

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 9 July 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: 100

Reading 1 Zec 9:9-10

Thus says the LORD:

Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion,
shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king shall come to you;
a just savior is he,
meek, and riding on an ass,
on a colt, the foal of an ass.
He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim,
and the horse from Jerusalem;
the warrior's bow shall be banished,
and he shall proclaim peace to the nations.
His dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13-14

R. (cf. 1) I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

or:

R. Alleluia.

I will extol you, O my God and King,
and I will bless your name forever and ever.

Every day will I bless you,
and I will praise your name forever and ever.

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

or:

R. Alleluia.

The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and of great kindness.

The LORD is good to all
and compassionate toward all his works.

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD,
and let your faithful ones bless you.

Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might.

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

or:

R. Alleluia.

The LORD is faithful in all his words
and holy in all his works.

The LORD lifts up all who are falling
and raises up all who are bowed down.

R. I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Reading 2 Rom 8:9, 11-13

Brothers and sisters:

You are not in the flesh;

on the contrary, you are in the spirit,
if only the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ
does not belong to him.

If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead
dwells in you,

the one who raised Christ from the dead
will give life to your mortal bodies also,
through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Consequently, brothers and sisters,
we are not debtors to the flesh,
to live according to the flesh.

For if you live according to the flesh, you will die,
but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body,
you will live.

Alleluia Cf. Mt 11:25

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth;
you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mt 11:25-30

At that time Jesus exclaimed:

"I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,

for although you have hidden these things
from the wise and the learned
you have revealed them to little ones.
Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will.
All things have been handed over to me by my Father.
No one knows the Son except the Father,
and no one knows the Father except the Son
and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him."

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for I am meek and humble of heart;
and you will find rest for yourselves.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Several years ago, I gave a lecture at the University of Muenster in Germany and then spent five happy days in the concert halls and museums of Berlin.

In Berlin, my little hotel was in a quiet neighborhood with treelined streets and gracious homes. Just around the corner from my hotel was a Bierstube.

This restaurant was my kind of place. It was a neighborhood hangout on a tranquil street. The restaurant even had Rote Grutze on the dessert menu - just like Grandma used to make for us in Petaluma when the blackberries ripened in late summer. (By the way, in Petaluma, Rote Grutze is pronounced "roty grut.")

Savoring the roty grut in Berlin and watching kids play hopscotch outside the restaurant, I thought about my own childhood, about Grandma and the blackberry bramble out in the field.

Everything was *gemutlich*.

Except that, after dinner, walking back to my hotel, I noticed a little bronze plaque on the sidewalk in front of the house next to the restaurant, not far from where the

kids were playing hopscotch. The plaque had three names on it.

In fact, the plaque had three Jewish names on it.

I asked the kids: What is this?

Das is ein Stolperstein

Stolperstein means "stumbling block" in German. The people of Berlin want us to stumble - just a little - on this piece of bronze set in the sidewalk in front of this house. We are to stumble on this stumbling block and remember that three Jews once lived in that place. I wondered if these three Jews ate Rote Grutze in the Bierstube just as I had that lovely summer evening in Berlin.

And then these Jews were arrested and murdered during the terror of the Third Reich.

There is a Greek word in the Bible for Stolperstein: *skandalon*. It means "stumbling block" (Stolper-stein).

In English, we get the word "scandal" from *skandalon*. The Stolperstein on the sidewalk in that lovely neighborhood in Berlin was meant to scandalize me.

And it did the job.

The plaque jolted me out of my happy memories of Grandma's roty-grut and the blackberries of summer in Petaluma. We need to be scandalized by the memory of those three Jews who no longer live in that lovely neighborhood in Berlin.

I believe that there is a great purpose served in being scandalized by the memory of violence. In remembering the three Jews whose names are engraved on the plaque set in the sidewalk of Berlin, we are to remember that scapegoating the innocent is still going on today.

That summer evening in Berlin, I thought of my brothers and cousins picking blackberries out in the field and I thought of Grandma making roty-grut for us. And I also

tried to think about those three Jews who used to live in the house next to the Bierstube in Berlin.

To tell the truth, I had trouble keeping it all in my head all at once. How could this have happened in this lovely old neighborhood? The Stolperstein had scandalized me. I had stumbled over the *skandalon* on the sidewalk and the memory of the Jews would not leave me in peace.

Look at the first reading. The Prophet Zechariah is writing beautiful Hebrew poetry to a people who were scandalized as well.

Zechariah is preaching God's Word to the people after their return to Jerusalem from their exile in Babylon. The people were rebuilding the Temple and rebuilding their Jewish lives as well. I imagine that the streets of Jerusalem were becoming lovely once again and lively like my neighborhood in Berlin. Their children were playing hopscotch.

But, in their hearts, there was also the memory of the violence that befell them and led them off into exile. There was also the fear that this could happen again.

The Prophet Zechariah must have recognized the scandal in the hearts of the people. He must have seen how the memory of violence haunts the human heart and becomes a stumbling block for us, even as we savor the roty-grut and remember Grandma and the blackberries of late summer and watch the little kids playing hopscotch.

For, look how Zechariah comforted the people and spoke about the coming Messiah:

He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim
and the horse from Jerusalem;
the warrior's bow shall be banished,
and he shall proclaim peace to the nations.

This is how the Prophet envisions the coming Kingdom of God: the chariot and the war horse will be banished along with the warrior's bow. The children playing hopscotch will be safe along with all our Jewish neighbors. There will be

rotty-grut for desert and memories of Grandma and the blackberries of late summer in Petaluma.

But for the present, let there be scandal. Let there be the troubling memory of the violence that overcomes men. And for all of those scandalized by this memory:

Thus says the LORD:
Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion,
shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king shall come to you;
a just savior is he.

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?