

LECTIO DIVINA: (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 23 July 2017

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A.

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Four.

Before beginning prayer with the Sacred Texts, let us take a look at the week ahead in Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

July 25: St. James (Feast)

July 26: Sts. Joachim and Anne, parents of the Mother of God. (Memorial)

July 29: Sts. Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

In the Australian Church:

No anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

July 26: 1833 – approval of the Emancipation Bill, abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire.

July 28: Schools' Tree Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Wisdom 12:13 & 16-19

Romans 8:26-27

Matthew 13:24-43

***Lectio:* Read the First Reading from the Book of Wisdom, Ch 12:13 & 16-19.**

Read it in a reverent way. The Word of God is sacred. Let us give ourselves to the sacred text, and open our hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit calling us forth to respond. Be aware of the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart as you read. This is the true “oratio” (prayer) of *Lectio Divina*.

***Meditatio:* Understanding the text so that we can make an informed response.**

It is an extraordinary text (an Exodus text), manifesting a God who is “mild in judgment”, and who governs “with great lenience”. It is a text giving an example to the virtuous person to be “kindly to others”. It portrays God as a God of hope: “You have given your children good hope, that after sin you will grant repentance.”

Wisdom 12:13 and 16-19 is situated in 12:9-22, in a section of the Book of Wisdom which begins with an introductory narrative (11:2-4). It takes the theme: Israel benefitted by the very things that punished Egypt (11:5).

From 11:6-19:22, the theme is illustrated in five antithetical diptychs.

1. 11:6-14: Water from the rock instead of the plague of the Nile.
2. 11:15-16:15 Quail instead of the plague of little animals.

The text we are given for *Lectio Divina* is part of the second diptych. The text, when placed in its original setting, needs to be seen as part of the Exodus experience – the people’s impatience with Moses and God, and the reminder to the people, of God’s kindness, in spite of their anger.

God provided water.

God provided manna.

(For some of this background, see Wright’s commentary, 3:31-33 in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary).

Wisdom was written somewhere between 20 BC and 54 AD. The place of composition was Egypt, probably Alexandria, the great intellectual and scientific centre of the Mediterranean world and one of the largest centers of the Jewish Diaspora (dispersion of the Jews to other parts of the ancient world). The author of the book remains anonymous, but is thought to be a learned Greek-speaking Jew. A teacher? Wisdom is also thought to be the last of the Old Testament books. (C.f. NJBC – introduction to the Book of Wisdom).

Now take time apart with this reading. Listen to the Holy Spirit placing unction on certain words and phrases. The prayer of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is the **oratio** of *Lectio Divina* – the true prayer which will lead to a lived response. After quietly pondering over many hours (days), you will want to make your response. Maybe your response will be an immediate one. This does not mean that we cease to ponder on the text throughout the week. *Lectio Divina* is a way of life. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 85

The response is: LORD, YOU ARE GOOD AND FORGIVING.

Psalm 85 is about loyalty in the service of God. In the Grail Psalter, it is described as “a gentle psalm, a little muted in tone, without cries for help or loud shouts of anguish”.

Lectio: Read the Second Reading, from Romans 8:26-27.

PAUSE. Read it again. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist, in order to bring forth the most authentic melody of your response...

Meditatio: Understanding the text in order to make an informed response to it.

This text is situated within Romans 8:1-39. New Christian life is lived in the Spirit, and is destined for glory.

8:10-13 Christian life is empowered by the Spirit of God.

8:14-30 Through the Spirit of God, the Christian becomes a child of God, destined for glory.

Verses 26-27. These verses give the third testimony to the new life and glorious destiny of Christians.

Human aspirations risk being inefficacious, because of the natural weakness of the flesh, but the Spirit adds its intercession, and thus transcends human weakness. Verse 27 is an Old Testament phrase for God.

Pause and read 1 Samuel 16:7, 1 Kings 8:39, Psalm 7:11, 17:3, and 139:1.

