

HOMILY FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
Sunday, 4 December 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: 4

Reading 1 Is 11:1-10

On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.

The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him:
a spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
a spirit of counsel and of strength,
a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD,
and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD.

Not by appearance shall he judge,
nor by hearsay shall he decide,
but he shall judge the poor with justice,
and decide aright for the land's afflicted.

He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.

Justice shall be the band around his waist,
and faithfulness a belt upon his hips.

Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the young lion shall browse together,
with a little child to guide them.

The cow and the bear shall be neighbors,
together their young shall rest;
the lion shall eat hay like the ox.

The baby shall play by the cobra's den,
and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair.

There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD,
as water covers the sea.

On that day, the root of Jesse,
set up as a signal for the nations,
the Gentiles shall seek out,
for his dwelling shall be glorious.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

R. (cf. 7) Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

O God, with your judgment endow the king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
he shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

Justice shall flower in his days,
and profound peace, till the moon be no more.

May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,
and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.

He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

May his name be blessed forever;
as long as the sun his name shall remain.

In him shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed;
all the nations shall proclaim his happiness.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

Reading 2 Rom 15:4-9

Brothers and sisters:

Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction,
that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures
we might have hope.

May the God of endurance and encouragement
grant you to think in harmony with one another,
in keeping with Christ Jesus,
that with one accord you may with one voice
glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you,
for the glory of God.

For I say that Christ became a minister of the circumcised
to show God's truthfulness,
to confirm the promises to the patriarchs,
but so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

As it is written:

*Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles
and sing praises to your name.*

Alleluia Lk 3:4, 6

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths:
all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mt 3:1-12

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea
and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"
It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said:
*A voice of one crying out in the desert,
Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.*

John wore clothing made of camel's hair
and had a leather belt around his waist.
His food was locusts and wild honey.
At that time Jerusalem, all Judea,
and the whole region around the Jordan
were going out to him
and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River
as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees
coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers!
Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?
Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.
And do not presume to say to yourselves,
'We have Abraham as our father.'
For I tell you,
God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.
Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees.
Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit
will be cut down and thrown into the fire.
I am baptizing you with water, for repentance,
but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I.
I am not worthy to carry his sandals.
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
His winnowing fan is in his hand.
He will clear his threshing floor
and gather his wheat into his barn,
but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Some time ago, I got a call from someone that I have known for a long time. She is very dear to me.

Father, I'm sorry to be calling you.
I'm at the cemetery with my niece.
She is burying her baby and there's been a mix-up.
There's no priest here to do the service.

How old was the baby?

Six months.

Is the mother okay?

I told her: give me ten or fifteen minutes.

I was in my jeans and a T-shirt, so I grabbed an alb and a stole. As I drove past the Plaza on my way out to the cemetery, I realized that I had forgotten my funeral book with the prayers and Bible readings.

I would also have to think of something to say to the mother of this little child of only six months.

At the cemetery, as I was hurriedly putting on my alb, my friend rushed over to my car and said,

Jim, I'm so glad you have come.
But I have to explain something to you.
The baby was just six months *in the womb*.
The doctors told my niece that her baby would be born dead and that the pregnancy would have to be terminated.

In fact, the pregnancy would have to be terminated in order to avoid considerable medical complications for the mother.

There were many tears. But there was also much faith. There was a little casket and a little hole dug in the ground just large enough to receive the casket.

I made the sign of the cross and offered a prayer. I just made it up as best I could. I apologized because I didn't have any holy water to bless the grave.

Then, I said to the family,

I am supposed to read from the Bible and give you a sermon. But, alas, I forgot my book... I am so sorry.

Now, there must be a Holy Spirit... for suddenly I remembered a passage from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. I couldn't remember the words exactly, so I paraphrased something.

Here is the actual passage.

Can a mother forget her infant,
And be without tenderness for the child of her womb?
Even should she forget, I will never forget you.

In truth, I didn't get all the words exactly right, but I was close.

How could a mother forget the child in her womb?

As a man, I can only try to imagine what it must be like to carry a baby inside oneself. My theology tells me that this should be a deeply spiritual experience, but women must tell their own stories. Moreover, as a man, I can only try to imagine what it must be like for a woman to have to terminate a pregnancy.

A few days after I buried that little baby, I met with the mother.

