

Seton Hall University

From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, S.T.L., S.S.L., D.Phil.

Winter 2011

Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections for Sundays and Festivals (February 27, 2011)

Lawrence E. Frizzell, *Seton Hall University*



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Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections for Sundays and Festivals

**Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell
Jewish-Christian Studies Graduate Program
Department of Religion
Seton Hall University
South Orange, NJ**

EIGHTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR
February 27, 2011

Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell

INTRODUCTION TO THE MASS

The mystery of divine providence is celebrated through the proclamation of biblical passages from Isaiah and Matthew. God foresees the true needs of creatures and provides, always calling for our cooperation in extending divine gifts to those in need.

INVITATION TO REPENTANCE

How have we responded to the gift of life and the grace of Baptism? We seek forgiveness for flaws and failings and rejoice in Christ's gift of mercy.

Lord, we have sinned against you: Lord have mercy.

Christ, show us the Father's mercy and grant us salvation.

HEADINGS FOR READINGS

First Reading (Isa 49:14-15). The challenges of parenthood include imitation of God's compassionate love. Failure in this responsibility has disastrous consequences, but God's maternal care will never fail.

Second Reading (1 Cor 4:1-5). The Christian vocation involves care and compassion in imitation of Christ. All decisions have spiritual and social dimensions that will be weighed on the Day of Judgment.

Gospel (Mt 6:24-34). Single-hearted commitment to the Kingdom of God requires deep trust in divine providence in the midst of daily struggles. Placing ourselves totally in divine service, we will receive all that we truly need day by day.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

President: Through Baptism we enter into union with Jesus and receive the gifts that will enable us to become vehicles of divine blessings to the world. In our commitment to serve, we present these petitions.

Reader(s):

For Pope Benedict and all bishops: may divine light and strength guide their service of the Gospel.

For all Christians, that they become more confident each day in God's loving care.

For all those preparing for Baptism and other sacraments, may the example of teachers and sponsors help them to live the Gospel.

For all who work in industry and services be safe and able to exercise their talents for a just wage.

For all who defend those who cannot speak for themselves: may they be models of courage and perseverance.

For all our family members, friends and benefactors who have gone before us: may their souls rest in peace.

President: God of compassion, you sent your Son to bring reconciliation and peace to the world. May all Christians grow in their calling through the same Christ our Lord.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LORD'S PRAYER

Jesus taught us to express our childlike trust by calling upon you. Together we ask for our daily bread and for the Bread of Life.

INVITATION TO THE SIGN OF PEACE

The gifts administered in the Church are grounded in Baptism for children of the heavenly Father. Reconciliation and peace flow from this Eucharistic worship by faith that works through love.

COMMUNION REFLECTION

Eternal God, Jesus is your greatest gift as you provide for all our needs. May his nourishing presence enable us to extend his royal, priestly and prophetic guidance to our world. Renewed by this Eucharist, we ask to be instruments of your compassionate care to all we encounter in the coming week.

FINAL BLESSING

May the exercise of our stewardship of God's gifts prepare for the Kingdom of righteousness and peace, strengthened always by divine compassion and mercy.

COMMENTARY

First Reading (Isa 49:14-15). A hymn celebrating God's blessings on a "day of salvation," with assurance that "the Lord has comforted his people..." (Isa 49:8-13) is followed by an objection of the exiled people and personified Jerusalem: "The Lord has forsaken me..." In times of trial or sickness, people may forget the abundant signs of divine providence in their lives. This text is a dialogue in which the divine response is profoundly evocative. "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she would have no compassion on the son of her womb?" Even if some mothers may fail dismally, God's maternal love is eternal (49:15). "Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me" (49:16). The link between Zion/Jerusalem and her people is so profound that God will reunite them. Although city walls could not be rebuilt after the liberating decree of Cyrus, the prophet Zechariah assured the people that God's presence was like a protective wall of fire (Zech 2:5) During times of trial faith and hope must prevail over doubts concerning the future.

Responsorial Psalm (62:2-3, 6-9). The prayer of assurance that God protects the faithful is based on the image of a fortress built on a rock. In danger a person takes refuge in him and is secure in his love.

Second Reading (1 Cor 4:1-5). Great are the privileges of the Christians of Corinth and all the faithful throughout the ages! "Do you not know that you are God's Temple and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (3:16). All of God's gifts are intended for the upbuilding of the faith community; the teachers, Paul, Apollos and Cephas (Peter) are servants of these believers (3:5), but primarily they are servants and stewards of God's mysteries (3:22-4:1). St. Paul was irked, after founding this church and moving on, that its members began to develop conflicting allegiances, rather than acknowledging that Jesus Christ is the foundation for this and every Temple of God (3:11). The mystery of God is the sacred plan for the salvation of the world, revealed in its fullness through the death-and-resurrection of Jesus to bring all the nations to the obedience of faith (Rom 16:25-27). This plan involves human cooperation of trustworthy teachers and ministers of the sacraments, whereby the Paschal Mystery is applied to those called into faith (Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 5:7-8).

