

## HOMILY FOR DAILY MASS

Monday, 23 March 2020

- 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

Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Lectionary: 244

#### Reading 1 [IS 65:17-21](#)

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Thus says the LORD:

Lo, I am about to create new heavens  
and a new earth;

The things of the past shall not be remembered  
or come to mind.

Instead, there shall always be rejoicing and happiness  
in what I create;

For I create Jerusalem to be a joy  
and its people to be a delight;

I will rejoice in Jerusalem  
and exult in my people.

No longer shall the sound of weeping be heard there,  
or the sound of crying;

No longer shall there be in it  
an infant who lives but a few days,  
or an old man who does not round out his full lifetime;  
He dies a mere youth who reaches but a hundred years,  
and he who fails of a hundred shall be thought accursed.

They shall live in the houses they build,  
and eat the fruit of the vineyards they plant.

#### Responsorial Psalm [30:2 AND 4, 5-6, 11-12A AND 13B](#)

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R. (2a) I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.

I will extol you, O LORD, for you drew me clear

and did not let my enemies rejoice over me.  
O LORD, you brought me up from the nether world;  
you preserved me from among those going down into the pit.

**R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.**

Sing praise to the LORD, you his faithful ones,  
and give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger lasts but a moment;  
a lifetime, his good will.

At nightfall, weeping enters in,  
but with the dawn, rejoicing.

**R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.**

“Hear, O LORD, and have pity on me;

O LORD, be my helper.”

You changed my mourning into dancing;

O LORD, my God, forever will I give you thanks.

**R. I will praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me.**

#### **Verse Before The Gospel [AM 5:14](#)**

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Seek good and not evil so that you may live,  
and the LORD will be with you.

#### **Gospel [JN 4:43-54](#)**

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At that time Jesus left [Samaria] for Galilee.

For Jesus himself testified

that a prophet has no honor in his native place.

When he came into Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him,

since they had seen all he had done in Jerusalem at the feast;

for they themselves had gone to the feast.

Then he returned to Cana in Galilee,

where he had made the water wine.

Now there was a royal official whose son was ill in Capernaum.

When he heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea,

he went to him and asked him to come down

and heal his son, who was near death.

Jesus said to him,

“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe.”

The royal official said to him,

“Sir, come down before my child dies.”

Jesus said to him, "You may go; your son will live."  
The man believed what Jesus said to him and left.  
While the man was on his way back,  
his slaves met him and told him that his boy would live.  
He asked them when he began to recover.  
They told him,  
"The fever left him yesterday, about one in the afternoon."  
The father realized that just at that time Jesus had said to him,  
"Your son will live,"  
and he and his whole household came to believe.  
Now this was the second sign Jesus did  
when he came to Galilee from Judea.

## **PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS**

Our hometown, Sonoma, is not yet two centuries years old. That's not very old when you compare it with a town like Rome, which has been around for at least twenty-five centuries. Sonoma, however, has something very important in common with Rome. Like the Eternal City, Sonoma has a *forum* – only we call it the Plaza.

When Padre José Altimira built the northern-most of the Franciscan missions here in the Valley of the Moon, he made sure that there was a plaza in front of the church, just like any respectable city in the ancient Mediterranean world. Altimira knew that if Sonoma were to become a durable city, a city where the Gospel could be preached and where we might want to raise our children, then Sonoma would need a big empty space in its center. In his own way, I suppose, Padre José understood that a *city* is more like a verb than a noun. Cities happen when we leave the outskirts and make our way to the center in order to talk about politics and growing grapes, recipes for chicken cacciatore and the latest gossip about our neighbors. Cities happen when we have a center to go to in order to come together with the aim of making the life we share a little better. A city is a community, not just a cluster of buildings and Padre José understood that a community needs a plaza where the life of the city can take place.

I like this expression, "take place." If a city is to be a community, it has to "take place." This is what I mean when I say "a city is really a verb." By coming together as a community, we are taking a place and making it into a place that is our own.

I think the same can be said of the Church. Like a city, the Church is really a verb. Why do we keep talking about it as if it were a noun? The Church is something we must *do*, not something we can take for granted like something sitting on a shelf. The Church is most certainly not just a pretty building. If cities need churches, then we must also say that the Church needs cities, places where community takes place. Padre José understood that Sonoma would be incomplete without its Plaza.

I thought of Padre José when I drove around the Plaza the other day. As you would expect, our Plaza is pretty empty during these days of separation. I searched in vain for children feeding the ducks and families having a picnic by the World War I memorial. If Sonoma is a verb, we are at a very low ebb right now. The emptiness of the Plaza bears silent witness to this sad state of affairs.

With this lonesome feeling in mind, I want to reflect on the first reading for mass today. It's from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. And it's about a city that, in Isaiah's day, was forlorn – more forlorn than Sonoma is today.

The city in question is Jerusalem. Over the centuries, the inhabitants of this city have had plenty of reasons to feel forlorn. When the Book of Isaiah (or more precisely, this last part of the Book of Isaiah) was written, King Nebuchadnezzar had already marched into Jerusalem, ransacked the city and carted off its people into exile. Before he was done, he went out of his way to destroy the Temple – the great sign that God was dwelling with his people in their city.

No doubt there will come a day when the Golden Gate Bridge no longer glides gracefully through the fog, connecting the Marin Headlands with San Francisco. I just hope I am not alive when this day comes. The Jews of Isaiah's day had witnessed more than that. Their Temple had been razed and their city destroyed. And they were witnesses to this loss. The people weren't practicing "social distancing" like we are. They were in exile.

So, try to imagine the beauty of Isaiah's poetry for the exiles in Babylon:

Thus says the Lord:  
For I create Jerusalem to be a joy  
and its people to be a delight;  
I will rejoice in Jerusalem  
and exult in my people.  
No longer shall the sound of weeping be heard there,  
or the sound of crying;

I like to imagine that Padre José Altimira, as he was laying out the ground plan for Mission San Francisco Solano and its plaza two hundred years ago, might have been thinking of what the Prophet Isaiah said of Jerusalem so long before his time. God created Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight. So also, God created Sonoma to be a joy and its people a delight as well. In this time of separation, don't lose track of this truth about of city and its lovely plaza.

If you drive by the Plaza during this difficult time of separation, think of José Altimira and his hopes for Sonoma. And when you think of Padre José, remember the beautiful poetry of the Prophet Isaiah,

Thus says the LORD:  
Lo, I am about to create new heavens  
and a new earth;  
The things of the past shall not be remembered  
or come to mind.  
Instead, there shall always be rejoicing and happiness  
in what I create;

Especially in this time of separation and “sheltering in place,” we need to take hope in the fact that the Lord is “about to create new heavens and a new earth.” The day will come when the Plaza is full once again with kids feeding the ducks and old and young alike strolling under the trees.

### **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?