

HOMILY FOR THE TWENTIETH-THIRD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME  
Sunday, 8 September 2024

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: 128

Reading 1 Is 35:4-7a

Thus says the LORD:  
Say to those whose hearts are frightened:  
Be strong, fear not!  
Here is your God,  
he comes with vindication;  
with divine recompense  
he comes to save you.  
Then will the eyes of the blind be opened,  
the ears of the deaf be cleared;  
then will the lame leap like a stag,  
then the tongue of the mute will sing.  
Streams will burst forth in the desert,  
and rivers in the steppe.  
The burning sands will become pools,  
and the thirsty ground, springs of water.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!  
The God of Jacob 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 the LORD 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 2 Jas 2:1-5

My brothers and sisters, show no partiality  
as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.  
For if a man with gold rings and fine clothes  
comes into your assembly,  
and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in,  
and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes  
and say, "Sit here, please, "  
while you say to the poor one,  
"Stand there," or "Sit at my feet,"  
have you not made distinctions among yourselves  
and become judges with evil designs?

Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters.  
Did not God choose those who are poor in the world  
to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom  
that he promised to those who love him?

Alleluia Cf. Mt 4:23

R. Alleluia, alleluia.  
Jesus proclaimed the Gospel of the kingdom  
and cured every disease among the people.  
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 7:31-37

Again Jesus left the district of Tyre  
and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee,

into the district of the Decapolis.  
And people brought to him a deaf man  
who had a speech impediment  
and begged him to lay his hand on him.  
He took him off by himself away from the crowd.  
He put his finger into the man's ears  
and, spitting, touched his tongue;  
then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him,  
“*Ephphatha!*”— that is, “Be opened!” —  
And immediately the man's ears were opened,  
his speech impediment was removed,  
and he spoke plainly.  
He ordered them not to tell anyone.  
But the more he ordered them not to,  
the more they proclaimed it.  
They were exceedingly astonished and they said,  
“He has done all things well.  
He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

#### PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

The Japanese have a wonderful expression: *mimi-ga toi*.  
Literally, it means “the ears are far away.” It is a way to indicate  
that a person is going deaf.

Sorry, I couldn't hear you. *mimi-ga toi*.

Hey – he can't hear you – *mimi-ga toi*

But in some situations, *mimi-ga toi* can mean that a person  
has no interest in you and your problems. We call out to  
others, but they don't hear us. Their “ears are far away.”

I presume we can all tell our own stories about the pain of not  
being heard when we reach out for help. But today, I want to  
remember the poor all around us who cry out to us without  
being heard.

Psalm 34 reminds us that,

The poor one cried out and the LORD heard,  
and from all his distress He saved him.

When it comes to those who have been cast aside, excluded and pushed to the margins, do not say that God does not care. The Lord hears the cry of the poor. Too often, when it comes to the wretched of the earth, it is our ears that are far away, not God's ears.

This last week, I spoke with a little boy. He's about ten years old. He started school last week and couldn't be more excited to be with his classmates. This little boy came to us less than a year ago as a refugee from a country that has lost its mind to drug gangs, corruption, and most of all, oil.

This little boy has asked his mom for a backpack. All the kids at school have a backpack. They carry their books and all the other stuff little kids like to carry around in their backpacks.

I suppose this little boy could put his books in a paper bag. But all the other kids have a backpack, and he doesn't want to stand out, especially because he's new and doesn't speak much English.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor, even when it's just a little boy asking for something as simple as a backpack.

The Apostle James, in the second reading, reminds us of this great teaching.

My brothers and sisters, show no partiality  
as you adhere to the faith  
in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.  
For if a man with gold rings and fine clothes  
comes into your assembly,  
and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in,  
and you pay attention

to the one wearing the fine clothes  
and say, "Sit here, please,"  
while you say to the poor one,  
"Stand there," or "Sit at my feet,"  
have you not made distinctions among yourselves  
and become judges with evil designs?

But it is easy to have ears that are far away when it comes to the poor. *Mimi-ga toi!* We need spiritual practices aimed at helping us to get our hearing back.

Let me give you an example taken from the Torah. In the book of Deuteronomy, the Law of Moses requires the following:

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the widow, the orphan and the stranger in your land.

This instruction gets to the heart of Jewish spirituality. When you're harvesting your crop and you see that you left a sheaf of wheat out in the field, common sense tells you to go back into the field, pick up the sheaf and toss it onto your wagon. But, in this case, the Law of Moses commands us not to use common sense. Leave the sheaf of wheat out in your field so that the poor might feed their children that night.

The Torah is full of commands like this.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor and sometimes, in order for us to hear their cry, we have to put common sense aside. This law in the Book of Deuteronomy isn't just about how we are to harvest wheat. It is to remind us that our ears are far away - *mimi-ga toi*.

In the Gospel for today, Mark tells us that the people brought a deaf man before Jesus and begged him to lay his hands on him. And Jesus heard the poor man's cry.

then he looked up to heaven and groaned,

and said to him,  
“*Ephphatha!*”— that is, “Be opened!”

And now there is a little boy who has come to us. He wants a backpack to carry his books to school. A little thing like a backpack can be a big deal when you’re ten years old, and you’re the new kid at school and you don’t speak English very well.

And hidden within this little boy who cries out to us, the Lord is saying something wonderful:

*Ephphatha!*

### 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?