

HOMILY FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
Sunday, 8 December 2024

Fr. Jim Fredericks

Part One: the readings for the day
Part Two: reflections on the readings
Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY
Lectionary: 6

Reading I Bar 5:1-9

Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery;
put on the splendor of glory from God forever:
wrapped in the cloak of justice from God,
bear on your head the mitre
that displays the glory of the eternal name.
For God will show all the earth your splendor:
you will be named by God forever
the peace of justice, the glory of God's worship.

Up, Jerusalem! stand upon the heights;
look to the east and see your children
gathered from the east and the west
at the word of the Holy One,
rejoicing that they are remembered by God.
Led away on foot by their enemies they left you:
but God will bring them back to you
borne aloft in glory as on royal thrones.
The forests and every fragrant kind of tree
have overshadowed Israel at God's command;
for God is leading Israel in joy
by the light of his glory,
with his mercy and justice for company.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.
When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion,
we were like men dreaming.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with rejoicing.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Then they said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."
The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad indeed.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the torrents in the southern desert.
Those who sow in tears
shall reap rejoicing.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Although they go forth weeping,
carrying the seed to be sown,
They shall come back rejoicing,
carrying their sheaves.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Reading II Phil 1:4-6, 8-11

Brothers and sisters:

I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you,
because of your partnership for the gospel
from the first day until now.

I am confident of this,
that the one who began a good work in you
will continue to complete it
until the day of Christ Jesus.

God is my witness,
how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer:
that your love may increase ever more and more
in knowledge and every kind of perception,
to discern what is of value,
so that you may be pure and blameless
for the day of Christ,
filled with the fruit of righteousness
that comes through Jesus Christ
for the glory and praise of God.

Alleluia Lk 3:4, 6

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths:
all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Lk 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,
when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea,
and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee,
and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region
of Ituraea and Trachonitis,
and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,
during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas,
the word of God came to John
the son of Zechariah in the desert.

John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan,
proclaiming a baptism of repentance
for the forgiveness of sins,
as it is written in the book of the words
of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one crying out in the desert:

*"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.*

Every valley shall be filled

and every mountain and hill shall be made low.

The winding roads shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth,

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

It's Advent and we will soon be celebrating the birth of the Messiah. Our lives can get complicated as we get close to Christmas. But in addition, I need to say that feelings can get complicated as well.

Today, I want to share a simple piece of advice to help you prepare spiritually for the coming of the Christ child.

In the Gospel for today's mass, Luke quotes the poetry of the Prophet Isaiah.

Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.
Every valley shall be filled
and every mountain and hill shall be made low.
The winding roads shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

I think of these words when I look up at Sonoma Mountain from the vineyards on the floor of our Valley. If we are to "make straight his paths," then every valley must be filled and every mountain and hill laid low.

But look at the next verse of Isaiah's poem.

The winding roads shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth.

Here, I think of the roads that go over the Mayacamas to the East of us. To make straight a path for the Messiah, the winding roads must be made straight and the rough ways smooth.

Isaiah is not just talking about Sonoma Mountain and the roads that go over the Mayacamas. He is talking about the winding roads and rough ways within our hearts.

And so, I come back to the complicated feelings that can fill our hearts at Christmas time. And here is my advice for you.

As Christmas draws near, remember how the Savior let his heart be touched by the suffering of others.

For example, remember when the leper called out to Jesus from the side of the road.

If You are willing, you can make me clean.

And then, Jesus was "moved with compassion." He stretched out his hand and then did something illegal: he *touched the leper*.

When you look up at Sonoma Mountain, remember the time when Jesus came on a poor widow who was burying her only son. When the Lord saw the woman in her desolation, his heart was filled with feelings.

When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

And when you think of the winding roads that go over the Mayacamas, remember what John said about Jesus as he stood before the grave of his friend, Lazarus.

And he was filled with the deepest emotions.

In truth, our hearts can be a winding road and a rough path. The problems we have to navigate with can be like high mountains and deep valleys. And yet, the Prophet tells us to prepare a way for the Messiah who is to come.

So, remember our sweet Savior. He let himself be touched by our suffering.

He wasn't afraid to feel.

There is so much suffering in the world. Don't close yourself off from it. Don't be afraid to feel. Christmas will be here soon. The Messiah is drawing near. Make straight his path.

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?