Only God understands the language and the mind of the Spirit and recognizes such Spirit-assisted prayer. (Summary from the New Jerome Biblical Commentary 51:89).

Take time over the text before making your response to it in the days ahead.
I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is Matthew 11:25.

BLESSED ARE YOU FATHER, LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. YOU HAVE REVEALED TO LITTLE ONES, THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from Matthew 13:24-43.**

***Meditatio:* Some informed background to the text.**

This week we are again presented with parables. Initially we may notice the social aspect: the woman's place is in the home – the cooking parable. The man's place is out in the fields, planting and harvesting (the farming parables). The disciples ask Jesus for the meaning of parable number 1, and Jesus explains it clearly, better than any scriptural commentary. In the time of Jesus, mustard was used medicinally for its "seed oil in poultices, and cooking oil...Jesus' parable seems to teach that a small work of God will develop tremendously, just as a tiny seed grows to become a large, fully-grown plant." (Encyclopedia of Biblical plants, by Nigel Hepper, page 133)

The parables, taken individually or collectively, are about the Kingdom of God.

Stand back from the Gospel and ponder. Hear the words: BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD. Allow the Holy Spirit to play on the fibres of your heart like a harpist in order to bring forth the most beautiful melody of your response to God. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 3*.

***Evangelizatio* is my LIVED RESPONSE to the sacred scriptures given to me each week by the Church for my formation as a Christian. If I don't respond, they are merely texts on a page. When I do respond, they are my life.**

1. The Holy Spirit is leading me to respond to the words: "By acting thus, you have taught a lesson to your people, how the virtuous person must be kindly to the "other" person, whoever that person may be." The general meaning of "kind" in the Sacred Scriptures, is serviceable, good, pleasant, easy, gracious. It is said that we never forget the kindness of another person, when that kindness is shown to us. Andre Gide (1869-1951) taught something which is fundamental to kindness: "True kindness presupposes the faculty of imagining as one's own, the suffering or joy of others." Kindness then, presupposes that as far as possible, we try to stand in the shoes of another. At a certain time in my life, a sister with whom I lived in community, and taught beside in a Catholic secondary school, brought me back from the depths of despair with a cup of tea and an Arnott's biscuit. Who would have thought that a humble milk coffee biscuit would save anyone? But it did. Or rather, the kindness did the saving. This way of acting is surely what Sr. Joan Chittister means when she says: "The kindnesses we remember are the ones that saved us from

the straits we were otherwise incapable of leaping over by ourselves. Kindness in the midst of pain is salvific. It heals the sick and strengthens the weak and gives hope to the depressed. It makes another week, another day, another hour possible.” (Aspects of the Heart, the many paths to a good life).

2. I am responding to the words, *God, who knows everything in our hearts...* Something Karl Rahner says about authentic prayer is applicable here. He says, in a meditation on this text, that *asking for something in the name of Jesus means entering into Jesus, living by Jesus, being one with Him in love and faith. If Jesus is in us in faith, love, grace and in his Spirit, then our prayer arises from the very center of our being, which is God, - then all our prayer is authentic harmonious, simple, unpretentious. The Spirit asks God for God. Everything is included and contained in this prayer. The Spirit asks God for God.*
3. My response is to the parable of the mustard seed, which is a tiny seed. That is the point. It is tiny. Through this parable, I am affirmed in the small acts or words of kindness which God prompts me to give. From a word of kindness to someone in need of that word, a person’s whole day can become beautiful, and full of enthusiasm because I have given that person words of kindness or words of encouragement. I have planted the seed. I have enabled someone to go forth, strengthened by my words encouragement, my words of kindness. My words? No – God acting through me.

***Lectio Divina is Holy Reading,
that is,
reading of the Sacred Scriptures
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
It is about reading (and listening),
reflecting,
praying in tune with the Holy Spirit within me,
resting in God,
and responding in the way I live.***