is being renewed, for knowledge,
in the image of its creator.
Here there is not Greek and Jew,
circumcision and uncircumcision,
barbarian, Scythian, slave, free;
but Christ is all and in all.

Alleluia Mt 5:3

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Lk 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus,
"Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me."
He replied to him,
"Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?"
Then he said to the crowd,
"Take care to guard against all greed,
for though one may be rich,

one's life does not consist of possessions."

Then he told them a parable.

"There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest.

He asked himself, 'What shall I do,
for I do not have space to store my harvest?'

And he said, 'This is what I shall do:

I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones.

There I shall store all my grain and other goods

and I shall say to myself, "Now as for you,

you have so many good things stored up for many years,
rest, eat, drink, be merry!"

But God said to him,

'You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you;

and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?'

Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves
but are not rich in what matters to God."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Let me start this homily with what would seem to be a simple question.

How much money would you need to accumulate in order to get to the point where having more money would be superfluous for you?

I'm not asking how many summer houses or ski cabins you need. I'm asking how many you would have to have to get to the point where having more would be meaningless, if not burdensome.

I used to ask this question of my students in a class I taught on Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Buddhists believe that suffering comes into our lives because of ignorance, lust and greed. They call this "the three poisons." I used to ask my students about how much money they would need with the aim of getting a handle on the power that greed has in making us unhappy.

Some of my students would answer by saying, "a million dollars." Other students, hearing this, would smile silently. I presumed that these students came from a wealthy background.

The best answer I ever got to my question came from a student who said:

"How much money would I need? Professor, that's easy to answer. I would need to have just a little bit more."

In the Gospel today, Jesus tells us a parable that Buddhists might like. The parable is about a man who was anxious to have "just a little bit more."

There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest. He asked himself, 'What shall I do, for I do not have space to store my harvest?'

The man decides to tear down his barns and build larger ones.

There I shall store all my grain and other goods and I shall say to myself, "Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!"

But that very evening, the "just a little bit more" slips through the rich man's fingers. For God says to the rich man,

"You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?"

Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God."

To tell the truth, I am feeling uncomfortable with this homily. Not many of you have to worry about having too much money. Moreover, we are all living in a global economy that is immoral. More and more wealth is being concentrated into the hands of fewer and fewer people. This comes at a terrible cost to the common good (to say nothing of democracy and the rule of law). According to Forbes Magazine, the net worth of one of the American oligarchs went up after the markets closed last Thursday (28 July) by 4.6 billion dollars. This is just one day's change in net worth.

How much money would you need to have to reach the point where having more money would be meaningless?

All of us, the rich and the not-rich-enough, have a responsibility to ensure that the economy serves the common good. The Gospel requires this of us.

Let me offer you two thoughts that, hopefully, will be of help to you in meeting this responsibility.

First, remember that Pope John Paul II spoke out on more than one occasion about what he called “the universal destination of created goods.” Our Church has never taught that the right to private property is absolute. The right to own the resources of the world must be seen within our broader responsibility to make sure that the good things God has created are available to all in accordance with their basic needs. God has intended that our wealth be put to use for the good of all. We are only stewards of what we own.

In an encyclical, John Paul wrote,

God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone. This is the foundation of the universal destination of the earth’s goods.

How can it be, then, that, as I write this homily, I am baking bread to bring to families that have been driven off their land in Mexico because of NAFTA and are worried about paying the rent on their apartments this weekend here in Sonoma?

My second thought for you is more hopeful.

Saint Augustine, at the very beginning of his *Confessions*, offered to God a remarkable prayer,

“You have made us for Yourself, Oh Lord,
and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

Augustine’s prayer reveals something about us that is important. He is saying that we have been made for God, not for greed, and that, ultimately, we do not have to be imprisoned by our passion for what is vain and impermanent.

For vanity, check out the first reading. For impermanence, look again at Jesus’ parable in today’s Gospel.

Augustine's prayer, which I urge you to make your own, assures us that, of all the desires in the cavern of the human heart, our deepest desire is not for "just a little bit more," as my astute student said so wisely. Our deepest desire is for the unbounded Mystery of God.

And so, I recommend that we look to what Saint Paul says to us in the second reading.

Brothers and sisters:
If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above,
where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.
Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.

Yes: Let us seek "what is above." This will not only lead our restless hearts to rest in God. It will endow us with the vision we need to make the economy serve the common good.

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?