

HOMILY FOR TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME  
Sunday, 8 October 2023

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: 139

**Reading 1 Is 5:1-7**

Let me now sing of my friend,  
my friend's song concerning his vineyard.  
My friend had a vineyard  
on a fertile hillside;  
he spaded it, cleared it of stones,  
and planted the choicest vines;  
within it he built a watchtower,  
and hewed out a wine press.  
Then he looked for the crop of grapes,  
but what it yielded was wild grapes.

Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah,  
judge between me and my vineyard:  
What more was there to do for my vineyard  
that I had not done?  
Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes,  
did it bring forth wild grapes?  
Now, I will let you know  
what I mean to do with my vineyard:  
take away its hedge, give it to grazing,  
break through its wall, let it be trampled!  
Yes, I will make it a ruin:  
it shall not be pruned or hoed,  
but overgrown with thorns and briars;  
I will command the clouds  
not to send rain upon it.  
The vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel,  
and the people of Judah are his cherished plant;  
he looked for judgment, but see, bloodshed!  
for justice, but hark, the outcry!

**Responsorial Psalm Ps 80:9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20**

R. (Is 5:7a) The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.  
A vine from Egypt you transplanted;  
you drove away the nations and planted it.  
It put forth its foliage to the Sea,  
its shoots as far as the River.

R. The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.  
Why have you broken down its walls,  
so that every passer-by plucks its fruit,  
The boar from the forest lays it waste,  
and the beasts of the field feed upon it?

R. The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.  
Once again, O LORD of hosts,  
look down from heaven, and see;  
take care of this vine,  
and protect what your right hand has planted,  
the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

R. The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.  
Then we will no more withdraw from you;  
give us new life, and we will call upon your name.  
O LORD, God of hosts, restore us;  
if your face shine upon us, then we shall be saved.

R. The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

**Reading 2 Phil 4:6-9**

Brothers and sisters:  
Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,  
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,  
make your requests known to God.  
Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding  
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters,  
whatever is true, whatever is honorable,  
whatever is just, whatever is pure,  
whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious,  
if there is any excellence  
and if there is anything worthy of praise,  
think about these things.  
Keep on doing what you have learned and received

and heard and seen in me.  
Then the God of peace will be with you.

**Alleluia Cf. Jn 15:16**

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

I have chosen you from the world, says the Lord,  
to go and bear fruit that will remain.

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

**Gospel Mt 21:33-43**

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people:  
"Hear another parable.

There was a landowner who planted a vineyard,  
put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it,  
and built a tower.

Then he leased it to tenants and went on a journey.

When vintage time drew near,  
he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce.

But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat,  
another they killed, and a third they stoned.

Again he sent other servants,  
more numerous than the first ones,  
but they treated them in the same way.

Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking,  
'They will respect my son.'

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another,  
'This is the heir.

Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.'

They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard,  
and killed him.

What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants  
when he comes?"

They answered him,

"He will put those wretched men to a wretched death  
and lease his vineyard to other tenants  
who will give him the produce at the proper times."

Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures:

*The stone that the builders rejected*

*has become the cornerstone;*  
*by the Lord has this been done,*  
*and it is wonderful in our eyes?*

Therefore, I say to you,  
the kingdom of God will be taken away from you  
and given to a people that will produce its fruit."

## PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

My wonderful ones:

I have said before that we live in a time in the history of the Church when it is an exciting time to be a Catholic.

This takes some people by surprise.

Our diocese - the Diocese of Santa Rosa - has filed for bankruptcy. This is having horrible consequences, most of which are invisible to most people. There is a shortage of priests and nuns. Mass attendance, at least among speakers of English, is down. Many of our children and grandchildren have become what sociologists of religion are now calling "nones" - people with no religious affiliation.

In addition, the world is screwed up and becoming more screwed up. I don't think I have to rehearse all the details with you about this. (Moreover, as your priest, my job is to accompany you as you are taken by surprised by hope.) But in our part of the world at least, the enormous river of wisdom, beauty and truth which is our tradition - our Christian faith - is being marginalized more and more in the world that is militantly secular.

And yet, let me say again that this is an exciting time to be a Catholic. Maybe I should be more broadminded and say that it is an exciting time to be a person of Christian faith - in order to include our Protestant and Orthodox sisters and brothers. Christians of all denominations should recognize that this is an exciting time to be a Christian believer committed to putting our faith into practice today.

Why do I say all this? It's because I am convinced that the Holy Spirit is calling us, today, to renew the Church so we can bring the Gospel to the wounded world in new ways.

Pope Francis thinks we should be excited too.

Right now, in Rome, the Synod on the Church's Synodality has started. Since the beginning of the Church's journey

toward God's Kingdom, Christians have been coming together to share their faith and discern how we can be more faithful in embracing the future which the Holy Spirit is preparing for us. To be the Church means that we recognize that we are "on the road together."

Pope Francis started the ball rolling two years ago with faith-sharing at the grassroots level all around the world. Catholics in Kinshasa and Montevideo, Manila and Beirut, Saarbrücken and San Diego have come together to name the problems troubling the world and come up with ideas about how we, as Christians, can respond to the suffering of our neighbors with compassion and courage.

Summaries of these conversations made their way up to Pope Francis. Now, the Pope has refined these global conversations into a list of questions for about 400 Catholic leaders from around the world as they meet this month in Rome.

The questions have to do with how we recognize the service of women in the Church and how we can be "radically inclusive" in welcoming those we have marginalized. The delegates to the Synod will discuss how we can better respond to the demands of justice and accompany the poor in this unjust world.

Yet the purpose of the Synod is not to answer these questions. The purpose of the Synod on the Church's Synodality is to create a Church that is better at coming together to discern how we are to change. This means the Pope is calling us to undergo a conversion in the process of grappling with the questions themselves. The Church, as always, is in need of *metanoia* - a change of heart that brings us to a deeper embrace of the Gospel.

So, the purpose of the Synod is not to produce more documents (although I hope you can see how a global process like the Synod on Synodality has produced lots of documents already).

Rather, the Pope says that the purpose of the Synod is,

to inspire people to dream about the church we are called to be, to make people's hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission.

These are beautiful words.

The Church is something we should be dreaming about. But we should not be dreaming about the Church of the past. We need to dream about the Church "we are called to be." And we can do this by discerning how we can make "people's hopes flourish" and by stimulating trust, binding up wounds. We are dreaming about the Church "we are called to be" when we "weave new and deeper relationships" and "learn from one another."

So, please pray for the Synod - the Synod on the Church's Synodality - that is going on right now in Rome. Place your trust the Gospel.

Look at the second reading for today's mass. Saint Paul offers good advice about becoming a more synodal Church:

Finally, brothers and sisters,  
whatever is true, whatever is honorable,  
whatever is just, whatever is pure,  
whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious,  
if there is any excellence  
and if there is anything worthy of praise,  
think about these things.  
Keep on doing what you have learned and received  
and heard and seen in me.  
Then the God of peace will be with you.

### 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?