

HOMILY FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT
30 March 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: 33

Reading I Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

The LORD said to Joshua,
"Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you."

While the Israelites were encamped at Gilgal
on the plains of Jericho,
they celebrated the Passover
on the evening of the fourteenth of the month.
On the day after the Passover,
they ate of the produce of the land
in the form of unleavened cakes and parched grain.
On that same day after the Passover,
on which they ate of the produce of the land,
the manna ceased.
No longer was there manna for the Israelites,
who that year ate of the yield of the land of Canaan.

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.
Let my soul glory in the LORD;
the lowly will hear me and be glad.
R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Glorify the LORD with me,
let us together extol his name.
I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.
R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Look to him that you may be radiant with joy,
and your faces may not blush with shame.
When the poor one called out, the LORD heard,
and from all his distress he saved him.
R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Reading II 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Brothers and sisters:

Whoever is in Christ is a new creation:

the old things have passed away;

behold, new things have come.

And all this is from God,

who has reconciled us to himself through Christ

and given us the ministry of reconciliation,

namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,

not counting their trespasses against them

and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

So we are ambassadors for Christ,

as if God were appealing through us.

We implore you on behalf of Christ,

be reconciled to God.

For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin,

so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Verse before the Gospel Luke 15:18

I will get up and go to my Father and shall say to him:

Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

Gospel Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Tax collectors and sinners

were all drawing near to listen to Jesus,

but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying,

"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So to them Jesus addressed this parable:

"A man had two sons,

and the younger son said to his father,

'Father give me the share of your estate

that should come to me.'

So the father divided the property between them.

After a few days,

the younger son collected all his belongings

and set off to a distant country

where he squandered his inheritance

on a life of dissipation.
When he had freely spent everything,
a severe famine struck that country,
and he found himself in dire need.
So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens
who sent him to his farm to tend the swine.
And he longed to eat his fill of the pods
on which the swine fed,
but nobody gave him any.
Coming to his senses he thought,
'How many of my father's hired workers
have more than enough food to eat,
but here am I, dying from hunger.
I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him,
"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.
I no longer deserve to be called your son;
treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."'"
So he got up and went back to his father.
While he was still a long way off,
his father caught sight of him,
and was filled with compassion.
He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.
His son said to him,
'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you;
I no longer deserve to be called your son.'
But his father ordered his servants,
'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him;
put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
Take the fattened calf and slaughter it.
Then let us celebrate with a feast,
because this son of mine was dead,
and has come to life again;
he was lost, and has been found.'
Then the celebration began.

Now the older son had been out in the field
and, on his way back, as he neared the house,
he heard the sound of music and dancing.
He called one of the servants
and asked what this might mean.
The servant said to him,
'Your brother has returned
and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf
because he has him back safe and sound.'

He became angry,
and when he refused to enter the house,
his father came out and pleaded with him.
He said to his father in reply,
'Look, all these years I served you
and not once did I disobey your orders;
yet you never gave me even a young goat
to feast on with my friends.
But when your son returns
who swallowed up your property with prostitutes,
for him you slaughter the fattened calf.'
He said to him,
'My son, you are here with me always;
everything I have is yours.
But now we must celebrate and rejoice,
because your brother was dead and has come to life again;
he was lost and has been found.'"

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READING

This homily is for our young people in middle school and high school.

What I want to say to you is this:

Dare to dance! Leave embarrassment at home.

This is the advice Mary Pukui used to give to her students in Hawaii. She was an elder among the Hawaiian people and revered as a teacher.

I agree: Dare to dance! Leave embarrassment at home.

This is a good message for young people. You are not little kids any longer and, I assure you, you are not yet adults either. But the time has come to dance - leave embarrassment at home.

This is what Jesus is teaching us in the parable of the prodigal son.

A man had two sons. Most people think the story is about the younger son. I think the story is really about the older son.

The younger son is a screw-up. He demands his inheritance up front from his father. Then he goes off to a foreign country where he shoots through his dad's money on stupid things.

Once he's broke, the younger brother comes to his senses and tells himself:

I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."

I don't think the younger brother is being sincere. I can't prove this, but I think he is trying to trick his father. And it works. The dad sees his younger son at a great distance and runs to him. The younger son goes through his spiel with his father and his father buys it.

Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him;
put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
Take the fattened calf and slaughter it.
Then let us celebrate with a feast,
because this son of mine was dead,
and has come to life again;
he was lost, and has been found.

But let me say again: this story is not about the younger brother. It is about the older brother.

What happens next is crucial.

The fatted calf is on the bar-b-que and the celebration has begun. Then, the older brother asks what's up and a servant tells him.

Your brother has returned
and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf
because he has him back safe and sound.

The older brother gets angry. He's angry for a good reason. What his dad is doing isn't fair. What's happening is obviously not fair. The older brother says to his father:

Look, all these years I served you
and not once did I disobey your orders;
yet you never gave me even a young goat
to feast on with my friends.
But when your son returns,
who swallowed up your property with prostitutes,
for him you slaughter the fattened calf.

The older brother is angry because his father isn't being fair with him.

This is the whole point of Jesus's story: life isn't fair. In fact, life is crammed with unfairness. At times, life is outrageous.

This is a bitter pill to swallow. When we are little kids, we get over it quickly. When we are old, we have become resigned to the unfairness of life. But when you are in middle school or high school, the unfairness of life is really difficult. I am sorry that I have to say this to you. But it must be said. Life isn't fair and it isn't fair by a long shot.

I don't think Jesus is trying to rub it in about the unfairness of the life. I think he is trying to tell us something about God's love.

