

HOMILY FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
25 MAY 2025

Fr. Jim Fredericks

Part One: the readings for the day
Part Two: reflections on the readings
Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY
Lectionary: 57

Reading I Acts 15:1-2, 22-29

Some who had come down from Judea
were instructing the brothers,
"Unless you are circumcised
according to the Mosaic practice,
you cannot be saved."
Because there arose no little dissension and debate
by Paul and Barnabas with them,
it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others
should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders
about this question.

The apostles and elders,
in agreement with the whole church,
decided to choose representatives
and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.
The ones chosen were Judas, who was called Barsabbas,
and Silas, leaders among the brothers.
This is the letter delivered by them:

"The apostles and the elders, your brothers,
to the brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia
of Gentile origin: greetings.
Since we have heard that some of our number
who went out without any mandate from us
have upset you with their teachings
and disturbed your peace of mind,
we have with one accord decided
to choose representatives
and to send them to you along with
our beloved Barnabas and Paul,
who have dedicated their lives

to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
So we are sending Judas and Silas
who will also convey this same message by word of mouth:
'It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us
not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities,
namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols,
from blood, from meats of strangled animals,
and from unlawful marriage.
If you keep free of these,
you will be doing what is right. Farewell.'"

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8
R (4) O God, let all the nations praise you!

May God have pity on us and bless us;
may he let his face shine upon us.
So may your way be known upon earth;
among all nations, your salvation.
R O God, let all the nations praise you!

May the nations be glad and exult
because you rule the peoples in equity;
the nations on the earth you guide.
R O God, let all the nations praise you!

May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you!
May God bless us,
and may all the ends of the earth fear him!
R O God, let all the nations praise you!

Reading II Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23
The angel took me in spirit to a great, high mountain
and showed me the holy city Jerusalem
coming down out of heaven from God.
It gleamed with the splendor of God.
Its radiance was like that of a precious stone,
like jasper, clear as crystal.
It had a massive, high wall,
with twelve gates where twelve angels were stationed
and on which names were inscribed,
the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites.
There were three gates facing east,

three north, three south, and three west.
The wall of the city had twelve courses of stones
as its foundation,
on which were inscribed the twelve names
of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

I saw no temple in the city
for its temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb.
The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it,
for the glory of God gave it light,
and its lamp was the Lamb.

Alleluia John 14:23

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord,
and my Father will love him and we will come to him.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel John 14:23-29

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Whoever loves me will keep my word,
and my Father will love him,
and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.
Whoever does not love me does not keep my words;
yet the word you hear is not mine
but that of the Father who sent me.

"I have told you this while I am with you.
The Advocate, the Holy Spirit,
whom the Father will send in my name,
will teach you everything
and remind you of all that I told you.
Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.
Not as the world gives do I give it to you.
Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.
You heard me tell you,
'I am going away and I will come back to you.'
If you loved me,
you would rejoice that I am going to the Father;
for the Father is greater than I.
And now I have told you this before it happens,
so that when it happens you may believe."

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

We have a new pope. I expect to be talking about Pope Leo in the future. Today, I want to pay tribute to Pope Francis.

I think it safe to say that, in the modern history of the papacy, no other pope has been so publicly criticized as Pope Francis. There are cardinals and bishops who said things about Francis that would have been unthinkable during the pontificates of Benedict XVI and John Paul II. A former papal diplomat wrote a screed against Pope Francis – thousands of words of outrageous lies – and demanded that Francis resign.

I am sorry to say that much of this invective against Pope Francis came from Catholics here in the United States.

Of course, many fine things have been said about Pope Francis as well. Let me share with you what I think is one of the most perceptive things I have ever read about Pope Francis.

John C Hirsch taught Medieval Literature at Georgetown University for many decades. He was a popular professor at Georgetown and, I'm told, a dedicated mentor to his students. He also did fine things as a volunteer in the wider community off campus.

In a letter to the New York Times, written in April 2018, Professor Hirsch wrote this about Pope Francis:

He is, when all is said and done, an agent not only of reform but also of a kind of Christian stability that insists on pastoral change, and that is what will ever distress his adversaries.

I don't think anything said about Pope Francis has been more insightful.

Francis was an agent of reform in our Church. But he was also a great example of the stability of Christian faith. Francis understood that our faith – the ancient faith of the Church – insists on pastoral change.

The Church's tradition is rich and complex. It speaks to us with many voices – voices that sometimes seem to contradict one another. In addition, the world is complex and constantly changing. Francis showed us that, if we are to be faithful to the Gospel, we must constantly find new ways of responding to the Gospel.

This is the stability of Christian faith.

And this, according to Professor Hirsch, is what has most distressed Pope Francis's adversaries.

Look at today's Gospel. At the Last Supper, our Savior showed us the foundation of this "Christian stability that insists on pastoral change."

Jesus said to his disciples,

I have told you this while I am with you.
The Advocate, the Holy Spirit,
whom the Father will send in my name,
will teach you everything
and remind you of all that I told you.

The word in Greek for "Advocate" is παρακλητος (*Parakletos*). It is a title for the Holy Spirit and it reveals a great deal about God's fidelity to the Church. Literally it means, "one who has been called to stand beside us."

This is a beautiful way to understand the Holy Spirit. We have not been abandoned. God has not withdrawn in silence into the heavens. The Risen Christ has summoned an "Advocate" – a *Parakletos* – to stand by our side as we make our way on the road of faith together.

This Advocate makes discernment possible. The Spirit is teaching us everything we need to know in order to discover the future that Christ has prepared for us.

Was Pope Francis a radical? No. He was a great example of the "Christian stability that insists on pastoral change." During the pontificate of Pope Francis, this was a source of anxiety for some. I have no doubt that it will be a source of

anxiety during the pontificate of Pope Leo XIV as well. Do not be afraid. The Lord has sent us an Advocate – a *Parakletos* – to stand by us as we make our way on the road 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 homily 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?

