

HOMILY FOR THE TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 9 October 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: 144

Reading I 2 Kgs 5:14-17

Naaman went down and plunged into the Jordan seven times
at the word of Elisha, the man of God.
His flesh became again like the flesh of a little child,
and he was clean of his leprosy.

Naaman returned with his whole retinue to the man of God.
On his arrival he stood before Elisha and said,
"Now I know that there is no God in all the earth,
except in Israel.
Please accept a gift from your servant."

Elisha replied, "As the LORD lives whom I serve, I will not take it;"
and despite Naaman's urging, he still refused.
Naaman said: "If you will not accept,
please let me, your servant, have two mule-loads of earth,
for I will no longer offer holocaust or sacrifice
to any other god except to the LORD."

Responsorial Psalm Ps 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

R. (cf. 2b) The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.
Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done wondrous deeds;
his right hand has won victory for him,
his holy arm.

R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.
The LORD has made his salvation known:
in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice.
He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness
toward the house of Israel.

R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.
All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation by our God.
Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands:
break into song; sing praise.

R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

Reading II 2 Tm 2:8-13

Beloved:

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David:
such is my gospel, for which I am suffering,
even to the point of chains, like a criminal.

But the word of God is not chained.

Therefore, I bear with everything for the sake of those who are
chosen,

so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus,
together with eternal glory.

This saying is trustworthy:

If we have died with him
we shall also live with him;
if we persevere
we shall also reign with him.

But if we deny him
he will deny us.

If we are unfaithful
he remains faithful,
for he cannot deny himself.

Alleluia 1 Thes 5:18

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

In all circumstances, give thanks,
for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Lk 17:11-19

As Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem,
he traveled through Samaria and Galilee.

As he was entering a village, ten lepers met him.

They stood at a distance from him and raised their voices, saying,
"Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!"

And when he saw them, he said,

"Go show yourselves to the priests."

As they were going they were cleansed.
And one of them, realizing he had been healed,
returned, glorifying God in a loud voice;
and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.
He was a Samaritan.
Jesus said in reply,
"Ten were cleansed, were they not?
Where are the other nine?
Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?"
Then he said to him, "Stand up and go;
your faith has saved you."

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

Last week, I preached about the preparations for the Synod on Synodality that will be held in Rome this time next year. Pope Francis has asked Catholics all around the world to come together and reflect on the future of the Church and the Church's service to the world.

This week, I want to do what Pope Francis is asking of us by reflecting on what is a difficult subject for some in our community: the Church's responsibility to welcome LGBTQ+ people, to recognize their dignity as human beings, and to accompany them as they accompany the rest of us on our one journey of faith.

Let me begin with a story.

When I lived in Hawaii, I met a man who from Kalaupapa, the leper colony on the island of Moloka'i. As a child, a doctor diagnosed Kawika ("David") with Hansen's Disease. Then, the Board of Health for the Country of Honolulu officially declared that he was a leper and sent him into quarantine at Kalaupapa.

I am choosing my words carefully. Kawika was "diagnosed" with Hansen's disease, but he was "declared" a leper. Hansen's disease is a medical condition resulting from a bacterial infection. Like AIDS, Hansen's disease is hard to contract. Leprosy, on the other hand, is a social stigma, not a medical condition. Kawika didn't contract leprosy, he was *made into a leper* by being forced to abandon his family and move to the colony of lepers at Kalaupapa.

A while back, Susan Sontag wrote a fine book entitled *Illness as Metaphor*. Some illnesses, like AIDS, are more than medical conditions. We have made some illnesses into metaphors for something wrong with our humanity.

This is certainly true of leprosy. More than a medical condition, leprosy is a metaphor for people who are "unclean." Leprosy means pollution and contagion. Someone with Hansen's disease needs treatment. Anyone with leprosy is to be spurned.

Illness as metaphor can be seen in the Gospel today. Jesus enters a village as he makes his way through Samaria. Ten lepers meet him and keep their distance.

This was to be expected. Anyone declared a leper was required to dwell outside of town, in the margins, and avoid contact with people. To be a leper meant much more than having a problem with your skin. It meant you had a problem with your soul.

They stood at a distance from him and raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!"

These ten human beings want to be cured of the bacterial infection that afflicts their skin. They also want to be freed from the loneliness imposed on them by being ostracized.

There are no more lepers confined to Kalaupapa today. The leper colony on Moloka'i is now an historical site operated by the Federal Park Service. And yet, we still are making people into lepers. This is true in our country, and it is true in our Church. We still declare some people unclean and confine them to the margins. We still require that some people live outside our village.

In preparation for the Synod on Synodality, the bishops of the local churches of the USA are listening to their people as they express their concerns for the present and their hopes for the future. Now the bishops have produced a summary of what the people of our churches are saying that bears careful reading.

The document, which is being shared with Catholics around the world, recognizes the polarization of opposing camps within the American church and even the opposition of not a few American bishops to the vision of Pope Francis. Then the report switches from polarization to marginalization in our local churches.

Many people in the local churches of the USA are talking about LGBTQ+ people who are

“marginalized because circumstances in their own lives are experienced as impediments to full participation in the life of the Church.”

In other words, too often, we make Gay people into lepers.

The bishops’ report tells us poignantly that some families

“feel torn between remaining in the church and supporting their loved ones.”

The report also says something dear to the heart of Pope Francis:

“People noted that the Church seems to prioritize doctrine over people, rules, and regulations over lived reality. People want the Church to be a home for the wounded and broken, not an institution for the perfect. They want the Church to meet people where they are, wherever they are, and walk with them rather than judging them; to build real relationships through care and authenticity, not superiority.”

The bishops’ report also says something of importance to us at Saint Leo’s.

“In order to become a more welcoming Church there is a deep need for ongoing discernment of the whole Church on how best to accompany our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters.”

We can do this at Saint Leo’s. We have members of our community ready to give leadership in this regard right now.

In fact, an initial step for this work is being planned. We promise to keep you in the loop.

I hope you will commit yourself to this work of the Church.

We are not an institution for the perfect, but a place where marginalized people can find a home.

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?