

HOMILY FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 6 February 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: 75

Reading I Is 6:1-2a, 3-8

In the year King Uzziah died,
I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne,
with the train of his garment filling the temple.
Seraphim were stationed above.

They cried one to the other,
“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts!
All the earth is filled with his glory!”
At the sound of that cry, the frame of the door shook
and the house was filled with smoke.

Then I said, “Woe is me, I am doomed!
For I am a man of unclean lips,
living among a people of unclean lips;
yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”
Then one of the seraphim flew to me,
holding an ember that he had taken with tongs from the altar.

He touched my mouth with it, and said,
“See, now that this has touched your lips,
your wickedness is removed, your sin purged.”

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
“Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?”
“Here I am,” I said; “send me!”

Responsorial Psalm Ps 138:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8

R. (1c) In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.
I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart,
for you have heard the words of my mouth;
in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise;

I will worship at your holy temple
and give thanks to your name.
R. In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.
Because of your kindness and your truth;
for you have made great above all things
your name and your promise.
When I called, you answered me;
you built up strength within me.
R. In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.
All the kings of the earth shall give thanks to you, O LORD,
when they hear the words of your mouth;
and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD:
"Great is the glory of the LORD."
R. In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.
Your right hand saves me.
The LORD will complete what he has done for me;
your kindness, O LORD, endures forever;
forsake not the work of your hands.
R. In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord.

Reading II 1 Cor 15:1-11

I am reminding you, brothers and sisters,
of the gospel I preached to you,
which you indeed received and in which you also stand.
Through it you are also being saved,
if you hold fast to the word I preached to you,
unless you believed in vain.
For I handed on to you as of first importance
what I also received:
that Christ died for our sins
in accordance with the Scriptures;
that he was buried;
that he was raised on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures;
that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.
After that, Christ appeared to more
than five hundred brothers at once,
most of whom are still living,
though some have fallen asleep.
After that he appeared to James,
then to all the apostles.
Last of all, as to one born abnormally,
he appeared to me.
For I am the least of the apostles,

not fit to be called an apostle,
because I persecuted the church of God.
But by the grace of God I am what I am,
and his grace to me has not been ineffective.
Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them;
not I, however, but the grace of God that is with me.
Therefore, whether it be I or they,
so we preach and so you believed.

Alleluia Mt 4:19

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Come after me
and I will make you fishers of men.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Lk 5:1-11

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to
the word of God,
he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret.
He saw two boats there alongside the lake;
the fishermen had disembarked
and were washing their nets.
Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon,
he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore.
Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.
After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon,
"Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch."
Simon said in reply,
"Master, we have worked hard all night
and have caught nothing,
but at your command I will lower the nets."
When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish
and their nets were tearing.
They signaled to their partners in the other boat
to come to help them.
They came and filled both boats
so that the boats were in danger of sinking.
When Simon Peter saw this,
he fell at the knees of Jesus and said,
"Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."
For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him
and all those with him,
and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee,
who were partners of Simon.

Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid;
from now on you will be catching men."
When they brought their boats to the shore,
they left everything and followed him.

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Years ago, I had a student in class that I can recommend to you all.

She was a woman, married with a few kids getting into their twenties. In class, she was always precise and articulate in discussing difficult ideas. She had a good head for theology.

But what I found most impressive about her was her ability to respond to the ideas I was presenting in class by telling stories about what she had witnessed as a woman of faith in this complex world.

She was a great storyteller.

One evening, walking back after class to my office, I asked her, "Do you preach? I think you would be good at giving homilies."

My student was shocked.

"Father, I'm a Catholic. I not allowed to preach."

I told her that, with her clear thinking, her gift for theology and (above all) her ability to tell stories, she should give preaching a try.

A year or two later, on the day she graduated with her MA in theology, surrounded by her husband and her kids, she said to me,

"You know, Father, in class you said many challenging things. But you said one thing that was more than just challenging, You said something that was downright frightening."

I guessed what was coming next.

“You said that I would be a good preacher.”

Today, I want to say that my student’s fear is yet another indication that she would be a good homilist.

A good homilist should know what we used to call, “the fear of God.”

My student is a woman of faith. She is articulate. She has a wealth of experience as a wife and mother and volunteer. She has a good head for theological thinking. She is a great storyteller.

And, in addition, she has a fear of God.

This too is an indication that she would make a good preacher. I say this because the Lord God seems to favor fearful people for the task of preaching His Word.

Look at the first reading today and the Gospel as well.

In the first reading, Isaiah gives us what is called his “inaugural vision” as a prophet. He stands before the Temple in Jerusalem and looks into the Holy of Holies where he sees the Lord God seated on his throne. The Seraphim attend Him.

They cried one to the other,
“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts!
All the earth is filled with his glory!”

The Temple fills up with *‘araphel* - the “thick darkness” that engulfed the Temple when God took possession of His throne before a speechless King Solomon and his stupefied priests when the Temple was dedicated.

And when Isaiah gazed at the throne of God in his inaugural vision, he reacts with fear.

Then I said, “Woe is me, I am doomed!
For I am a man of unclean lips,
living among a people of unclean lips;
yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

This is the “fear of the Lord.”

Then one of the seraphim, clutching a burning ember with tongs, flies to Isaiah and makes him a prophet by searing his lips with the ember.

After this, Isaiah tells us that he heard the voice of the Lord, saying,

“Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?”

And the Prophet Isaiah stands before the Lord and says,

“Here I am,” I said; “send me!”

Something remarkably similar happens in the Gospel today.

Jesus is preaching by the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret and there is a crowd so large that Jesus must get into a boat to preach. The boat belongs to Simon, whom Jesus will eventually rename Peter (*petrus* means “rock”).

Getting into one of the boats,
the one belonging to Simon,
he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore.
Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

After Jesus has finished speaking, he instructed Simon Peter to “lower your nets for a catch.”

Simon Peter is weary and dispirited after a long night, but ultimately obedient. There is a miraculous catch.

But it is Simon Peter’s reaction that fascinates me:

When Simon Peter saw this,
he fell at the knees of Jesus and said,
“Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

Like Isaiah, Simon Peter is aware of his unworthiness and is filled with fear. Instead of a winged angel with a burning coal to sear Simon Peter’s lips, Jesus simply says,

“Do not be afraid;

from now on you will be catching men.

Peter and his companions leave everything and follow him.

There is a little detail in the story of the call of Peter which needs our attention.

After finishing his preaching, Jesus said to Simon Peter,

“Put out into deep water.”

I suspect that this is why my student was fearful when I suggested that she might make a good homilist. I was inviting her to “put out into deep water.”

In the Catholic Church, women are not allowed to preach. What would people think (and say) if my student got up and preached? What would she say if she were given the opportunity to preach? Who is she to even think she could serve the community as a homilist?

All these things were going through my student’s head.

But, in addition, in her heart, there was also the fear of “putting out into deep water.” Responding to grace can be frightening.

Pope Francis is calling us to become a synodal Church - a Church of dialogue and mutual discernment - a Church where all the baptized have a ministry. We need to build a Church where the many gifts of the Holy Spirit are recognized cherished. We need to build a Church where everyone is able to contribute to the community in keeping with the Spirit’s gifts.

Most of all, we need a Church where we stand with one another, as humble pilgrims on the path together, and help one another to hear the voice of the Lord saying to us,

“Put out into deep water... and do not be afraid.”

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?