

HOMILY FOR THE TWELFTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 20 June 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: 95

Reading I Jb 38:1, 8-11

The Lord addressed Job out of the storm and said:

Who shut within doors the sea,
when it burst forth from the womb;
when I made the clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling bands?
When I set limits for it
and fastened the bar of its door,
and said: Thus far shall you come but no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stilled!

Responsorial Psalm 107:23-24, 25-26, 28-29, 30-31

R. (1b) Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.
or:

R. Alleluia.

They who sailed the sea in ships,
trading on the deep waters,

These saw the works of the LORD
and his wonders in the abyss.

R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.
or:

R. Alleluia.

His command raised up a storm wind
which tossed its waves on high.

They mounted up to heaven; they sank to the depths;
their hearts melted away in their plight.

R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.
or:

R. Alleluia.

They cried to the LORD in their distress;
from their straits he rescued them,

He hushed the storm to a gentle breeze,
and the billows of the sea were stilled.
R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

They rejoiced that they were calmed,
and he brought them to their desired haven.
Let them give thanks to the LORD for his kindness
and his wondrous deeds to the children of men.

R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Reading II 2 Cor 5:14-17

Brothers and sisters:

The love of Christ impels us,
once we have come to the conviction that one died for all;
therefore, all have died.
He indeed died for all,
so that those who live might no longer live for themselves
but for him who for their sake died and was raised.
Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh;
even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh,
yet now we know him so no longer.
So whoever is in Christ is a new creation:
the old things have passed away;
behold, new things have come.

Alleluia Lk 7:16

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

A great prophet has risen in our midst
God has visited his people.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 4:35-41

On that day, as evening drew on, Jesus said to his disciples:
“Let us cross to the other side.”
Leaving the crowd, they took Jesus with them in the boat just as he was.
And other boats were with him.
A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat,
so that it was already filling up.
Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion.
They woke him and said to him,
“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

He woke up,
rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!"
The wind ceased and there was great calm.
Then he asked them, "Why are you terrified?
Do you not yet have faith?"
They were filled with great awe and said to one another,
"Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

I had lunch with friends in Kenwood the other day. Their backyard offers a great view of Sugar Loaf Ridge and Hood Mountain in the Mayacamas. Someone mentioned the drought and the gusting winds we have had lately. I immediately thought of the wildfires that, over the last few years, have come screaming down on Kenwood from over the Mayacamas.

There has to be a point where there just isn't any more fuel to burn up in the mountains between Calistoga and Kenwood. Apparently, we haven't reached that point yet.

The climate has changed. We all agreed about this at lunch. The climate isn't just changing. It has already changed and burning fossil fuels is a part of the problem. This is more than the consensus over lunch in Kenwood. In 2015, Pope Francis dedicated a remarkable encyclical to the threat of climate change, *Laudato Si*.

In regard to *Laudato Si*, some have criticized the Pope for meddling in science. "Pope Francis is not a scientist," they say. "He should be talking about religion, not CO₂." Pope Francis, of course, is not a scientist. Neither is he a fool. This encyclical shows how our faith illuminates our efforts to respond to the danger of climate change.

Our faith calls us to join with all people of good will to promote what Francis calls an "integral ecology." An ecology that is "integral" recognizes that the problem of climate change is by no means simple. Integral ecology takes into account the fact that much of the world's economy, right now at least, relies on the extraction and burning of fossil fuels. The world's economy, of course, has over seven billion mouths to feed. The Pope also wants us to understand that an integral ecology is based on a recognition that the disruption of the climate affects the poor and the marginalized more than those who are secure and well-established.

Most of all, an integral ecology takes seriously the Christian understanding of creation. The environment is the creation of God and a gift from God that has been entrusted to human beings so that we might use it wisely for the benefit of all.

There is yet another theme in the doctrine of creation, touched on in *Laudato Si*, that needs more attention. Since the environment is God's creation, it will ultimately be obedient to its Creator. Human beings lose track of this Christian teaching at their own peril.

This brings us to the first reading for today's mass. It's from the Book of Job.

You know the story. Job has suffered one calamity after another, until he shakes his fist at God and demands that God give him justice. Eventually God appears to Job through the whirlwind of a storm and gives Job a little push-back.

