

HOMILY FOR THE THIRTIETH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 6 November 2021

- 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: 155

Reading I 1 Kgs 17:10-16

In those days, Elijah the prophet went to Zarephath.
As he arrived at the entrance of the city,
a widow was gathering sticks there; he called out to her,
"Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink."
She left to get it, and he called out after her,
"Please bring along a bit of bread."
She answered, "As the LORD, your God, lives,
I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar
and a little oil in my jug.
Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks,
to go in and prepare something for myself and my son;
when we have eaten it, we shall die."
Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid.
Go and do as you propose.
But first make me a little cake and bring it to me.
Then you can prepare something for yourself and your son.
For the LORD, the God of Israel, says,
'The jar of flour shall not go empty,
nor the jug of oil run dry,
until the day when the LORD sends rain upon the earth.'
She left and did as Elijah had said.
She was able to eat for a year, and he and her son as well;
the jar of flour did not go empty,
nor the jug of oil run dry,
as the LORD had foretold through Elijah.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 146:7, 8-9, 9-10

R. (1b) Praise the Lord, my soul!
The LORD keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets captives free.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

The LORD gives sight to the blind.

The LORD raises up those who were bowed down;
the LORD loves the just.

The LORD protects strangers.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

The fatherless and the widow he sustains,
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.

The LORD shall reign forever;

your God, O Zion, through all generations. Alleluia.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

Reading II Heb 9:24-28

Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands,
a copy of the true one, but heaven itself,

that he might now appear before God on our behalf.

Not that he might offer himself repeatedly,

as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary
with blood that is not his own;

if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly
from the foundation of the world.

But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages
to take away sin by his sacrifice.

Just as it is appointed that human beings die once,

and after this the judgment, so also Christ,

offered once to take away the sins of many,

will appear a second time, not to take away sin

but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.

Alleluia Mt 5:3

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are the poor in spirit,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 12:38-44 or 12:41-44

In the course of his teaching Jesus said to the crowds,

"Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes

and accept greetings in the marketplaces,

seats of honor in synagogues,

and places of honor at banquets.

They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext

recite lengthy prayers.
They will receive a very severe condemnation."
He sat down opposite the treasury
and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury.
Many rich people put in large sums.
A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents.
Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them,
"Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more
than all the other contributors to the treasury.
For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth,
but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had,
her whole livelihood."

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

I think most of you will remember that on 15 April 2019 a fire broke out in the Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Paris. Notre Dame was almost destroyed.

Apparently, the fire started in a part of the Cathedral called *la forêt* (the forest). This is the area above the vaulted ceilings that seem to float above the interior of the church. In other words, the fire broke out in Notre Dame's attic. This part of the church is called "the forest" because a small forest of oak was felled to build this beautiful expression of our faith.



Here is an unusual photo of the fire within the *forêt*.



Happily, the people of France are making progress in rebuilding their church.

I am told that the monks of the contemplative community of La Trappe have felled two great oak trees on the grounds of their monastery to provide wood to replenish the burnt oak beams of the *forêt*.

("La Trappe," by the way, is where we get the word "Trappist." Thomas Merton was a Trappist monk).

I need to say that my feelings swung in two directions when I learned that the monks were cutting down two of their oaks. Rebuilding the Cathedral is certainly a worthy cause. But, on the other hand, the trees are two hundred years old.

And they are oaks.

When I was a student in the seminary, there was a beautiful oak tree - easily two hundred years old and probably much older - that blessed me every day as I walked by it. Some years ago, this gracious gift of God took ill (some kind of blight) and came down. Now, it feels as if there is a gaping

hole in the universe where my friend once stood and greeted me every day.

I thought of this lost oak when I learned that the monks of La Trappe were donating two of the oaks on their land to help rebuild Notre Dame.

Yes: my feelings swung violently in two directions when I learned of the generosity of the monks. Being contemplatives, I think it safe to say that the monks feel the loss of these oaks more than the rest of us. It is a beautiful gift.

I want to tell you about the abbot's comment regarding the community's gift.

The abbot of La Trappe said that the community wants the wood to be used as beams within the *forêt* where it cannot be seen by people visiting the church below. The monks want the new oak beams to hold up Notre Dame as the old beams did for over eight hundred years: unseen, unremarked, unheralded. For this is what contemplative monks do in service to the Church - a good Trappist goes unseen, quietly supporting the Church with his prayers.

Sometimes I am convinced that the only reason the universe hasn't completely come apart at the seams is that there are contemplative men and women, dwelling in the deep darkness of the Creator, holding it all together as we go about our lives.

Donating the trees might not seem remarkable. Just cut down a couple of trees and ship the wood to Paris. In fact, I think it is a costly gift for these monks, and a gift that is very beautiful in the eyes of God. The gift of the Trappists is all the more beautiful in the eyes of God because it will be invisible to the eyes of human beings.

Now I can get to the Gospel today.

Mark tells us that Jesus is in the Temple precincts. He is standing opposite the treasury. It is not very much of an exaggeration to say that the major industry of the city of Jerusalem in Jesus's day was sacrificing animals to God.

The wealthy had the resources to make a splendid show of sacrificing a bull or an ox. They donated big sums to the Temple treasury. The humble of the earth donated less and were able to sacrifice a pigeon or dove (or even just a little flour). Everybody paid for the services of the High Priests on a scale that reflected the grandeur of the sacrifice you wanted to offer to God (and to show to the crowd).

He sat down opposite the treasury and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.

But then,

A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents.

Jesus then draws attention to the woman whose gift to the Temple would ordinarily go unseen, unremarked, unheralded. And of all the gifts to the Temple that day, this is the gift that Jesus singles out for praise.

Earlier, I said that, sometimes at least, I am convinced that the only reason that the universe hasn't come apart at the seams is that some contemplative, deep in the darkness of God, is holding it all together for us.

I think the same can be said for the generosity of the humble of the earth. Little acts of charity that go unseen, unremarked and certainly unheralded, are part of the glue that holds the world together.

Notre Dame, the Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Paris, will one day be rebuilt. The *forêt* will be reconstructed with oak beams from trees felled by the monks of La Trappe. And, with the grace of God, this gift of sturdy oak will help hold up the Cathedral for another eight hundred years.

But the monks of La Trappe will tell you that it is really little gifts of faith, hope and love that hold up Notre Dame and, for that matter, all of Paris and the whole world beyond.

I don't think we should fret that these little gifts go unseen, unremarked and unheralded. The beautiful church on the

Île de la Cité in Paris has been held together for eight hundred years by such gifts.

I will be very grateful if, someday, I can attend mass at Notre Dame once again. I will say a prayer for you all, of course, but I will also remember the Trappist monks and their gift that is holding Notre Dame together and, for that matter, the universe itself.

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?

