

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 27 August 2017

21st 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:

August 28: St. Augustine (Memorial)

August 29: Passion of St. John the Baptist. (Memorial).

September 1: Spring Ember Day (A day of prayer and fasting). There are many ways of fasting. Fasting from food, by missing a meal is only one way. Fasting from negativity and unkind words is another way. We all need to find the best way for us, and give ourselves to this day).

September 1: Care of Creation Day.

The Australian Church:

August 30: Bathurst – anniversary of the death of Bishop Patrick Dougherty (2010).

August 30: Geraldton – Anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral: 1988

August 31: Wagga Wagga – anniversary of the death of Bishop Brennan (2013).

September 1: Toowoomba – Patronal Feast (Mary of the Southern Cross) - a Solemnity in the Toowoomba Diocese.

September 2: Toowoomba – anniversary of the death of Bishop Edward Kelly (1994)

The Social Justice Calendar:

August 27: Refugee and Migrant Sunday

August 27: Death of Dom Helder Camara (1999)

August 29: International Day against Nuclear Tests.

August 30: International Day against victims of forced disappearances.

September 1: Founding of the Sisters of Charity, by Mary Aikenhead – 1815.

September 1: National Wattle Day.

September 2: On this day in 1991, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act was passed by Parliament.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 22:19-23

Romans 11:33-36

Matthew 16:13-20

Lectio: Read the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah chapter 22, verses 19-23. Read slowly and prayerfully, really listening to the text as you read aloud. This is about our on-going conversion.

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

This prophecy from first Isaiah, is a Messianic prophecy. It appears in the great “O” antiphons of Advent – the greater Advent Ferias. On December 20th every year, we pray this text as a Gospel Verse and as the Magnificat Antiphon at Vespers: *O key of David, and sceptre of the house of Israel, who opens the gates which none may shut, who shuts the gates which none may open. Come to liberate from prison the captive who dwells in darkness and in the shadow of death.*

Isaiah 22:19-23 comes at the end of a section of chapter 22. God is the speaker. “On that day” indicates a new beginning [for God’s people]. This is emphasized in verses 21-22. The things said of Eliakim and his office, are intended to associate him with the royal house. The key of the house of David symbolizes authority over all the royal household. The placing of it on his shoulders may refer to an investiture ceremony. (Cf. New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 15:42). All this symbolism points us to the Son of God, our Saviour, who gave us a new beginning, when he died for each one of us, and rose that we might live with him forever. Also implicit in this text is the Ascension of the Lord into glory with the Father.

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 137

The response is: LORD YOUR LOVE IS ETERNAL;
DO NOT FORSAKE THE WORK OF YOUR HANDS.

Psalm 137, is “a prayer of thanksgiving to a faithful God who cares for us, surpassing what we could expect from him.” (Jamberoo Abbey Psalter). This Psalm has a most challenging commentary in the monastic Psalter: “The thin coating we call the soil covers the whole earth; it binds all nations together in a common interest. But the triumph of a good harvest, or industrial prosperity should make one think of places where the harvest fails. God is the same God there and the people no less his image.”

Pray with the Psalm throughout the week and stay with the words that call you forth to respond.

Lectio: Read the second text from Romans 11:33-36.

Meditatio: Some background to the text so that we understand it better and can then make our response.

The commentary by Fitzmyer (NJBC), describes this text as a hymn to the merciful wisdom of God: “Paul exclaims...in wonder and gratitude, the boundless providence of God in arranging the mutual assistance of Jews and Gentiles in attaining salvation. Paul joins Isaiah 40:13 .and Job 41:3 to stress that God is no one’s debtor, either for his plans or for his gifts to humanity. All proceeds from his gracious bounty.”

Read the text again and allow the Holy Spirit to work on your heart. Listen to the Holy Spirit praying within you and prompting you to respond to words, phrases, sentences which call you forth and challenge you. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse from Matthew 16:18 is a prayer:

YOU ARE PETER AND ON THIS ROCK, I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from Matthew 16:13-20.**

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?**

This is firstly, Peter's confession of faith – "You are the Christ the Son of the Living God." In verse 14, Matthew mentions the Prophet Jeremiah because he was the Old Testament example of Jesus – in his suffering and rejection. In verse 19, Matthew relates church to a kingdom. The church is an interim arrangement between the earthly ministry of Jesus and the future coming of the kingdom.

God shall bind and loose what Peter binds and looses. And that is giving Peter enormous authority. Binding and loosing are rabbinical terms. They can apply to: the binding of the devil in exorcism, the power to excommunicate a person from the Christian assembly, and finally the authority to make decisions or set policies. This authority is given to the disciples in 18:18, but to Peter alone are accorded the revelation, the rock of foundation and the keys.

This and much more detail can be found in the NJBC 42:105.

Read the Gospel text a number of times during the week. Sit with the text for many "quiet" times. 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 gives me each Sunday for my formation as a Christian. 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. My response is to the words, "...should he open, no one shall close." Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen, a refugee to our country, is the Chairman of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council. In 2016, he described the journey of all asylum seekers as a journey based on Luke 5:4 – "Put out into the deep." *I believe that those words of Jesus also challenge Australians to make a similar journey – to dare to accept the gifts that we have come to fear or reject...the gifts that refugees have brought to Australia. Australia rose to the challenge in the past with its generous embrace of migrants and refugees. Australians in the past and in the present have found the key which opens the door of welcome to those seeking to belong. On a daily basis the finding of that key is harder. Our*

hearts are often hardened against another person. And this is the moment we need to take the hand of Jesus, ask Jesus to put the key in the door and to open the door. The grace he gives will also give us the words of welcome to the stranger, neighbour, friend or family. May we never shut the door and leave others outside in the cold.

2. My response is to persons who help other persons, or who give the gift of their lives in service of humanity. These persons are God's persons, acting on God's behalf, whether they know it or not. And often we hear a person say: "I am in debt to you for what you have done for my family." And so, we are confronted with the boundless providence of God, made manifest in the goodness of human beings on earth. Jesus said: "A cup of cold water given in my name..." And we can read Matthew 25 again this week. "In the evening of life we will be judged on love." (St. John of the Cross, summarizing Matthew 25). Mark Twain, in "In Simcox, Treasury of Quotations on Christian Themes", said: "Most people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand, but as for me, I always noticed that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those that I do understand." So, let us be challenged once again by the gracious bounty of God, the providence of God, and that very uncomfortable text – Matthew 25.
3. My response is to the "rock". Most of us have a small knowledge of geology – enough to know that the cleanest, freshest, life-giving water comes from rock. We can look up to the Illawarra escarpment here which is over 290 million years old, the last deposit being Hawkesbury sandstone. We can see the water slowly oozing out from about half-way down the rock. And we understand that Peter is the rock on which Jesus will build the church, not a building, or a series of buildings, but rather a building of "living stones" which have been set ALIVE by Jesus the cornerstone. This is CHURCH. And each of us is a living stone, a rock, called to give the freshest, cleanest living water to the world in which we live. A challenge for this week, and for every day of our lives. We are church, we are rock, we are living water because we are attached to Christ the cornerstone.

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.



Water flowing from the rock of the Illawarra Escarpment.