

HOMILY FOR THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 11 July 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: 107

Reading I Jer 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds

who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture,
says the LORD.

Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel,
against the shepherds who shepherd my people:
You have scattered my sheep and driven them away.

You have not cared for them,

but I will take care to punish your evil deeds.

I myself will gather the remnant of my flock
from all the lands to which I have driven them

and bring them back to their meadow;

there they shall increase and multiply.

I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them
so that they need no longer fear and tremble;

and none shall be missing, says the LORD.

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD,
when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David;

as king he shall reign and govern wisely,

he shall do what is just and right in the land.

In his days Judah shall be saved,

Israel shall dwell in security.

This is the name they give him:

“The LORD our justice.”

Responsorial Psalm Ps 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6

R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

In verdant pastures he gives me repose;

beside restful waters he leads me;

he refreshes my soul.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

He guides me in right paths

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk in the dark valley

I fear no evil; for you are at my side

with your rod and your staff

that give me courage.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

You spread the table before me

in the sight of my foes;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Only goodness and kindness follow me

all the days of my life;

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

for years to come.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Reading II Eph 2:13-18

Brothers and sisters:

In Christ Jesus you who once were far off

have become near by the blood of Christ.

For he is our peace, he who made both one

and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh,

abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims,

that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two,

thus establishing peace,

and might reconcile both with God,

in one body, through the cross,

putting that enmity to death by it.

He came and preached peace to you who were far off

and peace to those who were near,

for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Alleluia Jn 10:27

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord;

I know them, and they follow me.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 6:30-34

The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat. So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place. People saw them leaving and many came to know about it. They hastened there on foot from all the towns and arrived at the place before them. When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

Today, I want to sing the praises of Juan de Lorenzana O.P.

Father Juan was the prior of the Dominican community in Lima, Peru, in the early 1600s, when Peru was still very much a Spanish colony. I hold this priest up to you because, as head of the Dominican community in Lima, he accepted the vows of a boy named Martin, making him a member of the Dominican house in Lima.

To do this, Father Juan had to break the law.

There were numerous problems. Martin was born out of wedlock. His father was a Spanish nobleman who never acknowledged his son. In addition, Martin's mother was part Inca and part African. This was a problem too. As part of its program for keeping control of the Church within its empire, the Spanish government would not allow people of mixed race to become members of religious orders.

Admitting Martin to the Dominican community wasn't popular with a number of the priests either. What was Father Superior doing letting this illegitimate "mulatto dog" into our community?

But Father Juan discerned what the Gospel demanded and did what he thought best for the Church. Brother Martin made his vows before Father Juan and became a Dominican brother.

The young friar did wonderful things for the people of Lima. He founded a residence for indigenous children orphaned by the smallpox epidemic, and established a hospital for those who were dying in the streets. His dedication to the poor and needy became legendary. Pope John XXIII canonized Martin de Porres a saint in 1962, during the Second Vatican Council.

My purpose in this homily, however, is not to sing the praises of the saint. I want to praise the Dominican Friar, Juan de Lorenzana, who broke the law in letting Brother Martin take his vows. Father Juan saw that fidelity to the Gospel and dedication to the Church's mission were more important than protecting the power, the prestige and the privileges of the clergy.

Protecting the power, the prestige and the privilege of the clergy is nothing new. Take a look at the first reading. The Lord is not happy with the High Priests of the Temple in Jerusalem. They were making a comfortable living catering to the needs of the rich, even as they placed burden upon burden on those who count for little in their society. They enjoyed a monopoly on performing expensive rituals in the Temple for people that counted.

Speaking through the Prophet Jeremiah, the Lord God makes clear he is not pleased with the clergy or their wealthy benefactors.

Woe to the shepherds
who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture,
says the LORD.
Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel,
against the shepherds who shepherd my people:
You have scattered my sheep and driven them away.
You have not cared for them,
but I will take care to punish your evil deeds.

Jeremiah was not the only prophet unpopular with the clergy and the nobility. The Prophet Amos had the same problem. In the first reading last week, the High Priest in Bethel, a real establishment guy, tells Amos, God's prophet, to stop meddling in the affairs of the nobility and the clergy.

Amaziah, priest of Bethel, said to Amos,
"Off with you, visionary, flee to the land of Judah!
There earn your bread by prophesying,
but never again prophesy in Bethel;
for it is the king's sanctuary and a royal temple."

In allowing Saint Martin de Porres to take his vows as a Dominican, Father Juan had to decide that the Church's mission and fidelity to the Gospel were more important than protecting the power, the prestige and the privileges of the clergy. The Catholic Church is faced with a similar decision right now in its history.