Did some question whether Paul was trustworthy? He argued that his apostolic mission came from Jesus (1 Cor 1:1) so the Corinthians were not competent to be judges. The Lord is the ultimate Judge and all should wait for his penetrating gaze to assess the intentions behind human actions. However, certain actions or choices are reprehensible and the Christian community must take a stand and condemn a sinner, in the hope of bringing his conversion (5:1-5).

Gospel (Mt 6:24-34). From the fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time the Gospel passage is taken from the Sermon of the Mount, the synthesis of Jesus' teaching for those who follow him. Part of Matthew 6:1-18 will be proclaimed on Ash Wednesday, when the link between prayer, fasting and almsgiving will challenge us to deepen our piety, self-discipline and generosity to the poor.

This first of Jesus' five sermons in Matthew is ordered so that the instructions can be memorized, with some themes from the beatitudes returning so that the message will be reinforced in the life of the faithful. "Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God" (5:8) should be understood as "those with a single-hearted commitment," the point taken up in the statement that "no one can serve two masters" (6:24). In Hebrew the same verb may be used for worship of God and ordinary work, showing the demand for unity of intention in all the activities of life. From the drama of community worship there should be a movement toward the service of God and neighbor in the various deeds of ministering to the needs of others throughout the week. This work is the means of earning a livelihood, but the intention should be to serve the family's needs, not merely to accumulate wealth (*mammon* in Aramaic) in its many forms. If a person focused on becoming rich as the goal of life a subtle form of idolatry becomes a real danger. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness..." (6:33).

The next section of the Sermon challenges those who are anxious about their duty to provide for the basic needs of their family. The scene is farm life, where work with crops and flocks would bring food, flax and wool in relative abundance. Of course, the specter of hail, drought or disease may haunt the farmer's mind. So Jesus stressed trust in divine providence as people face the unknown. One is expected to use prudent judgment and to develop all the resources of human wisdom and experience, but in time of peace God will bring all things together for the good of the faithful.

God will provide for our true needs, so disciples pray with the simple petitions of the Lord's Prayer (6:7-14). The contrast with the search of other peoples for the benefits of daily life is clear: Place the reign of God over all other concerns and these too will be provided (6:33).

REFLECTION

The uncertainties of human existence vary from regions threatened by volcanoes and earthquakes to those with extremes in the weather. Everywhere people may experience sudden loss of all their possessions. It is perhaps less devastating at times than the horrors of war, when people cannot trust that their neighbor will be benign toward the weak and vulnerable. The section of Isaiah from which today's brief passage is taken was composed in the aftermath of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem; survivors were taken into slavery in far-off Babylon. The prophet interpreted these tragic events as signs of divine corrective punishment.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her
That her time of service is ended,
That her iniquity is pardoned,
That she has received from the Lord's hand
Double for all her sins (Isa 40:1-2).

Then come beautiful expressions of divine mercy that include the promise of the servant teacher who will gather the tribes of Israel from exile and, moreover, will be a light to the nations. Thereby God's gifts will reach to the ends of the earth (Isa 49:5-6).

Sing for joy, heavens, and exalt, earth...
For the Lord has comforted his people,
And will have compassion of his afflicted (Isa 49:13).

In spite of these promises of God, personified Zion (Jerusalem) was skeptical, complaining that the Lord had abandoned her (49:14). God replied that the ideal of motherhood, which may be subject to tragic aberrations, is not a reflection of the maternal care of the Lord. God will never forget his promises to the patriarchs and will restore the chosen people to a renewed covenant wherein the holy city and the land will prosper.

The theology of divine providence must be nuanced to include human free collaboration; this gift of free will includes the call to imitate God (Lev 19:2; Ex 34:6-7) but there is a shadow side of freedom, which is sin and failure.

To carry out the divine plan God "also makes use of his creature's cooperation... For God grants his creatures... the dignity of acting on their own, of being causes and principles for each other, and thus of cooperating in the accomplishment of his plan" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #306).

The Creator has the right to make moral demands of his human creatures; all should sense in conscience that generosity rather than greed, service rather than selfishness, must motivate their decisions and actions. As the Judge of creation, God the Father will offer commendation or condemnation to each person (1 Cor 4:5). A person may not be aware of failings but has the duty to educate his or her conscience and be ready for the coming of the Lord Jesus who, as agent of the Father, will bring to light what is hidden and will disclose the intentions of the heart (the seat of intellect and will in the Hebrew way of thinking, see 1 Cor 4:4-5).

The Catechism draws on the Gospel and Paul's expression of its message. "Though often unconscious collaborators with God's will, people can also enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions, their prayers and their suffering. Then they fully become God's fellow workers and co-workers for his Kingdom (#307). With this priority the faithful will be assured of all that they truly need in daily life (Mt 6:33).