

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)**  
**PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES**  
**Sunday 20 August 2017**

**20<sup>th</sup> 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:**

August 21: St. Pius X (Memorial)

August 22: The Queenship of Mary, (Memorial)

August 24: St. Bartholomew (Feast)

**In the Australian Church:**

August 20 Darwin - Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral – 1972.

August 23: Cairns – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. James Foley (1992)

August 23: Bunbury – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Peter Quinn (2003)

August 25: Broken Bay Anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral (1991).

**In the Social Justice Calendar:**

August 23: International Day for the remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition

August 26: 2001 – Rescue of 433 Asylum seekers by the MV Tampa.

Australian Government sent troops to prevent disembarkation.

**LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS**

**The readings are:**

Isaiah 56:1 & 6-7

Romans 11:13-15 & 29-32

Matthew 15:21-28

***Lectio:*** Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, Ch. 56, verse 1, & verses 6-7.

Read slowly and prayerfully, really listening to the text as you read aloud. This is about my on-going conversion.

***Meditatio:*** Understanding the text so that we can immerse ourselves in it, and make our response to it.

This text from Isaiah, the one who speaks on behalf of God, calls the people of the Old Testament to “have a care for justice and to act with integrity” because “soon my salvation will come.” We, the Christians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century know that salvation has come to us when God sent his only Son, into the world, a Lord who clothed himself in the form of humanity, the one who gave us the gift of the Gospel of peace, the Gospel of love. Love and peace, through the Son of God, manifested the integrity of God.

Back to the text now, and some background on the “foreigners”. The New Jerome Biblical Commentary notes that “foreigners living in Palestine were granted limited

rights and protection. Isaiah 56:1-8 is an oracle of Temple worship by outsiders. It addresses the situation of inclusion. Foreigners are to be shown justice and integrity.

Take time to ponder on this text in the days ahead as you go about your work, rest, recreation. Allow the Holy Spirit to work on the fibres of your heart, and bring forth the melody of your response to this text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 1*.

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 66

**The response is:** O GOD, LET ALL THE NATIONS PRAISE YOU.

Psalm 66 is a harvest song. In a reflection on this Psalm (Abbey Psalters), there is a magnanimous insight: "...the thin coating we call the soil, covers the whole earth; it binds all nations together in a common interest; from this, we all get our living. But the triumph of a good harvest should make one think of places where the harvest fails. God is the same God there, and humanity is no less his image. If God rules the whole world with justice, humanity must try to imitate him." May we ponder on this reality when we next go shopping for fruit and vegetables, flour and cereals. May we remember the starving people of South Sudan, and all the places on earth where hunger is eliminating those made in God's image.

**Lectio:** Read the second text from Romans 11:13-15 and 29-32.

**Meditatio:** This text is an amazing expression of what it is to stumble: Israel has stumbled over Christ, but has not fallen down completely so that it cannot regain its footing. And so, the mercy of God meets those who stumble. Because of this stumbling, the apostles turned elsewhere – to the Gentiles.

Verses 29-32: the key note is mercy: "All Jews and Greeks have as groups, been unfaithful to God, who makes use of the infidelity to manifest to all of them his bounty and mercy." (NJBC) 51:10

Read the text again and allow the Holy Spirit to work on your heart. What words, what phrases, what sentences are to change your life? I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

**The Gospel Verse is Matthew 4:23**

JESUS PREACHED THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM AND HEALED ALL WHO WERE SICK.

**Lectio:** Read the Gospel text from Matthew 15:21-28.

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.

**Meditatio:** What is it about?

The woman in this text is a foreigner and therefore an outsider. In a commentary on this text by St. John Chrysostom, he asks: "What was she, but a dog, unworthy to obtain her request?" By perseverance she became worthy, for Christ admitted her to the same noble rank as the children, dog though she was, but he also sent her away

with high praise. Saying, ‘Woman, you have great faith...let it be as you desire.’ Jesus made the woman’s patience an example for all.

Read this Gospel text a number of times, and as you read, listen to the Holy Spirit playing like a harpist on the fibres of your heart, to bring forth the melody of your response. 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. The Word of God is life-changing for me, when I respond to it in a practical way.**

1. My response is to admit that loving and accepting foreigners into “our” way of doing things was no easier then, than it is now. It requires justice and integrity, respect, reverence, a listening ear, and breadth of vision. Before Australian Federation, Sir Henry Parkes, building his case for Federation said: “The crimson thread of kinship runs through us all”. The truth is that women weren’t able to vote (except in South Australia), and Indigenous men, tribal leaders were forbidden to vote. So, what about this crimson thread? Today, in this time of history, one could say: “The crimson thread of kinship runs through us all, unless we are asylum seekers, or refugees trying to build a new life.” The point is, of course that the colour of our blood, is the same – for every human person and every animal. Sr. Joan Chittister reminds us that “monastic spirituality says that we are to honour one another, listen to one another, reach across boundaries and differences in this fragmented world.” (This quotation can be found in Sr. Joan Chittister’s teaching on “The Rule of Benedict”).
2. I am responding to Divine Mercy. “God never takes back his gifts or revokes his choice.” And Pope Francis reminds us: “What a beautiful truth of faith this is for our lives: the mercy of God! God’s love for us is so great, so deep; it is an unfailing love, one which always takes us by the hand and supports us, lifts us up and leads us on.” (The Church of Mercy). This is such a refreshing message and so different from many of the teachings we received in our childhood. The main message was: “If you don’t do as you are told, God won’t love you.” We have all received some of this in childhood and even in teenage years, accompanied by threats of hell. In many cases, it takes decades to undo the damage that was done. I have a friend who left the Catholic Church in 1959, because he loved a woman, who was divorced. He married the woman, and received threats of hell’s fire from the priest in the confessional. The priest was doing what he had been taught to do. He and the penitent were part of the 1950s Catholic Church. This friend died in 1981, never returning to the Catholic Church because of that one confession, through which he did not experience the love and mercy of God – quite the opposite. We all have these stories in our background. May we claim the love and mercy of God in the present, and rejoice.

3. This Gospel story has always upset me, because a dog in the time of Jesus was not the pampered pooch we all love and have on our beds. The dogs referred to here were dirty street dogs, who hunted for scraps from piles of rubbish. Only a dog owned by the wealthy, or the Roman rulers and governors, was inside, and yes, they always were expectant of scraps from their master's table. But – they were still beggars, unvaccinated and probably had worms! My most recent experience of a prayer request is my own, when I asked the Lord to take my brother home, rather than spend the next twenty or more years in a nursing home. I asked over and over again. God didn't give me what I asked for, but God gave our family the miracle of coming together, relating to one another, and the greatest of all: communicating with one another from where we are now. That was the answer to prayer.

*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.*