Speaking to Job, God thunders,

Who shut within doors the sea,
when it burst forth from the womb;
when I made the clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling bands?
When I set limits for it
and fastened the bar of its door,
and said: Thus far shall you come but no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stilled!

Job is being reminded, in no uncertain terms, that he did not create the sea and impose limits on the vastness of the ocean. The sea is obedient to its Creator, not the whims of human beings.

The same can be said of the Mayacamas Mountains. The beautiful land between Calistoga and Kenwood is not just real estate. The mountains with their oaks and buckeyes, their wild grasses and madrone, were created by God. In the end, the mountains will be obedient to their Creator.

The Lord spoke to Job out of the fury of a storm. Today, I think the Lord is speaking to us out of the fury of the wildfires. And the message is the same. We are creatures dwelling within the environment, not the Creator of the environment standing above it. Over lunch with friends in Kenwood, looking up at the Mayacamas, I realized that we are learning this ancient truth the hard way.

The mountains, in the end, will be obedient to their Creator, just as the sea is obedient to the order established by God at the creation of the world. When the days grow hot and dry and the winds are gusting, the Mayacamas burn just as God intended them to burn.

But we need to go deeper into the Book of Job if we are to develop an integral ecology. When Job is addressed by God from the fury of the storm, Job is not being punished by his Creator. In fact, Job's encounter with God turns out to be a summons to responsibility.

In effect, God says to Job, at the end of this great book, "I will not explain to you why you have suffered so. Such understanding is beyond your ken. Instead, I summon you to look

with compassion on your fellow human beings who, like yourself, suffer for reasons they cannot fully understand.”

Pope Francis wants us to expand on this teaching. Speaking through the wildfires, God is asking us to show compassion on those who are forced to evacuate, to be sure. But God is demanding that we show mercy to the Mayacamas as well. Speaking out of the wildfires, the Lord is asking us to show mercy to all that he has created.

I strongly urge you to think about the sobering message in the Book of Job in light of the Gospel for today’s mass. Mark tells us the story of how Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee. It’s another example of Mark telling a great story with very few words.

Jesus gets into a boat with his disciples. Then,

A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat,
so that it was already filling up.

Jesus was taking his siesta, asleep on a cushion at the back of the boat. And the disciples are petrified. So, they wake him and say to him,

“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

Jesus awakens, rebukes the wind, and then says to the sea,

“Quiet! Be still!”

Then, Mark simply tells us,

The wind ceased and there was great calm.

On 27 March, 2020, Pope Francis led a prayer service for the world. The Pope stood in a rainy Saint Peter’s Square that was eerily empty, in compliance with the quarantine that had just come down over Italy. There, in Saint Peter’s Square, Pope Francis read Mark’s account of the calming of the storm.

Then, in his homily, he told us that, like the disciples crossing the Sea of Galilee, COVID has put us all in the same boat.

We are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other.

I cannot emphasize enough how important the Pope’s insight is for us as we come together to develop an integral ecology .

The pandemic has been terrible. I know, personally, a surprising number of people who have died. I know a much greater number of people who have lost loved ones to COVID. I know small business owners and their employees who have suffered economically and children who have not done well, academically and emotionally, with distance learning.

But I think we can also say that the pandemic has taught many of us (by no means all) an important truth: on this little planet, we are all in the same boat. We have a responsibility to act for the common good of all. This is the case in regard to COVID and it is the case in regard to climate change as well.

We need to learn how to see the Mayacamas and Sonoma Mountain and our Valley that lies between them once again as God's creation. The same must be said of the Arctic Ocean and the atmosphere itself.

To take a step in this direction, we would do well to remember what God told Job from out of the storm: in the end, creation will be obedient to its Creator, not to human beings. But let us also remember Mark's Gospel: the Lord has not abandoned us to the storm. The Lord is right here with us in the boat which is the earth, our home.

And when we finally embrace this truth about the God who has created the world and redeemed it as well, we will finally understand what the disciples said after Jesus calmed the storm and stilled the wind:

They were filled with great awe and said to one another,
"Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"

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?