

HOMILY FOR THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME  
Sunday, 4 August 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: 113

Reading 1 Ex 16:2-4, 12-15

The whole Israelite community grumbled  
against Moses and Aaron.  
The Israelites said to them,  
"Would that we had died at the LORD's hand  
in the land of Egypt,  
as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread!  
But you had to lead us into this desert  
to make the whole community die of famine!"

Then the LORD said to Moses,  
"I will now rain down bread from heaven for you.  
Each day the people are to go out  
and gather their daily portion;  
thus will I test them,  
to see whether they follow my instructions or not.

"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites.  
Tell them: In the evening twilight you shall eat flesh,  
and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread,  
so that you may know that I, the LORD, am your God."

In the evening quail came up and covered the camp.  
In the morning a dew lay all about the camp,  
and when the dew evaporated,

there on the surface of the desert  
were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground.  
On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, "  
What is this?"  
for they did not know what it was.  
But Moses told them,  
"This is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."

Responsorial Psalm Ps 78:3-4, 23-24, 25, 54

R. (24b) The Lord gave them bread from heaven.  
What we have heard and know,  
and what our fathers have declared to us,  
We will declare to the generation to come  
the glorious deeds of the LORD and his strength  
and the wonders that he wrought.

R. The Lord gave them bread from heaven.  
He commanded the skies above  
and opened the doors of heaven;  
he rained manna upon them for food  
and gave them heavenly bread.

R. The Lord gave them bread from heaven.  
Man ate the bread of angels,  
food he sent them in abundance.  
And he brought them to his holy land,  
to the mountains his right hand had won.

R. The Lord gave them bread from heaven.

Reading 2 Eph 4:17, 20-24

Brothers and sisters:  
I declare and testify in the Lord  
that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do,  
in the futility of their minds;  
that is not how you learned Christ,  
assuming that you have heard of him  
and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus,  
that you should put away the old self

of your former way of life,  
corrupted through deceitful desires,  
and be renewed in the spirit of your minds,  
and put on the new self,  
created in God's way in righteousness  
and holiness of truth.

Alleluia Mt 4:4b

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

One does not live on bread alone,  
but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Jn 6:24-35

When the crowd saw that neither Jesus  
nor his disciples were there,  
they themselves got into boats  
and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus.  
And when they found him across the sea they said to him,  
"Rabbi, when did you get here?"  
Jesus answered them and said,  
"Amen, amen, I say to you,  
you are looking for me not because you saw signs  
but because you ate the loaves and were filled.  
Do not work for food that perishes  
but for the food that endures for eternal life,  
which the Son of Man will give you.  
For on him the Father, God, has set his seal."  
So they said to him,  
"What can we do to accomplish the works of God?"  
Jesus answered and said to them,  
"This is the work of God,  
that you believe in the one he sent."  
So they said to him,  
"What sign can you do,  
that we may see and believe in you?  
What can you do?  
Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written:  
*He gave them bread from heaven to eat.*"

So Jesus said to them,  
"Amen, amen, I say to you,  
it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven;  
my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.  
For the bread of God is that  
which comes down from heaven  
and gives life to the world."

So they said to him,  
"Sir, give us this bread always."  
Jesus said to them,  
"I am the bread of life;  
whoever comes to me will never hunger,  
and whoever believes in me will never thirst."

#### PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

I remember standing next to my grandmother one evening many years ago in front of a casket. We were in a funeral parlor. My grandfather was dead, and the family had gathered for the funeral.

Grandma was filled with a mixture of emotions. There was grief of course, but also a little anger. In addition, there was despair.

Standing before the coffin, Grandma spoke plainly to Grandpa:

After ironing your shirts for 65 years,  
NOW what am I supposed to do?

I had the good sense to keep my mouth shut. I was not going to interfere in this last conversation between my grandparents.

Now we can look at the first reading.

The Jewish people have begun their forty-year sojourn in the desert, and they are not happy. Back in Egypt, the people witnessed the great deeds of God for his people (the plagues

and the crossing of the Red Sea). Now they are in the desert and life is hard.

The people grumble against Moses (and Aaron, his brother). And what they say in their grumbling reveals a good deal about us all.

Would that we had died at the LORD's hand  
in the land of Egypt,  
as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread!  
But you had to lead us into this desert  
to make the whole community die of famine!

In Egypt, they might have been slaves, but they had stew to eat (fleshpots). The people are grumbling to Moses – but they are really accusing the Lord of tricking them.

A friend of mine who is a rabbi once told me that this passage in the Torah is the “original sin” for a Jew: accusing God of luring his people out of the slavery of Egypt into the difficult freedom of the desert in order to trick them and abandon them.

At the funeral parlor, Grandma was talking to grandpa, but she was really talking to God. After bringing her all this way (sixty-five years of marriage), was the Lord abandoning Grandma in the desert of widowhood?

“NOW what am I supposed to do?”

Like the Jews in the first reading, Grandma was grumbling in the desert.

I think we all have stories to tell about “grumbling in the desert.” This is a metaphor from the Bible that says a lot about our life as a people of faith. Pope Francis reminds us that we are a people “on the road together.” Sometimes, the *camino* of faith leads into the desert. In the desert, life becomes a struggle and faith gives way to grumbling.