God loves us all unconditionally. God loves us whether we deserve to be loved or not. He loves us when we are responsible and faithful to him and he loves us when we are jerks.

And this isn't at all fair. But love isn't about being fair. Love is about seeing your irresponsible son at a great distance and running to him with nothing but joy in your heart. Young people: the time will come when you will learn how to do this and, then, your son will accuse you of being unfair.

Life isn't fair and I recognize that this is so very hard to take when you are in middle school or high school. This is why I am telling you about Mary Pukui.

Dare to dance! Leave embarrassment at home.

Perhaps she could have said,

Dare to dance! Leave your bitterness at home.

At the end of Jesus' story, the father pleads with his elder son who is bitter over the unfairness of life. Come to the party. And the older son hesitates.

Come to the party. Dare to dance. Leave your bitterness outside in the cold and the dark. Life has always been unfair and maybe it will always be unfair.

Dare to dance! Leave embarrassment at home.

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Esta homilía es para nuestros jóvenes de middle school y high school. Lo que quiero decirles es esto:

¡Atrévase a bailar! Dejen la vergüenza en casa.

Este es el consejo que Mary Pukui dio a sus estudiantes en Hawái. Era una anciana del pueblo hawaiano y venerada como maestra.

Estoy de acuerdo:

¡Atrévase a bailar! Dejen la vergüenza en casa.

Este es un buen mensaje para los jóvenes. Ya no son niños pequeños y, les aseguro, tampoco son Uds adultos. Pero ha llegado la hora de bailar: dejen la vergüenza en casa.

Esto es lo que Jesús nos enseña en la parábola del hijo pródigo.

Un hombre tenía dos hijos. La mayoría de la gente piensa que la historia se trata del hijo menor. Yo creo que en realidad se trata del hijo mayor.

El hijo menor es un imbécil. Le exige su herencia a su padre. Luego se va a un país extranjero donde malgasta el dinero de su padre en tonterías. Cuando lo ha gastado todo, el hermano menor recobra la cordura y se dice:

Me levantaré, volveré a mi padre y le diré: Padre, he pecado contra el cielo y contra ti; ya no merezco llamarme hijo tuyo. Recíbeme como a uno de tus trabajadores’.

¿Es sincero el hermano menor? No lo creo. No puedo demostrarlo, pero creo que intenta engañar a su padre. Y funciona. El padre ve a su hijo menor a lo lejos y corre hacia él. El hijo menor se confiesa a su padre y el padre le cree.

¡Pronto!, traigan la túnica más rica y vístansela; pónganle un anillo en el dedo y sandalias en los pies; traigan el becerro gordo y mátenlo. Comamos y hagamos una fiesta, porque este hijo mío estaba muerto y ha vuelto a la vida, estaba perdido y lo hemos encontrado’.

Pero déjenme repetirlo: esta historia no se trata del hermano menor. Se trata del hermano mayor.

Lo que sucede a continuación es crucial.

El ternero cebado está en la barbacoa y la celebración ha comenzado. Entonces, el hermano mayor pregunta qué pasa y un sirviente le cuenta.

Tu hermano ha regresado y tu padre mandó matar el becerro gordo, por haberlo recobrado sano y salvo’.

El hermano mayor se enoja. Está enojado con razón. Lo que su padre está haciendo no es justo. Lo que está sucediendo obviamente no es justo. El hermano mayor le dice a su padre:

¡Hace tanto tiempo que te sirvo, sin desobedecer jamás una orden tuya, y tú no me has dado nunca ni un cabrito para comérmelo con mis amigos! Pero eso sí, viene ese hijo tuyo, que despilfarró tus bienes con malas mujeres, y tú mandas matar el becerro gordo.

El hermano mayor está enojado porque su padre no está siendo justo con él.

Este es el punto central de la parábola de Jesús: la vida no es justa. De hecho, la vida está llena de injusticias. A veces, la vida es indignante - una barbaridad!

Es un trago amargo. De pequeños lloramos y luego seguimos adelante. De mayores, nos resignamos a la injusticia de la vida. Pero cuando estás en middle y high school, la injusticia de la vida es Insoportablemente difícil. Lamento tener que decirles esto. Pero hay que decirlo. La vida no es justa. No es justa en absoluto.

No creo que Jesús esté tratando de reprendernos con la injusticia de la vida. Creo que está tratando de decirnos algo sobre el amor de Dios.

Dios nos ama a todos incondicionalmente. Dios nos ama, merezcamos ser amados o no. Nos ama cuando somos responsables y fieles a él, y nos ama cuando somos rebeldes.

Y esto no es justo. Pero el amor no se trata de ser justo. Amar es ver a tu hijo irresponsable a la distancia y correr hacia él con alegría en el corazón. Jóvenes: Llegará el momento en que aprenderán a hacerlo y, entonces, sus hijos los acusarán Uds de ser injustos.

La vida no es justa y reconozco que es muy difícil de aceptar cuando estás en middle school y high school. Por eso les hablo de Mary Pukui.

¡Atrévete a bailar! Deja la vergüenza en casa.

Quizás podría haber dicho: Deja tu amargura atrás.

Al final de la parábola de Jesús, el padre le suplica a su hijo mayor, amargado por la injusticia de la vida: «Ven a la fiesta». Y el hijo mayor duda.

Ven a la fiesta. Atrévete a bailar. Deja tu amargura afuera, en el frío y la oscuridad. La vida siempre ha sido injusta y tal vez siempre lo será.

¡Atrévete a bailar! Deja la vergüenza en casa.

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?