

HOMILY FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 5 February 2023

- 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: 73

Reading 1 Is 58:7-10

Thus says the LORD:

Share your bread with the hungry,
shelter the oppressed and the homeless;
clothe the naked when you see them,
and do not turn your back on your own.
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your wound shall quickly be healed;
your vindication shall go before you,
and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer,
you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!
If you remove from your midst
oppression, false accusation and malicious speech;
if you bestow your bread on the hungry
and satisfy the afflicted;
then light shall rise for you in the darkness,
and the gloom shall become for you like midday.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 112:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. (4a) The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.
or:

R. Alleluia.

Light shines through the darkness for the upright;
he is gracious and merciful and just.
Well for the man who is gracious and lends,
who conducts his affairs with justice.

R. The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.
or:

R. Alleluia.

He shall never be moved;
the just one shall be in everlasting remembrance.

An evil report he shall not fear;
his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD.
R. The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.

or:

R. Alleluia.

His heart is steadfast; he shall not fear.
Lavishly he gives to the poor;
His justice shall endure forever;
his horn shall be exalted in glory.

R. The just man is a light in darkness to the upright.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Reading 2 1 Cor 2:1-5

When I came to you, brothers and sisters,
proclaiming the mystery of God,
I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom.
For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you
except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.
I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling,
and my message and my proclamation
were not with persuasive words of wisdom,
but with a demonstration of Spirit and power,
so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom
but on the power of God.

Alleluia Jn 8:12

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
whoever follows me will have the light of life.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mt 5:13-16

Jesus said to his disciples:

"You are the salt of the earth.

But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned?

It is no longer good for anything
but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

You are the light of the world.

A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.

Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket;
it is set on a lampstand,

where it gives light to all in the house.

Just so, your light must shine before others,

that they may see your good deeds
and glorify your heavenly Father."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

I must be getting old.

I say this because, more and more, memories of my childhood tumble out of the dark closets of my mind and beg for attention.

While doing my *lectio divina* on the readings for this Sunday, a memory of my grandmother showed up to greet me. Like all memories, this memory is my own construction. My grandmother might not remember this little vignette the way I do, but then, she was old and I was very young. Older people sometimes can't see what is going on in plain sight like little people can.

I must have been about six years old. I was sitting in the backseat of Grandma's old Buick with my older brother. On the passenger side of the front seat (this was long before cars had "bucket seats"), Grandma had a big box of groceries. Gram drove my brother and me through the streets of Petaluma to a house and parked the car.

Just stay in the car, boys...
this won't take long.

Then she carried the box of groceries up the front steps of the house and rang the bell. She chatted with a lady for a few minutes, smiling politely, and then came back to the car.

If I remember correctly, my older brother began to pepper Grandma with questions.

Why did you give that lady all those groceries?
Why does she need groceries?
Does she have to pay for the groceries?

Grandma got irritated with my brother (if I remember correctly). I just said nothing. I was about six years old and, I assure you, I was soaking it all in.

Sometimes, when little kids are quiet, it's because they're taking notes. We who are no longer so young forget this at our own peril.

I assure you: I was taking notes.

I just said that memories are a construction and that Grandma might not remember this story the way I do. (For that matter, my older brother may not remember this story at all). In any event, I doubt if Grandma realized that she was giving me spiritual formation when she parked her old Buick and carried the box of groceries up the front steps of that house in Petaluma well over sixty years ago.

I didn't understand it at the time, but Grandma was a member of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Church in Petaluma. She was bringing groceries to a family that needed some help.

Was her husband unemployed?

Was he drunk?

Was the woman a widow with children?

These are my questions today, now that I am no longer six years old. At the time, I was just taking notes and, unlike my older brother, not asking questions.

I did not understand it at the time, and Grandma didn't either, but she was giving me spiritual formation.

In the first reading today, the Prophet Isaiah is saying aloud what Grandma was teaching me by example:

Thus says the LORD:

Share your bread with the hungry,
shelter the oppressed and the homeless;
clothe the naked when you see them,
and do not turn your back on your own.

Grandma must have heard this reading while Father Kylie was saying mass in that beautiful old church, full of bells

and smells, over in Petaluma. For whatever reason, she became a member of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

I don't know why my older brother and I were with Grandma that day, but I today, I give thanks to God for showing me his Mercy.

Grandma was giving me spiritual formation...
And I was taking notes.

With this in mind, look at what the Prophet says after he encourages us to bring boxes of food to those in need and (older brothers please take note) without asking a lot of questions:

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your wound shall quickly be healed;
your vindication shall go before you,
and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer,
you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!

Today, living here on the other side of Sonoma Mountain from Petaluma, I think of Grandma from time to time. I am a member of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society of Saint Leo's Parish. Grandma and I are both "Vincentians" now. Like Grandma, I put food in boxes and greet all who come for help without asking a lot of questions.

I hope that all the little children are watching us.

I hope they are all taking notes.

It's okay if they ask questions. I won't get irritated. My answers probably won't satisfy the children of the world. They don't satisfy me. So, I hope at least that we are teaching the little ones by our example.

Grandma probably didn't realize it, but she was giving me spiritual formation. And for this, I can only say about Grandma what Jesus says of us in today's Gospel:

You are the light of the world.
A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.
Nor do they light a lamp
and then put it under a bushel basket;
it is set on a lampstand,
where it gives light to all in the house.
Just so, your light must shine before others,
that they may see your good deeds
and glorify your heavenly Father.

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?