We talked for a long time, and she shared with me her great faith in God. She told me that she was sure her baby is with the angels in heaven and that the child awaits her there. I told her that the Church is sure of this as well.

Every mother who has ever had to bury a child should know: your child awaits you in heaven and longs for you to cradle them in your arms.

Please be assured of this teaching of the Church.

As we all know, there are those who are eager to condemn this mother who had to terminate her pregnancy.

I am not one of these people.

In fact, I am grateful to God that He gave me the grace to stand at this woman's side as she buried her little baby. I hope those words from Isaiah stay with her as she cares for her husband and her surviving child.

There are those who are eager to condemn women who have had to end their pregnancies for medical reasons or because they are poor. Please do not condemn these women. I have no doubt that they are precious in the eyes of God.

We are in Advent and the Church is giving us wonderful passages from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah for our reflection.

Today, the Prophet assures us that a day is coming when

a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.

Jesse was the father of King David, and, as we will learn on Christmas Eve, Mary gave birth to a child who was of the line of King David, a "sprout from the stump of Jesse."

And the spirit of the LORD will rest upon this "sprout from the stump of Jesse."

a spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
a spirit of counsel and of strength,
a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD,
and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD.

But now, look more closely at what the Prophet says next.

Not by appearance shall he judge,
nor by hearsay shall he decide,
but he shall judge the poor with justice,
and decide aright for the land's afflicted.

We are so eager to pass judgment on women who are poor and afflicted by the injustice that rules over this world.

The Messiah when he comes again, will not judge by "appearance" or "hearsay." He will know us as we really are. He will know all of our sins. But he will also share our grief and shed tears with us as we gather around the graves of our lost children.

The Messiah will know what it is like to be a woman who has had to terminate a pregnancy.

I seem to be surrounded by people, on the Left and the Right, who think abortion is a simple matter. I have never looked on it as such. In fact, the more I stand with women who have had to terminate a pregnancy, I can only see it as horribly complicated. Abortion is a terrible thing. But in the United States, unfortunately, we are discovering that lack of access to proper medical care is a terrible thing as well.

In the end, the Church must stand by women and listen to them when they call out in their grief. Only after we have stood with them and listened to them can we dare to offer words of comfort and hope.

Can a mother forget her infant,
And be without tenderness for the child of her womb?
Even should she forget, I will never forget you.

I am touched that my old friend called me that day and asked me to come out to the cemetery. There, I was able to stand at the grave of a little baby, only six months in the womb, and listen to the mother's cry of grief.

The day is coming when we will no longer judge by appearance and condemn people based on hearsay. The day is coming when all our political conflicts and moral dilemmas will be put aside.

Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the young lion shall browse together,

And above all else, Isaiah assures us,

There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD,
as water covers the sea.



Hace mucho tiempo, recibí una llamada de alguien que conozco desde hace mucho tiempo. Ella es muy querida para mí.

Padre, siento llamarte.
Estoy en el cementerio con mi sobrina.
Está enterrando a su bebé y ha habido una confusión.
No hay sacerdote aquí para hacer el servicio.

¿Qué edad tenía el bebé?

Seis meses.

¿La madre está bien?

Yo le dije a mi amiga: dame diez o quince minutos.

Estaba en mis jeans y una camiseta. No había tiempo por cambiar ropa. Entonces, no más agarré un alba y una estola. ¡Se me olvidó mi libro de funerales con las oraciones and lecturas de la Biblia!

Mas que todo: tendría que pensar en algo que decirle a la madre de este pequeño niño de sólo seis meses.

En el cementerio, mientras me ponía el alba a toda prisa, mi amiga corrió hacia mi auto y dijo:

Jaime, estoy tan contenta de que hayas venido.
Pero tengo que explicarte algo.
El bebé tenía solo seis meses en el útero.
Los médicos le dijeron a mi sobrina que su bebé nacería muerto y que habría que interrumpir el embarazo.

De hecho, habría que interrumpir el embarazo para evitar complicaciones médicas considerables a la madre.

Hubo muchas lágrimas. Pero también había mucha fe. Había un pequeño ataúd y un pequeño agujero cavado en el suelo.

Saludé a la familia e hice la señal de la cruz y ofrecí una oración. Lo inventé lo mejor que pude. Me disculpé porque no tenía agua bendita para bendecir la tumba.

