

HOMILY FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT
Sunday, 5 March 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: 25

Reading 1 Gn 12:1-4a

The LORD said to Abram:

"Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk
and from your father's house to a land that I will show you.

"I will make of you a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
so that you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you
and curse those who curse you.
All the communities of the earth
shall find blessing in you."

Abram went as the LORD directed him.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22.

R. (22) Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Upright is the word of the LORD,
and all his works are trustworthy.

He loves justice and right;
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,
upon those who hope for his kindness,

To deliver them from death
and preserve them in spite of famine.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Our soul waits for the LORD,
who is our help and our shield.

May your kindness, O LORD, be upon us

who have put our hope in you.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Reading 2 2 Tm 1:8b-10

Beloved:

Bear your share of hardship for the gospel
with the strength that comes from God.

He saved us and called us to a holy life,
not according to our works
but according to his own design
and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began,
but now made manifest
through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus,
who destroyed death and brought life and immortality
to light through the gospel.

Verse Before the Gospel Cf. Mt 17:5

From the shining cloud the Father's voice is heard:
This is my beloved Son, hear him.

Gospel Mt 17:1-9

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother,
and led them up a high mountain by themselves.
And he was transfigured before them;
his face shone like the sun
and his clothes became white as light.
And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them,
conversing with him.
Then Peter said to Jesus in reply,
"Lord, it is good that we are here.
If you wish, I will make three tents here,
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."
While he was still speaking, behold,
a bright cloud cast a shadow over them,
then from the cloud came a voice that said,
"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased;
listen to him."
When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate
and were very much afraid.
But Jesus came and touched them, saying,
"Rise, and do not be afraid."
And when the disciples raised their eyes,
they saw no one else but Jesus alone.

As they were coming down from the mountain,
Jesus charged them,
"Do not tell the vision to anyone
until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

I think most of you know that Pope Francis has been gathering us together, Catholics all around the world, to prepare for a synod to be held in Rome this October.

A synod is a meeting of the faithful with the goal of sharing our faith with one another and discerning the future course of the Church's work. The world is complicated, troubled, and, I must say, increasingly in despair. How are we to tell out the Good News and serve those who have fallen into despair?

The theme of the up-coming synod is the "synodality" of our Church. The word "synod" comes from ancient Greek, *syn-hodos*, "to be on the path together." Pope Francis wants us all to reflect on this vision of the Church. Before all else, we are a community of faith "on the road together."

When I say that the Pope wants us all to reflect on the synodality of the Church, he means it. Catholics have been meeting all around the world at the grass roots level in order to open their hearts to one another, articulate the challenges we face and discern where the Holy Spirit is leading us.

Being on the road together is not easy. In different parts of the world, there is resistance to Pope Francis and the synod. This is certainly true here in the United States where many of our bishops are lukewarm at best about the synod. Some American Catholics are nostalgic for the Church prior to the Second Vatican Council. Their vision of the Church is idealized. It is a Church that is an island of light defending itself against a sea of darkness and sin. But the Pope is reminding us that the Church is not an island focused on the past. We are a community of faith which is "on the road together."

Look at the first reading for today's mass. It is one of the most important texts in the entire Bible. I count it among the most important texts in all the literature of the world. The call of Abraham marks a revolution in human consciousness: a shift from a nostalgia for the past to a life-transforming hope in the future.

The LORD said to Abram
Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk
and from your father's house
to a land that I will show you.

The LORD commands. Abraham must leave behind an old life - a life that might have been quite comfortable - and set out into the desert.

But the LORD's command is followed by a promise:

I will make of you a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
so that you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you
and curse those who curse you.
All the communities of the earth
shall find blessing in you.

And then, Genesis simply tells us,

Abram went as the LORD directed him.

The story is quite simple. There is God's command. There is God's promise. And there is Abraham's obedience.

Abraham is called the father of faith for a good reason: faith is obedience to God's command to set out into the future.

Let me be clear about this: Faith is not belief in Marxist or capitalist fairytales about "progress." Such fairytales inevitably betray us. After the betrayal, we sink into despair and a nostalgia for a lost past. This is what is

going on in many parts of the world today, including the United States.

And faith is not found in this nostalgia either. Here, I am speaking to Catholics who are anxious about Pope Francis' synod on the Church's synodality. I am speaking to Catholics who are fearful of the future and uncomfortable with change and nostalgic for the mass when the priest faced a wall with his back to the people. The Holy Spirit is not to be found in such nostalgia. Instead, the Holy Spirit speaks to us out of the depths of our hope in the future promised us by God.

And this reading from Genesis assures us that the great sign of faith is obedience to the Spirit's call to set out on the road together.

There will be a synod on the Church's synodality in October. Pray for the success of this synod. But the synod is already a success. Catholics, all around the world, continue to gather to share their faith and to reflect on what it means to be on the road together. At Saint Leo's we are searching for ways to build bridges to LGBTQ+ people and how we might continue to accompany immigrant people and the poor. Our people in Kinshasa, Rio de Janeiro and Hanoi have their own stories to tell.

The LORD said to Abram:
Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk
and from your father's house to a land that I will
show you.

Abram went as the LORD directed him.

This is the obedience of faith and, also, this is what it means to be a synodal Church. With Abraham, the father of faith, we are "on the road together."

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?