

HOMILY FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Sunday, 24 January 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: 68

Reading I **Jn 3:1-5, 10**

The word of the LORD came to Jonah, saying:

“Set out for the great city of Nineveh,
and announce to it the message that I will tell you.”

So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh,
according to the LORD’S bidding.

Now Nineveh was an enormously large city;
it took three days to go through it.

Jonah began his journey through the city,
and had gone but a single day’s walk announcing,
“Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed, “

when the people of Nineveh believed God;

they proclaimed a fast

and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.

When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way,

he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them;

he did not carry it out.

Responsorial Psalm **Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9**

R. (4a) Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;

teach me your paths,

Guide me in your truth and teach me,

for you are God my savior.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Remember that your compassion, O LORD,

and your love are from of old.

In your kindness remember me,

because of your goodness, O LORD.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Good and upright is the LORD;
thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice
and teaches the humble his way.
R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Reading II **1 Cor 7:29-31**

I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out.
From now on, let those having wives act as not having them,
those weeping as not weeping,
those rejoicing as not rejoicing,
those buying as not owning,
those using the world as not using it fully.
For the world in its present form is passing away.

Alleluia **Mk 1:15**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
The kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent and believe in the Gospel.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel **Mk 1:14-20**

After John had been arrested,
Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God:
“This is the time of fulfillment.
The kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the gospel.”
As he passed by the Sea of Galilee,
he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea;
they were fishermen.
Jesus said to them,
“Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.”
Then they abandoned their nets and followed him.
He walked along a little farther
and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John.
They too were in a boat mending their nets.
Then he called them.
So they left their father Zebedee in the boat
along with the hired men and followed him.

PART TWO: A HOMILY

Four years ago, at mass on the Sunday after his inauguration as president, I asked you to pray for Donald Trump. Today, let us keep Joseph Biden in our prayers.

What blessings should we ask of God to pour out onto Mr. Biden and the United States of America?

Father Leo O'Donovan S.J. has some good ideas in this regard. Leo and I have been acquainted for many years. He is a fine theologian and respected teacher. He was the President of Georgetown University for twelve years. He now works for the Jesuit Refugee Service and has become a champion of those fleeing political and religious persecution. Leo has also been a long-time friend of Joe Biden and his family. Mr. Biden asked Leo to say the funeral mass for his son, Beau, who died of cancer in 2015. Mr. Biden also asked Leo to say a prayer at his inaugural ceremony last Wednesday.

What did Leo O'Donovan ask of God for our new President and our country?

During his prayer, Leo recalled the prayer given by Archbishop John Carroll, the first Catholic Bishop in the United States, 232 years ago at the inauguration of George Washington. At Washington's first inaugural, Archbishop Carroll prayed,

[O Creator of all] "assist with your Holy Spirit of counsel and fortitude the President of these United States, that his administration may be conducted in righteousness, and be eminently useful to your people."

I like the fact that Archbishop Carroll offered this prayer for George Washington and that Leo O'Donovan used it in his prayer for Joe Biden. The Church teaches that the purpose of government is to serve the common good of all. The Church expects governments to be "eminently useful" to their people by bringing them together to solve problems.

Leo also remembered King Solomon when he prayed for the new President. After Solomon's anointing as King over the people of Israel, God told him to ask for a gift. Solomon did not ask for wealth or power from God. Instead, Solomon prayed for an "understanding heart" so that he might govern the people with wisdom, knowing "the difference between right and wrong."

Leo did well to include this in his prayer as well. There is far too much wealth contending for power in the government of our nation. Let us have leaders that are humble and modest and eager to accompany those who are marginalized and vulnerable. May God instruct our leaders as he instructed Solomon: there is a difference between right and wrong.

Finally, Leo quoted Pope Francis in his prayer. Pope Francis has said recently that, when we dream, we should all dream together. This is because, by ourselves, isolated from one another, "we risk seeing things that are not there." You may have noticed that this has been happening a lot in different parts of the world recently, including our own country. We need to start

dreaming together so we can stop seeing what is not there. Leo asked God to bless these shared dreams of the American people and endow our dreams with the “joy that is the overflow of love.”

The “joy that is the overflow of love” – I will tell Leo that he hit the ball out of the park with this one. Loving your neighbor leads to joy. Given all that has happened in this joyless year that has finally ended, Americans need to rededicate themselves to love, to service and to concern for their neighbors. Father Leo is assuring us that joy will come from this.

I would like to add only one thing to the prayer Father Leo O’Donovan offered at Joseph Biden’s inauguration. It comes from the Gospel for today’s mass.

In the reading, taken from the very beginning of Mark’s Gospel, we have the story of the calling of the first disciples. Jesus was passing by the Sea of Galilee and saw Simon (who will be renamed “Peter”) and his brother Andrew. These brothers were fishermen, going about their business, casting their nets into the sea. Jesus approached them and said,

“Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

And then, Mark simply tells us,

They abandoned their nets and followed him.

So, what I would like to add to Leo’s prayer for Joseph Biden and for our nation is simply this:

“Lord of all mercies, give your people the wisdom we need to abandon our nets and follow you. Give us the grace we need to lay aside our foolish schemes and our obsession with power. Fill our hearts with tenderness for those around us, especially those who are less fortunate than ourselves. Transform us into bridgebuilders. Help us always to remember that you have given us to one another and called us to be a blessing to the earth. Help us to abandon our nets and follow you.”

May God bless Mr. Biden and may God bless the United States of America.

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?