

HOMILY FOR THE FEASTS OF ALL SAINTS AND ALL SOULS
Sunday, 6 November 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: 156

Reading 1 2 Mc 7:1-2, 9-14

It happened that seven brothers with their mother were arrested and tortured with whips and scourges by the king, to force them to eat pork in violation of God's law. One of the brothers, speaking for the others, said: "What do you expect to achieve by questioning us? We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors."

At the point of death he said:
"You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up to live again forever. It is for his laws that we are dying."

After him the third suffered their cruel sport. He put out his tongue at once when told to do so, and bravely held out his hands, as he spoke these noble words: "It was from Heaven that I received these; for the sake of his laws I disdain them; from him I hope to receive them again." Even the king and his attendants marveled at the young man's courage, because he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

After he had died, they tortured and maltreated the fourth brother in the same way. When he was near death, he said, "It is my choice to die at the hands of men with the hope God gives of being raised up by him; but for you, there will be no resurrection to life."

Responsorial Psalm Ps 17:1, 5-6, 8, 15

R. (15b) Lord, when your glory appears, my joy will be full.

Hear, O LORD, a just suit;

attend to my outcry;

hearken to my prayer from lips without deceit.

R. Lord, when your glory appears, my joy will be full.

My steps have been steadfast in your paths,
my feet have not faltered.

I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God;
incline your ear to me; hear my word.

R. Lord, when your glory appears, my joy will be full.

Keep me as the apple of your eye,
hide me in the shadow of your wings.

But I in justice shall behold your face;
on waking I shall be content in your presence.

R. Lord, when your glory appears, my joy will be full.

Reading 2 2 Thes 2:16-3:5

Brothers and sisters:

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father,
who has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement
and good hope through his grace,
encourage your hearts and strengthen them in every good deed
and word.

Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us,
so that the word of the Lord may speed forward
and be glorified, as it did among you,
and that we may be delivered from perverse and wicked people,
for not all have faith.

But the Lord is faithful;

he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.

We are confident of you in the Lord that what we instruct you,
you are doing and will continue to do.

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God
and to the endurance of Christ.

Alleluia Rv 1:5a, 6b

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Jesus Christ is the firstborn of the dead;
to him be glory and power, forever and ever.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Lk 20:27-38

Some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, came forward and put this question to Jesus, saying,

"Teacher, Moses wrote for us,
If someone's brother dies leaving a wife but no child, his brother must take the wife and raise up descendants for his brother.

Now there were seven brothers;
the first married a woman but died childless.

Then the second and the third married her,
and likewise all the seven died childless.

Finally the woman also died.

Now at the resurrection whose wife will that woman be?

For all seven had been married to her."

Jesus said to them,

"The children of this age marry and remarry;
but those who are deemed worthy to attain to the coming age and to the resurrection of the dead
neither marry nor are given in marriage.

They can no longer die,
for they are like angels;
and they are the children of God
because they are the ones who will rise.

That the dead will rise
even Moses made known in the passage about the bush,
when he called out 'Lord, '
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;
and he is not God of the dead, but of the living,
for to him all are alive."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Tuesday of last week, November 1st, was the Solemnity of All Saints. At Saint Leo's, we invoked the names of Francis and Patrick and Our Lady of Guadalupe (for our Italian, Irish and Mexican families), but also Cecilia (for our musicians), Jude (for our hopeless cases), Mother Teresa (for our poor), and, of course, Saint Leo (the Great), our patron.

Don't worry. I made sure we also remembered Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas (for all our theologians).

The following day, Wednesday, was also special: the Feast of All Souls (or, as we also say, *Dia de los Muertos*). We have an All Souls altar in the church adorned with statues of saints and images of the Virgin, crucifixes, baskets of *pan dulce*, and, most importantly, photos of our deceased loved ones who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith.

There is a rumor going around the parish that someone placed a bottle of *Modelo Negra* in front of a picture of their grandpa - but this has yet to be confirmed. (I know that my grandfather would have been delighted).

These two great feasts are side-by-side in the liturgical calendar for a reason: the two celebrations are identical twins (almost). In the celebration of the mass, heaven, which is never very far from earth, draws even closer to us. At mass, the great saints of our Church gather around the altar along with our deceased loved ones. This is why we remember "Saint Leo and all Your saints" during the Eucharistic Prayer as well as "all those who were pleasing in your sight at their passing from this world."

There is a name for this great truth that unites All Saints with All Souls. We call it "the communion of the saints." This teaching is even included in the creed. We believe in...

"the communion of the saints
and the life of the world to come... Amen."

The communion of the saints includes, I assure you, all the saints that are "on the list" (canonized) and all the saints that are not on the list (our loved ones whose pictures adorn the *Dia de los Muertos* altar at Saint Leo's).

But, in addition, at mass, we also say,

Listen graciously to the prayers of this family,
Whom you have gathered here before you:
In your compassion, O Merciful Father,
Gather to yourself all your children
Scattered throughout the world.

Sometimes, when I proclaim these words with you at mass, I think of the Chibok girls. I want you to remember them as well, for, without any doubt at all, they are part of the communion of the saints.

One night in April of 2014, 276 girls were kidnaped from their high school in the town of Chibok in Nigeria by members of Boko Haram, a horrible fundamentalist group. The girls were preparing to take a final exam in physics. Some of the kidnaped girls were bartered in exchange for prisoners with the Nigerian government. Some are now dead. The majority were forcibly married to men they did not know. Amnesty International estimates that up to 2000 girls have been kidnaped in Nigeria since the kidnapping of the Chibok girls.

All these girls are part of the communion of the saints. All women and girls who have been trafficked and abused and forgotten are part of this great and Holy Communion of all the saints.

We are remembering these souls when we say,

Gather to yourself all your children
Scattered throughout the world.

In his mysterious mercy, the Lord gathers the Chibok girls around the altar whenever we are at mass at Saint Leo's. And with his demanding love for us, the Lord empowers us with the grace to build a world where little girls will no longer be kidnaped.

Around the altar with us, when we gather for mass, are Francis, Patrick and Guadalupe and Cecilia and Jude and Augustine and Aquinas. Of course, Saint Leo is there with us. All the beautiful souls whose pictures adorn our *Dia de los Muertos* altar are gathered with us as well.

But please, never doubt that those young girls are with us and not forgotten when we are at mass. They too are gathered at our altar when we share the scriptures and offer up to the Creator his bread and wine. For these girls are part of the communion of the saints.

The Lord is calling all his saints into communion around our altar. All Saints and All Souls.

Remember them all when we pray,

Gather to yourself all your children
Scattered throughout the world.

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?