

HOMILY FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
Sunday, 5 May April 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: 56

Reading 1 Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and, falling at his feet, paid him homage. Peter, however, raised him up, saying, "Get up. I myself am also a human being."

Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him."

While Peter was still speaking these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word. The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles also, for they could hear them speaking in tongues and glorifying God.

Then Peter responded,
"Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit even as we have?" He ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

R. (cf. 2b) The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done wondrous deeds;
His right hand has won victory for him,
his holy arm.

R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.
The LORD has made his salvation known:
in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice.
He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness
toward the house of Israel.

R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.
All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation by our God.
Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;
break into song; sing praise.

R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

Reading 2 1 Jn 4:7-10

Beloved, let us love one another,
because love is of God;
everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.
Whoever is without love does not know God,
for God is love.

In this way the love of God was revealed to us:

God sent his only Son into the world
so that we might have life through him.

In this is love:

not that we have loved God, but that he loved us
and sent his Son as expiation for our sins.

Alleluia Jn 14:23

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord,
and my Father will love him and we will come to him.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Jn 15:9-17

Jesus said to his disciples:

"As the Father loves me, so I also love you.

Remain in my love.

If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love,
just as I have kept my Father's commandments
and remain in his love.

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you
and your joy might be complete.

This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.

No one has greater love than this,

to lay down one's life for one's friends.
You are my friends if you do what I command you.
I no longer call you slaves,
because a slave does not know what his master is doing.
I have called you friends,
because I
have told you everything
I have heard from my Father.
It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you
and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain,
so that whatever you ask the Father in my name
he may give you.
This I command you: love one another."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Somewhere in the Talmud (it contains about two million words), a wise and learned rabbi said,

No one is blinder than the one
who simply refuses to see.

I'm afraid to say that human beings are generally pretty good as refusing to see. We are blinded not so much by our ignorance, but by what we fear and by what we need, for some reason, to hate. Our blindness is willful.

Please don't blame God for this mess.

We were not created by God to be fearful and hateful. We were not created by God to be violent and dishonest. We were not created by God to be blind. We have only ourselves to thank for our blindness.

Our blindness, let me say again, is willful.

We have made ourselves blind by refusing to see the goodness of creation and, even more importantly, by refusing to see the innate goodness of our own humanity, which is delicate and fragile, but also very beautiful and even God-like.

The rabbi got it right:

No one is blinder than the one
who simply refuses to see.

And that one, unfortunately, is us.

So, today, I want to propose that we look on our Christian faith as a school. Faith is a kind of education for our souls in which we are taught, slowly and with difficulty, how to see once again. I say this because the practice of faith is the path of love. And love, as Christians understand this word, is a way of seeing the world and ourselves aright.

Look at the second reading. It is from the First Letter of John and it contains a teaching that is quite radical.

Beloved, let us love one another,
because love is of God;
everyone who loves is begotten by God
and knows God.
Whoever is without love does not know God,
for God is love.

Those who love know God. John is telling us that love is a way to open our eyes and finally see, once again, the One who has created us to be in love. Love is a way of knowing. In fact, love is the most radical way of knowing available to a human being. Love is the way we slowly open our eyes and see God. Love is the way for us to put aside our blindness and our refusal to see. Love is the education of the human soul.

This is a hard teaching. At least, I have found it a teaching that is hard to put into practice. I prefer my blindness. I prefer simply to refuse to see the goodness that is right before my eyes.

And so, this is why Jesus, in the Gospel reading, commands us to love.

This is my commandment:
love one another as I love you.

The Lord commands us to learn how to see one another and ourselves and to see God himself by loving.

The rabbi in the Talmud got it right.

No one is blinder than the one
who simply refuses to see.

And the Lord, in his loving mercy got it right as well. He commands us to love - the difficult practice of faith - and in loving, to learn how to see once again.

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En algún lugar del Talmud (contiene alrededor de dos millones de palabras), un rabino sabio y erudito dijo:

Nadie es más ciego que el
que simplemente se niega a ver.

Me temo que los seres humanos en general son bastante buenos negándose a ver. Estamos cegados no tanto por nuestra ignorancia, sino por lo que tememos y por lo que necesitamos, por alguna razón, odiar. Nuestra ceguera es voluntaria.

Por favor no culpes a Dios por este desastre.

No fuimos creados por Dios para ser temerosos y odiosos. Dios no nos creó para ser violentos y deshonestos. No fuimos creados por Dios para ser ciegos. Sólo tenemos que agradecernos a nosotros mismos por nuestra ceguera.

Nuestra ceguera, permítanme repetirles, es voluntaria.

Nos hemos vuelto ciegos al negarnos a ver la bondad de la creación y, más importante aún, al negarnos a ver la bondad innata de nuestra propia humanidad, que es delicada y frágil, pero también muy hermosa e incluso divina.

El rabino lo entendió bien:

Nadie es más ciego que el
que simplemente se niega a ver.

Y ese, lamentablemente, somos nosotros.

Por eso hoy quiero proponer que miremos nuestra fe cristiana como una escuela. La fe es una especie de educación para nuestra alma en la que se nos enseña, poco a poco y con dificultad, a volver a ver. Digo esto porque la práctica de la fe es el camino del amor. Y el amor, tal como los cristianos entendemos esta palabra, es una forma de ver el mundo y a nosotros mismos correctamente.

Mira la segunda lectura. Es de la Primera Carta de Juan y contiene una enseñanza bastante radical.

Queridos hijos:
Amémonos los unos a los otros,
porque el amor viene de Dios,
y todo el que ama ha nacido de Dios
y conoce a Dios.
El que no ama, no conoce a Dios,
porque Dios es amor.
El amor que Dios nos tiene
se ha manifestado en que envió al mundo a su Hijo
unigénito,
para que vivamos por él.

Los que aman conocen a Dios. Juan nos está diciendo que el amor es una manera de abrir los ojos y finalmente ver, una vez más, a Aquel que nos ha creado para estar enamorados. El amor es una forma de saber. De hecho, el amor es la forma más radical de conocimiento disponible para un ser humano. El amor es la forma en que lentamente abrimos los ojos y vemos a Dios. El amor es el camino para que dejemos de lado nuestra ceguera y nuestra negativa a ver. El amor es la educación del alma humana.

Ésta es una enseñanza difícil. Al menos, he encontrado que es una enseñanza difícil de poner en práctica. Prefiero mi ceguera. Prefiero simplemente negarme a ver la bondad que está ante mis ojos.

Por eso Jesús, en la lectura del Evangelio, nos manda a amar.

Este es mi mandamiento:
amaos unos a otros como yo os amo.

El Señor nos manda a aprender a vernos unos a otros y a nosotros mismos y a ver a Dios mismo amando.

El rabino del Talmud tenía razón.

Nadie es más ciego que el
que simplemente se niega a ver.

Y el Señor, en su amorosa misericordia, también lo hizo bien. Él nos ordena amar - la difícil práctica de la fe - y, al amar, aprender a ver una vez más.

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?