

LECTIO DIVINA: (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 30 July 2017

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A.

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

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 31: St. Ignatius of Loyola. (Memorial)

August 1: St. Alphonsus Ligouri (Memorial)

August 3: St. Dominic (Memorial)

August 4: St. John Vianney (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:

August 3: Canberra-Goulburn and Sydney. Anniversary of the death of Cardinal Edward Clancy, 2014.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

July 30: Bible Sunday

July 30: International Day of Friendship

July 30: World Day against Trafficking in Persons.

August 4: Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12

Romans 8:28-30

Matthew 13:44-52.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the First Book of Kings, Ch. 3, v's 5, and 7-12.**

Be aware of the way you handle your bible. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep reverence. This text is given to all of us on this particular day in the Church's Liturgical Year for our formation as Christians.

***Meditatio:* Some background on the text, so that we can understand it more profoundly, and make our response to it.**

This text is the humble prayer of Solomon. God rewarded Solomon for asking of the Lord "a discerning judgment". Solomon did not ask for a long life, for riches, or that his enemies would be slain. Here then, is the model of true prayer. Solomon's focus is on guiding the people given to him by the Lord. He asks for the spiritual gifts which will enable him to do so.

Read the text again a couple of times. Ponder on the text for a day or more. However, if you are aware of the Holy Spirit calling forth your response to the text,

note it down. When the Holy Spirit prays within you or pours unction on a text and calls you forth, this is the true “prayer” (*oratio*) of *Lectio Divina*.
I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm. Psalm 118

The Response is: LORD, I LOVE YOUR COMMANDS.

Psalm 118 is a Psalm which proclaims love of God’s law. It is, in Hebrew, an alphabetical Psalm, of 176 verses of two lines each. It is the longest Psalm in the Psalter.

Listen, as you pray with the Psalm throughout the week to the Holy Spirit calling you to respond to a line, a word, a phrase. This is the Holy Spirit praying within you.

***Lectio:* Read the Second text from the Letter to the Romans, Ch. 8, verses 28-30.**

Meditatio: Since the meaning of verse 28 is a problem for scripture scholars, it may be best to take it as is: *we know that by turning everything to their good, God cooperates with all those who love him. With all those he called - Christians who have responded to a divine call.*

Verses 29-30: According to the divine plan of salvation the Christian is to reproduce in himself or herself an image of Christ by a progressive share in his Risen life.

Read Romans 8:17, 2 Corinthians 3:18, and 4:4-6, Philippians 3:20-21. (This background has been summarized from the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 51:90).

Stand back from the reading and go about your work for a while. Maybe a day or two. Be alert to the grace of God. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist on the strings of the harp. The Holy Spirit will bring forth the most beautiful response to this reading. You will be surprised by the Spirit.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is taken from 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 13:44-52.**

Read it slowly and reflectively, and maybe a second time. Try to read aloud rather than with the mind. Listen to the text as you read. Stand back from it and ponder.

***Meditatio:* Some background to help us understand the text and respond to it.**

This Sunday we are presented with three parables: the treasure in the field, the pearl of great value, and the haul of all kinds of fish. Let us first revise Crossan’s description of a parable: *It is one thing to communicate to others conclusions and admonitions based on one’s profound spiritual experience...it is quite another thing to try to communicate that experience itself, or better, to assist people to find their own ultimate encounter. This is what the parables of Jesus seek to do: to help others into their own experience of the Reign of God and to draw from that experience their*

own way of life. A Patristic commentary by Origen notes that : *The pearl [of great value] will be acquired by those who give their all, who sacrifice everything for it, the pearl Paul meant when he said: "I have accepted the loss of everything in order to gain Christ." Everything means [the other] beautiful pearls. To gain Christ refers to the one pearl of great value. (Origen 183-253 A.D).*

Read the Gospel text again slowly. Stand back from the text and the commentary and go about your work quietly ruminating. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 3*.

EVANGELIZATIO: My lived response to the texts with which the Church exhorts me to pray. St. James says "Be doers of the Word." And the Book of Deuteronomy tells us that the Word of God is in our hands to do it.

1. I remember the day Pope Francis was elected. He came out on the balcony and asked the people to pray for him. He is a humble man, a wise man and a brave man. Recently, I found some words of the poet Robert Frost: *The afternoon knows what the morning never suspected.* (Page 158, of "Day by Day" with Sr. Stan). The Pope's election was the morning glory – sun and light. His vocation as the Vicar of Christ on earth, is the afternoon – the afternoon which has bravely challenged discrimination within the Catholic Church. It is about washing the feet of prisoners, travelling to Lampedusa to speak with and comfort Asylum seekers, and to offer shelter inside the Vatican for two families. I don't know what humble prayer he made on the day of his election or afterwards, but I suspect it was similar to that of Solomon: a prayer for the gift of wisdom: *Give your servant a heart to understand how to discern between good and evil, for who could govern this people of ours that is so great?*
2. My response is to the first line of the text: *We know that by turning to their good, God cooperates with all those who love Him...* And I ask myself: What does it mean to love God? It surely does not mean going to Mass on Sundays, or embracing ascetical practices. I believe it means acknowledging that the Son of God died for her, him and me, and thus showed me the way of love. Love is the answer, the way, the truth and the life, for all of us who profess to be followers of Jesus. I came across the following short story recently: *Her little girl was late arriving home from school, so when the child arrived, the mother began to scold her daughter, but stopped and asked, "Why are you so late?" She replied: "I had to help another girl. She was in trouble." Her mother asked "What did you do to help this girl?" And the child replied: "Oh, I sat down and helped her cry."* A child cared for another child so much that she sat down and helped her cry. This story was in a beautiful little book called "Words on Compassion" by Helen Exley – a Helen Exley Gift Book).
3. My response is to the second parable. In my family ancestry, there are a number of women who were married young, and who married those who didn't bear the religion's name "Catholic" They were married in the parish presbytery or the church sacristy. We called these marriages "mixed marriages". It occurs to me that in every case they had found love

– the pearl of great value. With St. John of the epistles, I believe that God is love. God is not religion. I believe that God’s only-begotten Son was the manifestation of Divine Love. I believe that when we embrace the manifestation of God’s love (that is, Jesus), then we have found the pearl of great price. Whatever is our vocation in this life: marriage, the single life, the monastic life, the professional dedicated life – when one finds love, and gives up all for love, one has found the pearl of great price. I remember an Australian nurse who went to help with the Ebola outbreak, a 21st century plague. I remember the fire fighters who went from Australia, to help after 9/11, the event which changed our world. They were dedicated people who had found love in their lives, and wanted to give this gift to others. I remember my great aunt who worked with our Australian soldiers – those who came back from World War 1 and 2, without arms or legs or eyes – and men who were tormented because they were gassed. She was a brave nurse who also ministered to the insane, those locked up because of what war had done to them. And, she never married. She was the single dedicated woman who had found love in her own family and wanted to give love to others as a nurse. God is love, God is not religion.

Lectio Divina is about reading the Sacred Scriptures and reflecting on them from an informed background.

It is allowing the Holy Spirit to play on the fibres of my heart like a harpist, and bring forth the beauty of my response.

In responding to the text, my life is changed more and more into Christ.

***The traditional Latin terms are:
Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, Contemplatio, Evangelizatio.***