

## HOMILY FOR SIXTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 26 July 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

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 109

#### Reading 1 [1 KGS 3:5, 7-12](#)

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The LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night.

God said, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you."

Solomon answered:

"O LORD, my God, you have made me, your servant, king  
to succeed my father David;

but I am a mere youth, not knowing at all how to act.

I serve you in the midst of the people whom you have chosen,  
a people so vast that it cannot be numbered or counted.

Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart  
to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong.

For who is able to govern this vast people of yours?"

The LORD was pleased that Solomon made this request.

So God said to him:

"Because you have asked for this—

not for a long life for yourself,

nor for riches,

nor for the life of your enemies,

but for understanding so that you may know what is right—

I do as you requested.

I give you a heart so wise and understanding

that there has never been anyone like you up to now,

and after you there will come no one to equal you."

## Responsorial Psalm [PS 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130](#)

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R. (97a) **Lord, I love your commands.**

I have said, O LORD, that my part  
is to keep your words.

The law of your mouth is to me more precious  
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

R. **Lord, I love your commands.**

Let your kindness comfort me  
according to your promise to your servants.

Let your compassion come to me that I may live,  
for your law is my delight.

R. **Lord, I love your commands.**

For I love your command  
more than gold, however fine.

For in all your precepts I go forward;  
every false way I hate.

R. **Lord, I love your commands.**

Wonderful are your decrees;  
therefore I observe them.

The revelation of your words sheds light,  
giving understanding to the simple.

R. **Lord, I love your commands.**

## Reading 2 [ROM 8:28-30](#)

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Brothers and sisters:

We know that all things work for good for those who love God,  
who are called according to his purpose.

For those he foreknew he also predestined  
to be conformed to the image of his Son,  
so that he might be the firstborn  
among many brothers and sisters.

And those he predestined he also called;  
and those he called he also justified;  
and those he justified he also glorified.

## Alleluia [CF. MT 11:25](#)

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R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth;

for you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom.  
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

### Gospel [MT 13:44-52](#) OR [13:44-46](#)

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Jesus said to his disciples:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field,  
which a person finds and hides again,  
and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant  
searching for fine pearls.

When he finds a pearl of great price,  
he goes and sells all that he has and buys it.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea,  
which collects fish of every kind.

When it is full they haul it ashore  
and sit down to put what is good into buckets.

What is bad they throw away.

Thus it will be at the end of the age.

The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous  
and throw them into the fiery furnace,  
where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.

“Do you understand all these things?”

They answered, “Yes.”

And he replied,

“Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven  
is like the head of a household  
who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old.”

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

I have a friend who is a fireman in Los Angeles. Some years ago, he told me a story. It’s a love story with a happy ending and I want to share it with you.

I hope you will remember that ten years ago last January there was a terrible earthquake in Haiti. I won’t give you any statistics, but one of the poorest corners of the Western Hemisphere was brought low by the horrific shifting of tectonic plates in the Caribbean.

On that terrible day, after the earth finally stopped shaking, a man in Port-au-Prince immediately set out to find his wife. I don’t remember the man’s name. Let’s call him François. His wife’s name (which I do remember) was Jeanette.

Jeanette worked in a bank. When Francois arrived at the ruin that used to be the bank, he was overwhelmed with grief. Even still, he stayed at the site, carefully picking through the rubble, and listening for a voice. He did this for six long days. (I wonder when his hope for rescuing his wife turned into the despair of merely retrieving her body.)

On the sixth day, one of the rescue workers heard a small voice rising out of the darkness.

*Silence, si il vous plait!*

It was Jeanette and she was alive.

Just then, a rescue team from the Los Angeles Fire Department came along. (This is how my friend in LA, who works for LAFD, came to know this story and pass it on to me). LAFD went to work and Jeanette was back in the sunshine after about three hours. There was hardly a scratch on her, although she was weak and very, very dehydrated.

As Jeanette was taken out of the darkness and into the light, she began to sing a beloved church hymn, *Beni soit le nom du Seigneur* (Blessed be the Name of the Lord). Everybody joined in. It's a very beautiful hymn and everybody, except I presume the guys from LAFD, knew the tune.

Some of the lyrics go like this:

I will bless the name of the Lord.  
Your faithfulness shall be my shield  
I shall sing to you day by day...  
Jesus is there for us, today and always  
I will bless thy name all my life  
Blessed is the name of the Lord.

There was no ambulance, so Francois drove Jeanette home in his car.

Even as I rejoice that Jeanette was rescued alive, I want to lift-up François to you today. He is giving us an example of what the Church sees as a life well-lived. Our brother François is not far at all from the Kingdom of God.

This leads me to the Gospel.

For the third Sunday in a row, Jesus is giving us parables to help us imagine the Kingdom of God. Today, he tells us that

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field,  
which a person finds and hides again,  
and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Then Jesus gives us yet another parable –

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant  
searching for fine pearls.  
When he finds a pearl of great price,  
he goes and sells all that he has and buys it.

In both of these parables (which are two of my favorites), someone gives up everything they have in order to gain something of incomparable value.

And this is why I say that François is not far at all from the Kingdom of God.

François is truly blessed by God. He has been given Jeanette, whom he loves deeply, to cherish and treasure. Like the merchant in Jesus' parable, François knows that he has found "a pearl of great price" in his beloved Jeanette. In wisdom worthy of King Solomon (check out the first reading), François has given up "all he has" for this pearl.

Our spiritual tradition also teaches us that we should be wise and cagy when it comes to giving up all in order to gain what is of incomparable value. Loving another unconditionally often leads to a confrontation with our human fragility.

Love makes us vulnerable to loss.

François shows us that, for those who have been willing to give up everything for the "pearl of great price," earthquakes are all the more terrifying. In the shaking of the earth and in the general tumult of the world, our "pear of great price" can become a "treasure buried in a field."

This is what happened to François. The earth beneath his feet began to shake and when it finally stopped shaking, he set out in search of his treasure that had suddenly been buried in a field.

And yet, the Church holds up François as an example of a life well-lived. I repeat: our brother François is not far at all from the Kingdom of God. François has not chosen power or prestige. He has given up everything for his beloved Jeanette, a "pearl of great price." Compared to a loveless life, his life is endowed with the God-given beauty of our fragile humanity.

Don't be afraid to sell all in order to live such a life. Remember what the Haitians sang,

*Beni soit le nom de Seigneur.*

### **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?