Después de bendecir la tumba, le dije a la familia:

Se supone que debo leer de la Biblia y darte un sermón.
Pero, por desgracia, olvidé mi libro... Lo siento mucho.

De repente recordé un pasaje del Libro del Profeta Isaías.

Aquí está el pasaje.

¿Se olvidará la mujer de lo que dio a luz, para dejar de
compadecerse del hijo de su vientre? Aunque olvide ella,
yo nunca

Si: ¿Cómo podría una madre olvidar al niño en su vientre?

Como hombre, solo puedo tratar de imaginar cómo llevar a luz a un niño. Mi teología me dice que esta debe ser una experiencia humana profundamente espiritual. Además, como hombre, solo puedo tratar de imaginar cómo debe ser para una mujer tener que interrumpir un embarazo.

Unos días después de enterrar a ese pequeño bebé, me reuní con la madre.

Hablamos durante mucho tiempo y ella me compartió su gran fe en Dios. Me dijo que estaba segura de que su bebé está con los ángeles en el cielo y que el niño la espera allí. Le dije que la Iglesia también está segura de esto.

Como todos sabemos, existe personas dispuestos a condenar a esta madre que tuvo que interrumpir su embarazo.

Yo no soy una de estas personas.

De hecho, estoy agradecido con Dios por haberme dado la gracia de estar al lado de esta mujer mientras enterraba a su pequeño bebé. Espero que esas palabras de Isaías permanezcan con ella mientras cuida a su esposo y a su otro hijo.

Estamos en Adviento y la Iglesia nos está regalando maravillosos pasajes del Libro del Profeta Isaías para nuestra reflexión.

Hoy, el Profeta nos asegura que llegará el día en que

brotará un renuevo del tronco de Jesé,
un vástago florecerá de su raíz.

Es decir, el Mesías.

Y el espíritu del Señor reposará sobre este "brote del tronco de Jese".

Sobre él se posará el espíritu del Señor,
espíritu de sabiduría e inteligencia,
espíritu de consejo y fortaleza,
espíritu de piedad y temor de Dios.

Todos, fíjense de lo que dice el Profeta a continuación.

No juzgará por apariencias,
ni sentenciará de oídas;
defenderá con justicia al desamparado
y con equidad dará sentencia al pobre;

Tenemos tantas ganas de juzgar a las mujeres pobres y afligidas por la injusticia que reina en este mundo.

El Mesías cuando venga de nuevo, no juzgará por "apariencias" o "oídas". Él nos conocerá a nosotros en corazón. Él conocerá todos nuestros pecados. Pero también compartirá nuestro dolor y derramará lágrimas con nosotros cuando nos reunamos alrededor de las tumbas de nuestros hijos perdidos.

El Mesías sabrá lo que es ser una mujer que ha tenido que interrumpir un embarazo.

Hay muchas personas, de izquierda y de derecha, que piensan que el aborto es un asunto sencillo.

¡Es un derecho!
¡Es una abominación!

Nunca lo he mirado como tal. De hecho, pienso que el aborto es terriblemente complicado. El aborto es algo terrible. Pero en los Estados Unidos, lamentablemente, estamos descubriendo que la falta de acceso a la atención médica adecuada también es algo terrible.

Al final, la Iglesia debe apoyar a las mujeres y escucharlas cuando gritan en su dolor. Solo después de haber estado con ellos y escuchados podemos atrevernos a ofrecerles palabras de consuelo y esperanza.

¿Se olvidará la mujer de lo que dio a luz, para dejar de compadecerse del hijo de su vientre? Aunque olvide ella, yo nunca.

Me conmueve que mi viejo amiga me llamara ese día y me pidiera que saliera al cementerio. Allí, pude pararme junto a la tumba de un pequeño bebé, de solo seis meses en el útero, y escuchar el llanto de dolor de la madre.

Se acerca el día en que ya no juzgaremos por la apariencia ni condenaremos a las personas en base a rumores. Se acerca el día en que todos nuestros conflictos políticos y dilemas morales serán dejados de lado.

Dice el Profeta,

Habitará el lobo con el cordero,
la pantera se echará con el cabrito,
el novillo y el león pacerán juntos...

Y, sobre todo, Isaías nos asegura,

No harán daño ni estrago por todo mi monte santo,
porque así como las aguas colman el mar,
así está lleno el país de la ciencia del Señor.

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?