We are only fifty years into implementing the Second Vatican Council. This means that the Church has just begun to integrate the vision of the Council into its life and practices. We have many years ahead of us in this project and we need to move ahead with prudence and

discernment. We are faced with a choice much like the choice Father Juan, the Dominican Superior, had to make in regard to Martin de Porres.

What is more important? Fidelity to the Gospel and the Church's mission or protecting the privileges of those in power?

Pope Francis has done a great job in laying out the alternatives facing us.

The Holy Spirit, according to Pope Francis, is inviting the us to put aside the ancient temptation of "clericalism."

Clericalism arises when we think of ministry as a power to be exercised rather than a service to be given generously out of faith, hope and love.

Clericalism leads us to believe that we belong to a group that has all the answers and no longer needs to listen.

Clericalism arises when we think that Holy Orders, not Baptism, is the sacrament through which the Holy Spirit calls us to ministry and, indeed, to holiness.

Clericalism leads us to think that the Eucharist is a reward for good behavior, not nourishment for those who hunger and thirst for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Clericalism is what afflicts priests who want to say "Father's mass" with his back to the People of God in a language no one speaks any more.

Clericalism also leads us to think of the Church as an island of purity that is lost in a world that is defiled by sin.

I also have to say, along with Pope Francis, that clericalism lies at the heart of why children have been hurt in the Catholic Church and why the clergy, at times, have failed in their obligation to protect them.

Clericalism is not a problem that is restricted to the clergy. Clericalism is a form of spiritual despair that afflicts the whole Church. All of us are touched by it. All of us must help one another to resist it through the grace of God. This has always been the case, going all the way back to the days of Jeremiah and Amos and the other Prophets of Israel.

Pope Francis puts the issue very succinctly:

"Clericalism is a perversion and is the root of many evils in the Church: we must humbly ask forgiveness for this and above all create the conditions so that it is not repeated."

Pope Francis is clear about what the problem is. He is also confident about where the Holy Spirit is leading us at this moment in the Church's history.

The Spirit is calling us to come together in order that we might listen to one another and, in doing so, discern where the Holy Spirit is leading us today. The ancient word for this is "synod," a Greek term whose literal meaning is quite instructive: synod means "to take the path together."

Taking the path together does not mean that some teach while the rest receive instruction. Neither does it mean that the grace of the Holy Spirit starts with the pope and trickles down through the bishops and priests to the laity.

Taking the path together does not mean keeping discussions within the Church tightly under control so as not to disturb the status quo.

Taking the path together does, however, mean that all of us, through our Baptism, have been given a vocation to serve the Gospel. All the baptized share in the prophetic role of the Church.

Taking the path together does, in fact, mean that the Church is first and always a Eucharistic community of faith, not a hierarchy of clergy and laity.

Taking the path together means, as well, that the Church is of its very nature a pilgrim here on earth, struggling with its sinfulness and yet full of hope in the knowledge that we will never be abandoned by the Holy Spirit.

During the Second Vatican Council, Good Pope John XXIII held up Martin de Porres to the Church and to the world as a model of fidelity to the Gospel. Someday I will say more about this great saint. But today, I wish to hold up his religious superior, Father Juan de Lorenzana O.P.

Father Juan had to make a difficult choice: He saw that fidelity to the Gospel and dedication to the Church's mission were more important than protecting the power, the prestige and the privileges of the clergy. Father Juan trusted in the Lord's promise, at his Ascension, that the Father would send the Church the Holy Spirit.

To be clear, Martin de Porres was never ordained a priest. He took vows as a Dominican brother. But, in accepting his vows, Father Juan took a courageous step forward. Today, in the Catholic Church, Pope Francis is promoting discernment on ordaining women to serve the community as deacons. He has also gathered the bishops of the Amazon Basin together in a synod to discern how the Church can be of service to the indigenous peoples there. The bishops of the Amazon have asked to ordain as priests married men who are already leaders of isolated indigenous communities with little access to the sacraments. In October, he will hold a synod of bishops to

discuss “synodality” itself. These are but small steps in a long journey. The Church is a pilgrim in this world and we “take the path together” step by step.

Father Juan saw that the Holy Spirit is always raising up prophets to carry on the Lord’s work in this world. Indeed, he saw that the Holy Spirit was being poured out even onto illegitimate mulatto boys and calling them to be saints. The Holy Spirit is still at work in the Church. The time has come for us to place our trust in the Spirit and take the path together.

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?