

HOMILY FOR THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 4 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

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

I am praying that you all have a happy and safe 4th of July weekend. Some might say that we Americans have little to celebrate given all the woes that plague our country at this time. There is certainly a lot of anger today.

Some people are angry about having to wear masks. This anger is hard to understand. Wearing a mask is not about our “freedom.” We should be wearing masks because we have a responsibility to contribute to the common good by protecting our community.

Some people – lots of people – are angry about the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. This anger is easy to understand. However, I think we need to understand our anger correctly. Moreover, we need to be angry carefully. We need to understand our anger in light of our Christian faith. This is what this homily is about.

Bryan Massingale is a Catholic theologian (teaching at Fordham University) and a Catholic priest. Bryan is also an African American who has his own stories to tell about racism (both the genteel kind and the non-so-genteel kind). He also has some very wise things to say about anger today that come out of our Catholic heritage. Bryan recently wrote about the sin of anger in the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas and what this means for our angry country today.

Here is what Bryan said about Saint Thomas and anger.

First, Saint Thomas says that anger is one of the seven deadly sins. Anger must be included with pride, greed, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth as a vice that can entomb us, spiritually speaking. But once Saint Thomas recognizes that anger as a deadly sin, he starts to make some clever distinctions – which is what you might expect from a Medieval theologian like Thomas Aquinas.

Second, Thomas says that there are three ways of committing the deadly sin of anger.

First, we can commit the sin of anger by “excess.” This means that we are committing a sin when anger becomes uncontrolled wrath, or what another of my friends calls “getting rage-y.”

Second, Saint Thomas says that we can commit the deadly sin of anger by means of “misdirection.” This happens when we direct our anger at the wrong object. Instead of dealing with the real reason for our anger, we “take it out” on an innocent person.

Sinning by an excess of anger is happening a good deal these days. Sinning by misdirecting our anger is happening a lot too and it happens more often than most of us would like to think. Don’t do this. It’s a sin.

But Saint Thomas says that there is a third way that we can commit the deadly sin of anger. In addition to excess and misdirection, we can commit this sin by “deficiency” as well.

Deficiency means that we refuse to get angry when anger is what is required of us in the face of injustice. This is a teaching that is both useful and practical. This teaching is also challenging. Certainly, it is a challenge to me. Anger can be many things. Often it is a destructive force in our lives. But sometimes, it is a passion that moves the will to seek justice. Anger that moves us to seek justice is not to be avoided. It is a gift from God and a sign of the working of the Holy Spirit in our soul. This gift must be welcomed with gratitude and, I hasten to add, with humility.

Trying to use anger to accomplish justice is tricky. The “righteous” anger that moves the will to seek justice, as Saint Thomas understands it, very easily becomes “self-righteous” anger. I can tell you from experience that self-righteous anger never ends well. As I have said many times at mass, “The anger of the creature cannot hope to fulfill the justice of the Creator.”

And yet, we have to recognize that, at important turning points in our lives with one another here on this earth, anger is given to us so as to move the will to seek justice. To refuse this gift is to commit one of the deadly sins – not by excess or by misdirection, but rather by deficiency.

In the first reading for this mass, the Prophet Zechariah paints a picture of a future king of Israel entering Jerusalem seated on an ass.

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.

Zechariah may have witnessed the triumphant entry of King Darius of the Persians into Jerusalem, which he had conquered about five hundred years before the time of Jesus. I think it safe to say that Darius entered Jerusalem the way Napoleon marched his troops through the *Arc de Triumphe* in Paris. This must have been an impressive sight.

But in Zechariah's prophetic vision, Israel's messiah will not be like Darius or Napoleon. He won't march triumphantly into Jerusalem at the end of a military parade. He will be meek, riding on an ass, not a general's warhorse.

For centuries, Christians have read this passage from Zechariah in light of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Jesus is a king, but his entry into Jerusalem is no triumphant military parade.

I think it is helpful to remember what Jesus does after he enters Jerusalem. Jesus gets angry. He clears out the moneychangers in the Temple. Jesus is meek and humble, but he was not afraid to get angry on occasion. He gets angry with Peter, with the Pharisees, and with moneychangers.

So on this 4th of July, our Christian faith places before us a double challenge. First, our faith requires us to be angry. The sin of racism requires this of us. But we must be very careful about how we use our anger. Anger is only justified if it is in service to justice. We must never lose sight of the only justifiable purpose of anger. Anger is given to us to move the will to create a world when justice brings peace.

As Zechariah says of Israel's king,

He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim,
and the [war] 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.

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?