This is true of us as individuals.  
This is true of us as families.  
This is true of us as the Church as well.

We are a people on the road together and sometimes the road leads into a desert.

Let me offer some advice.

In his *Confessions*, Saint Augustine tells us his life story. He tells us how he came to Christian faith. Augustine's journey with God led him into a desert as well. In the midst of his despair, Augustine offers a prayer to God which I strongly recommend to you,

Do not abandon what You have begun in me,  
but go on to perfect all that remains unfinished.

We are right to be afraid of deserts. But when we are tempted to grumble, we should remember to open our hearts in prayer. And when we offer our prayer in the desert, we should beg God not to abandon what he has begun in us, but to bring to perfection what remains unfinished in our souls.

This is a good prayer for us at this time. Write this prayer in your bible so you can find it when you need it.

Write this prayer in your heart so that the Holy Spirit can remind you of it when you begin to grumble.

And don't be afraid to grumble. Grumbling in the desert is what the Lord expects us to do. Grumbling is a kind of prayer. And when the Lord hears this prayer rising to heaven from the desert, He goes on to perfect all that remains unfinished within us.

□□□□

Recuerdo que una noche, hace muchos años, estaba de pie junto a mi abuela frente a un ataúd. Estábamos en una sala funeraria. Se murió mi abuelo y era mi responsabilidad rezar un rosario para mi abuelo.

Abuela estaba llena de una mezcla de emociones. Dolor, por supuesto. También ira. Además, desesperación.

De pie frente al ataúd, abuela le habló claramente a mi abuelo:

Después de planchar tus camisas durante 65 años,  
AHORA ¿qué se supone que debo hacer?

Tuve el buen sentido de mantener la boca cerrada. No iba a interferir en esta última conversación entre mis abuelos.

Entonces, ahora podemos ver la primera lectura.

El pueblo judío ha comenzado su peregrinación de cuarenta años en el desierto y no está contento. De regreso en Egipto, el pueblo fue testigo de las grandes obras de Dios para su pueblo (las plagas y el cruce del Mar Rojo). Ahora están en el desierto y la vida es dura.

El pueblo se queja contra Moisés (y Aarón, su hermano). Y lo que dicen en sus quejas revela mucho acerca del alma humano.

Ojalá hubiéramos muerto a manos del Señor en Egipto, cuando nos sentábamos junto a las ollas de carne y comíamos pan hasta saciarnos. Ustedes nos han traído a este desierto para matar de hambre a toda esta multitud.

En Egipto, los Judíos eran esclavos, pero tenían guisos para comer (ollas de carne). El pueblo se queja ante Moisés, pero en realidad están acusando al Señor de engañarlos.

Un amigo mío que es rabino me dijo una vez que este pasaje de la Torá es el “pecado original” para un judío: acusar a Dios de sacar a su pueblo de la esclavitud de Egipto a la difícil libertad del desierto para engañarlos y abandonarlos.

En la sala funeraria, mi abuela estaba hablando con abuelito, pero en realidad abuelita estaba hablando con Dios. Después de traerla hasta aquí (sesenta y cinco años de matrimonio), ¿el Señor estaba abandonando a mi abuela en el desierto de la viudez?

¿Y AHORA qué debo hacer?

Al igual que los judíos en la primera lectura, Abuela se quejaba en el desierto.

Creo que todos tenemos historias que contar sobre “las quejas en el desierto”. Esta es una metáfora de la Biblia que dice mucho sobre nuestra vida como pueblo de fe. El Papa Francisco nos recuerda que somos un pueblo “en camino juntos”. A veces, el camino de la fe conduce al desierto. En el desierto, la vida se convierte en una lucha y la fe da paso a las quejas.

Esto es cierto para nosotros como individuos.

Esto es cierto para nosotros como familias.

Esto es cierto para nosotros como la Iglesia también.

Somos un pueblo en camino juntos y a veces el camino conduce a un desierto.

Que permítanme ofrecerles consejo.

En su libro, *Confesiones*, San Agustín nos cuenta la historia de su vida. Nos cuenta cómo llegó a la fe cristiana. El viaje de Agustín con Dios lo llevó también a un desierto. En medio de su desesperación, Agustín ofrece una oración a Dios que yo les recomiendo encarecidamente:



O Señor, no abandones lo que has comenzado en mí, sino que prosigas hasta perfeccionar todo lo que queda inacabado.

Tenemos razón tener miedo por los desiertos. Pero cuando nos sintamos tentados a quejarnos, debemos recordar abrir nuestro corazón en oración. Y cuando ofrecemos nuestra oración en el desierto, debemos rogar a Dios que no abandone lo que ha comenzado en nosotros, sino que lleve a la perfección lo que queda inacabado en nuestras almas.

Esta es una buena oración para nosotros en este momento. Escribe esta oración en tu Biblia para que puedas encontrarla cuando la necesites.

Escribe esta oración en tu corazón para que el Espíritu Santo te la recuerde cuando empieces a quejarte.

Y no tengas miedo de quejarte. Quejarse es una especie de oración. Y cuando el Señor escucha esta oración que se eleva al cielo desde el desierto, procede a perfeccionar todo lo que queda inacabado en nosotros.

### 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?