

## HOMILY FOR THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 29 August 2021

- 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: 131

#### Reading I Is 50:5-9a

The Lord GOD opens my ear that I may hear;  
and I have not rebelled,  
have not turned back.

I gave my back to those who beat me,  
my cheeks to those who plucked my beard;  
my face I did not shield  
from buffets and spitting.

The Lord GOD is my help,  
therefore I am not disgraced;  
I have set my face like flint,  
knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

He is near who upholds my right;  
if anyone wishes to oppose me,  
let us appear together.

Who disputes my right?  
Let that man confront me.

See, the Lord GOD is my help;  
who will prove me wrong?

#### Responsorial Psalm Ps 116:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

R. (9) I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.  
or:

R. Alleluia.

I love the LORD because he has heard  
my voice in supplication,  
Because he has inclined his ear to me  
the day I called.

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.  
or:

R. Alleluia.

The cords of death encompassed me;

the snares of the netherworld seized upon me;  
I fell into distress and sorrow,  
And I called upon the name of the LORD,  
“O LORD, save my life!”  
R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.  
or:  
R. Alleluia.  
Gracious is the LORD and just;  
yes, our God is merciful.  
The LORD keeps the little ones;  
I was brought low, and he saved me.  
R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.  
or:  
R. Alleluia.  
For he has freed my soul from death,  
my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.  
I shall walk before the LORD  
in the land of the living.  
R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.  
or:  
R. Alleluia.

**Reading II Jas 2:14-18**

What good is it, my brothers and sisters,  
if someone says he has faith but does not have works?  
Can that faith save him?  
If a brother or sister has nothing to wear  
and has no food for the day,  
and one of you says to them,  
“Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well, ”  
but you do not give them the necessities of the body,  
what good is it?  
So also faith of itself,  
if it does not have works, is dead.  
Indeed someone might say,  
“You have faith and I have works.”  
Demonstrate your faith to me without works,  
and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.

**Alleluia Gal 6:14**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.  
May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord  
through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.  
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

### **Gospel Mk 8:27-35**

Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Christ." Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."

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

Almost all of us can remember where we were that morning.

I was in Los Angeles. I awoke about 5:30 am and turned on my radio in the hope of catching a little news. I had a busy day ahead of me. The day before, Monday, September 10, 2001, I had welcomed a group of Buddhists from Japan to my university.

There were about ten of them, if I remember correctly. These Buddhists had come to Los Angeles as my guests in a spirit of dialogue and collaboration. My colleagues in the Theology Department were eager to meet the Buddhists who had come from so far. We were to spend several days learning from one another in a dialogue about Christian faith and Buddhist practice. I was excited to think that several of the Buddhists were interested in the Second Vatican Council

and how Catholic theologians were contributing to the renewal of the Church. (Take it from me: Buddhists need renewal too).

As I lay in bed, the announcer on the radio suddenly said, "Reports are coming in that a plane has struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center."

At the time, I remembered that a prop-plane had nicked the Empire State Building back in the 1940s. For some reason, I got up and turned on the TV. Minutes later, the South Tower was struck. Minutes after that, the Federal Government shut down LAX.

My guests from Japan were stranded.

I could not understand why anyone would drive a jumbo jet into a skyscraper. But I was quite clear about one thing: the Lord had entrusted these Buddhist friends into my hands for their safe keeping.

A little later that morning, I got in to see the dean of my college to discuss our responsibility for our guests. I told him: "I have no idea how long the delegation from Japan will be stranded here."

My dean assured me that he would make available whatever extra funds we needed to keep our guests in their hotel for the duration. I remember asking him, "Do you have the money?" He said, "No, I don't. But you worry about Buddhists. I'll worry about money."

Still later that morning, I heard that there would be a mass celebrated in the university chapel. I called Campus Ministry and told them about the Buddhists. Seats were reserved for them in the front, very near the altar. At the beginning of mass, Father Bob Lawton, the President of Loyola Marymount University, turned to the Buddhists and expressed his gratitude that they had come to be with our community at this difficult time.

I also remember the response to the psalm that day.

"Shepherd me Oh Lord, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life."

One of the Buddhists whispered a translation into Japanese and there was a murmur among my Buddhist friends. How does this ancient Hebrew poem fall on the ears of a Buddhist, far from home, caught up in an event that, even that day, we all knew would change the history of the world?

On my way home, at the end of a long and difficult day, I drove past the gas station where I went to have my oil changed. The owner of the station was a guy from Egypt. Eduard was a Copt – a member of the ancient Christian community in Egypt. He kept a holy card of the Blessed Virgin in his office.

“Eduard, are you okay?”

In reply, Eduard said,

“Father, someone threatened me this afternoon. I guess they think I’m a Muslim.”

The following Sunday, I celebrated mass at the parish in the Little Tokyo district of Los Angeles. Joe Nakamura was at mass that day. In late December of 1941, when he was about 20 years old, Joe was arrested with the rest of his family and “evacuated” to Manzanar (or maybe Tule Lake or Poston). He was later released from camp so he could enlist in the US Army and serve as a translator in the Pacific. I think Joe got a lot of medals for his service to his country.

Angie, Joe’s wife, was at mass too. Vince and Agnes Doi were there. I remember seeing Bernadette Nishimura and Teresita Okita as well. I looked into their faces and tried to imagine them as youngsters during the War in the internment camps. At that moment I realized how much I had come to love them all as their priest over the years.

I didn’t mince words during my homily.

I told them about my stranded Buddhist friends from Japan and I told them about my mechanic, the Coptic Christian from Egypt, and the threats he had received.

Then I said to Joe and Angie, Vince, Agnes, Bernadette, Teresita and their kids and their grandkids,

“Our country has been attacked.  
Now, once again, America is frightened.  
No one knows better than you do what America is capable of doing when it is frightened.  
The time has come for us to put our faith to work in building bridges.”

My Buddhist friends taught me and my colleagues wonderful things during their visit to my university the week the world changed for us all, twenty years ago. My friends taught me that the Buddha’s *Dharma* (teaching) is not something that you believe. The *Dharma* is something that you do.

The same is true of the Gospel: our faith is not real until it becomes the way we actually live our lives.

The second reading today puts it quite starkly:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters,  
if someone says he has faith but does not have works?  
Can that faith save him?

Much has happened since 9/11. My Buddhist friends have long ago returned to Japan. Eduard is okay. A lot of horrible things have happened as well.

Put your faith to work: build bridges.

### **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?

