

HOMILY FOR THE FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD
Sunday, 9 January 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: 21

Reading I Is 42:1-4, 6-7

Thus says the LORD:

Here is my servant whom I uphold,
my chosen one with whom I am pleased,
upon whom I have put my spirit;
he shall bring forth justice to the nations,
not crying out, not shouting,
not making his voice heard in the street.
a bruised reed he shall not break,
and a smoldering wick he shall not quench,
until he establishes justice on the earth;
the coastlands will wait for his teaching.

I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice,
I have grasped you by the hand;
I formed you, and set you
as a covenant of the people,
a light for the nations,
to open the eyes of the blind,
to bring out prisoners from confinement,
and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

Or: Is 40:1-5, 9-11

Comfort, give comfort to my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her
that her service is at an end,
her guilt is expiated;
indeed, she has received from the hand of the LORD
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!
 Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!
Every valley shall be filled in,
 every mountain and hill shall be made low;
the rugged land shall be made a plain,
 the rough country, a broad valley.
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
 and all people shall see it together;
 for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Go up on to a high mountain,
 Zion, herald of glad tidings;
cry out at the top of your voice,
 Jerusalem, herald of good news!
Fear not to cry out
 and say to the cities of Judah:
 Here is your God!
Here comes with power
 the Lord GOD,
 who rules by a strong arm;
here is his reward with him,
 his recompense before him.
Like a shepherd he feeds his flock;
 in his arms he gathers the lambs,
carrying them in his bosom,
 and leading the ewes with care.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10

R. (11b) The Lord will bless his people with peace.

Give to the LORD, you sons of God,
 give to the LORD glory and praise,
Give to the LORD the glory due his name;
 adore the LORD in holy attire.

R. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters,
 the LORD, over vast waters.

The voice of the LORD is mighty;
 the voice of the LORD is majestic.

R. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

The God of glory thunders,
 and in his temple all say, "Glory!"
The LORD is enthroned above the flood;
 the LORD is enthroned as king forever.

R. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

OR: Ps 104:1b-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27-28, 29-30

R. (1) O bless the Lord, my soul.

O LORD, my God, you are great indeed!
you are clothed with majesty and glory,
robed in light as with a cloak.

You have spread out the heavens like a tent-cloth;

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

You have constructed your palace upon the waters.

You make the clouds your chariot;
you travel on the wings of the wind.

You make the winds your messengers,
and flaming fire your ministers.

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

How manifold are your works, O LORD!

In wisdom you have wrought them all,
the earth is full of your creatures;
the sea also, great and wide,
in which are schools without number
of living things both small and great.

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

They look to you to give them food in due time.

When you give it to them, they gather it;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

If you take away their breath, they perish and return to the dust.

When you send forth your spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth.

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

Reading II Acts 10:34-38

Peter proceeded to speak to those gathered
in the house of Cornelius, saying:

"In truth, I see that God shows no partiality.

Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly
is acceptable to him.

You know the word that he sent to the Israelites
as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all,
what has happened all over Judea,
beginning in Galilee after the baptism
that John preached,
how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth
with the Holy Spirit and power.
He went about doing good

and healing all those oppressed by the devil,
for God was with him.”

Or: Ti 2:11-14; 3:4-7

Beloved:

The grace of God has appeared, saving all
and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires
and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age,
as we await the blessed hope,
the appearance of the glory of our great God
and savior Jesus Christ,
who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness
and to cleanse for himself a people as his own,
eager to do what is good.

When the kindness and generous love
of God our savior appeared,
not because of any righteous deeds we had done
but because of his mercy,
He saved us through the bath of rebirth
and renewal by the Holy Spirit,
whom he richly poured out on us
through Jesus Christ our savior,
so that we might be justified by his grace
and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Alleluia Cf. Mk 9:7

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The heavens were opened and the voice of the Father thundered:
This is my beloved Son, listen to him.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

OR: Cf. Lk 3:16

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

John said: One mightier than I is coming;
he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Lk 3:15-16, 21-22

The people were filled with expectation,
and all were asking in their hearts
whether John might be the Christ.

John answered them all, saying,
“I am baptizing you with water,

but one mightier than I is coming.
I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals.
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

After all the people had been baptized
and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying,
heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him
in bodily form like a dove.
And a voice came from heaven,
“You are my beloved Son;
with you I am well pleased.”

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Today is the feast of the Baptism of the Lord - the end
of the Christmas season.

I remember, back when I was in high school, asking my
teacher a question:

If Jesus is really divine, why did he need to be
baptized?

Looking back on my precocious youth as a budding
theologian, I think it’s a pretty good question. Maybe
you have asked this question yourself. It’s not like Jesus
had to have the “stain of original sin” washed off his
soul. Why did he need to be baptized?

I don’t remember what my teacher said in response. No
matter. I want to give my own answer today.

Some months ago, I brought a boule of my
grandmother’s Irish soda bread to a family here in
Sonoma. This bread has butter and sugar and raisins. I
use a really good flour and fresh buttermilk. I call it *pan
dulce* when I bring it to our Mexican families. Of course,
it’s soda bread, not real *pan dulce*, but the kids like it.
Toast it and spread a little butter over it in the morning.

I sat in the kitchen with the mother of this family and
traded pleasantries with her for about ten minutes or
so. Then, suddenly, this good woman said,

Padre, I'm afraid.

Three years ago, her husband died suddenly of a heart attack. He was a gardener, a *jardinero* - a "mower and blower" as some say. I knew him, but certainly not well enough. He was good man - good to his children and good to his wife. He was certainly a man of faith. The man died and left his wife with four kids - two of them still in the fourth grade.

Padre, I'm afraid.

The twins are in seventh grade now. I am happy to say that they both do well in school. They never get into trouble and are affectionate toward their mom. The mom is trying to hold the family together by cleaning houses. (Let me know if you have any work for her). The other two kids are old enough to have jobs. All the kids are helping out in their own way.

I think the family will be okay. But all the same, I stop in with bread from time to time. I don't know what else to do.

Padre, I'm afraid.

We were just making small talk when she said this. She didn't need to explain what she meant.

And when she said this, I paused for a moment as my mind filled up with stupid, useless things to say in response to this simple eloquent revelation of her humanity.

In the end, I reached across the kitchen table and put my hand in hers and told her the truth.

I said,

I'm afraid too.

On this feast of the Baptism of the Lord, I recommend that we reflect on what is one of the great teachings of our faith: In being baptized, we have been given to one

another. When we baptize a child, God is entrusting us to one another for safe keeping.

When the Church teaches that baptism washes away the stain of Original Sin, we mean that the million and one things that separate us from one another have been overcome by Christ's gentle love. For all our differences, we are no longer strangers to one another.

When the Church teaches that baptism washes away the stain of Original Sin, we mean that it is possible to accompany those who are lonely, marginalized, widowed and afraid.

We have been given to one another.

Why did the Messiah kneel before John in the Jordan River to be baptized?

I think this is his way of reaching across the table and placing his hand in ours and saying to all of us who are widowed and afraid,

I'm afraid too.

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?