

HOMILY FOR SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Sunday, 9 May 2021

Mother's Day

- 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: 52

Reading 1 [ACTS 6:1-7](#)

As the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

So the Twelve called together the community of the disciples and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table.

Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

The proposal was acceptable to the whole community, so they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit, also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them.

The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly; even a large group of priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

Responsorial Psalm [PS 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19](#)

R. (22) Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Exult, you just, in the LORD;

praise from the upright is fitting.

Give thanks to the LORD on the harp;

with the ten-stringed lyre chant his praises.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Upright is the word of the LORD,
and all his works are trustworthy.

He loves justice and right;
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

or:

R. Alleluia.

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,
upon those who hope for his kindness,

To deliver them from death
and preserve them in spite of famine.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Reading 2 [1 PT 2:4-9](#)

Beloved:

Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings
but chosen and precious in the sight of God,
and, like living stones,
let yourselves be built into a spiritual house
to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices
acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For it says in Scripture:

*Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion,
a cornerstone, chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame.*

Therefore, its value is for you who have faith, but for those without faith:

*The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,
and*

*A stone that will make people stumble,
and a rock that will make them fall.*

They stumble by disobeying the word, as is their destiny.

You are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, a people of his own,
so that you may announce the praises” of him
who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Alleluia [JN 14:6](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the way, the truth and the life, says the Lord;
no one comes to the Father, except through me.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel [JN 14:1-12](#)

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.
You have faith in God; have faith also in me.
In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.
If there were not,
would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?
And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come back again and take you to myself,
so that where I am you also may be.
Where I am going you know the way.”

Thomas said to him,

“Master, we do not know where you are going;
how can we know the way?”

Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me.

If you know me, then you will also know my Father.

From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said to him,

“Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you for so long a time
and you still do not know me, Philip?

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?

The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own.

The Father who dwells in me is doing his works.

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me,
or else, believe because of the works themselves.

Amen, amen, I say to you,

whoever believes in me will do the works that I do,

and will do greater ones than these,

because I am going to the Father.”

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

Happy Mother's Day to you all.

My hope, for all of you who are mothers, is that you can be with your children this day. If not, I hope that you can at least connect with your children via a screen or a telephone call.

Today we celebrate those among us who "gave us to the light," as our Mexican families here at St. Leo's say so beautifully. We remember the women who combed our hair and made sure we brushed those molars "way in the back." We remember those who put a bandage on our bleeding fingers and dried our tears with her apron. We remember the women who cooked us pancakes in the morning and had a snack ready for us when we returned home from school. We remember our moms who helped us with long division and ever-so-patiently reminded us that the rule for spelling "receive" is "i" before "e" except after "c."

But, today, I want to remember all kinds of moms.

Let's remember those moms around us who haven't had enough work during the pandemic. I know one mom here in Sonoma who needs extra work cleaning houses. She wants to buy a car – not for herself, but for her son. Her youngest son is on the honor roll at Sonoma Valley High School and wants to go to Santa Rosa JC in the Fall. He needs a car if he is going to get to class on time. She needs more work.

Last year, on Mother's Day, I asked you to remember moms who get no paid sick leave. They were asking, "can I afford to stay home if I have a fever?" They were also afraid that, every time they went to work, they might catch the virus from one of their coworkers (who also had no paid sick leave) and bring Covid home to their children. Back in the days of ancient Greece, Thucydides said, "The powerful will do what they want and the weak will do what they must." This was true of lots of mothers during the pandemic. It will be true after the pandemic as well. Every mother's child should grow up in a society that is less addicted to competitive cruelty. The plight of working mothers might be a good place to start.

Most of all, I want to remember the mothers who have confessed their sins to me over this last year, when we were all very much under the stress of the pandemic. I'm thinking of the mothers who have had their own little meltdowns with their children.

Every child comes into the light of this world with needs that seem to be infinite. Putting their own needs first, of course, is how children survive. Learning how to put your own needs aside in order to attend to the needs of another is a life-long challenge. Perhaps this is just a fancy way of talking about what it means to grow up. But we need to appreciate how difficult this is and why it takes children so long to do this. For that matter, we need

to realize that, even after we are “grown up,” putting our own needs aside and attending to the needs of another is still a challenge.

Mother’s are not unique in their responsibility to put their own needs aside in order to attend to the needs of another. We all have this responsibility – even if you’re not a grownup yet. Mothers are just a particularly dramatic example of this great vocation of service to those around us.

This is why I want to honor mothers today: a child’s needs might be infinite, but every woman who gives a child to the light is only a human being whose ability to put her own needs aside in order to attend to the infinite needs of her children is limited. Even when it’s the mom – not the kid – who is having the meltdown, something important is taking place.

It’s this: the Mystery of God is being revealed in human weakness.

This takes us, once again, to the cross and to the core of Christian faith. God is revealed not in the strength of those who are powerful, but in the humanity of those who are weak. This is a difficult and, sometimes at least, a dreadful truth. It is also a truth revealed in the little dramas of life that most people pay no attention to at all.

“Go brush your teeth and put on your pajamas! ... Right now! I mean it! I’m not going to tell you again!”

To all you women who have given a child to the light: I hope you can be with your little ones today, no matter how old they may have become. You are a blessing to us in ways that you might not fully understand.

Happy Mother’s Day.

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?