

LECTIO DIVINA: (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 3 September 2017
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Two.

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:

September 8: Birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary. (Feast).

In the Australian Church:

September 3: Armidale – Anniversary of the death of Bishop Henry Kennedy, 2003.

Sydney – Episcopal Ordination of Archbishop Anthony Fisher, O.P. - 2003

September 5: Bunbury – Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Gerard Holohan, 2001.

September 7: Wilcannia-Forbes – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, 1960.

September 8: Broome – Anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral – 1963,

In the Social Justice Calendar:

September 3: Father's Day

September 4: National Child Protection week.

September 5: International Day of Charity.

September 5: Death of St. Teresa of Calcutta (1997).

September 5: 2013 – Convention concerning decent work for domestic workers came into force.

September 7: National Threatened Species Day.

September 8: International Literacy Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27

***Lectio:* Read the First Reading from the prophet Jeremiah, Ch 20, verses 7-9.**

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:* A little background to the text, so that we understand it and can make an informed response to it.**

Jeremiah is the suffering prophet, more so than the other prophets, and becomes an Old Testament model of Christ. The divine fire burns within him, the fire which is the essence of his vocation to proclaim God's word to the people, despite the suffering

this brings him. The text is also an Old Testament model of the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus sweated blood in his agony. Jeremiah tries to restrain his vocation as prophet. He finds it unbearable: “The effort to restrain it wearied me.”

With this background, read the text again, and take a long time to ponder on the overall message. Build into each day some quiet time. Be still before the Lord. After pondering over many hours (days), you will want to make your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 62

The response is: MY SOUL IS THIRSTING FOR YOU, O LORD MY GOD.

Psalm 62 is a prayer of longing for God. Note the words: long, thirst, pines, gaze. And then: the outcome – will speak, will bless, will lift up, shall be filled, shall praise. Jeremiah thirsted for the Lord, and could not resist the call of the Lord. St. Augustine prayed: *Our hearts are restless until they rest in You O Lord*. Certain lines of the Psalm will speak to your spirit. Stay with them and ruminate (ponder) on the riches they offer.

Lectio: Read the Second Reading, from Romans 12:1-2.

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

The Glenstal Bible Missal notes that “the Christian ideal makes one’s whole life and every moment of it, worship given to God, a living liturgy, after the example of Christ offering himself to the Father.”

Dom Andre Louf, in his classic work “Teach Us To Pray”, has an in-depth reflection on the celebration of the interior liturgy. It is worth reading again if you have a copy of this book. The section on “The Sanctuary within” on Page 98, summarizes this prayer by calling it the “silent liturgy “ which leads the heart to gradually come to be the Holy of Holies: *The heart, asleep to begin with, was first sought out and alerted by the Word. Fertilized by the Word, it came to full maturity. Incorporated now into the Word, the heart is consecrated as the temple in which the Word is celebrated in the most original sense of that expression: The heart set free from every notion, and moved by the Holy Spirit...has become a true temple... In it the liturgy is celebrated wholly according to the Spirit.*

The monk Theoleptus says it more simply: *Therefore... repeat the words of the [Jesus] prayer and speak to the Lord, calling to him constantly and never losing heart. Then you will walk in the spirit..and will not interrupt the ceaseless flow of prayer...you are a temple of God in which God is praised without distraction.* (Philokalia on the Prayer of the Heart, page 391, paragraph 21).

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 taken from Ephesians 1:17 and 18.

MAY THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ENLIGHTEN THE EYES OF OUR HEARTS,

THAT WE MAY SEE HOW GREAT IS THE HOPE TO WHICH WE ARE CALLED.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 16:21-27.

Pause and ponder. Read the text again.

Meditatio: Some background to the text, so we can make an informed response.

Peter is centre stage. His misguided protection-directed, verbal tirade over the very prospect of Jesus' passion and death, shows, not a lack of faith, but a lack of understanding. Who wouldn't want to prevent Jesus facing his passion and death? Peter's character is an "all out front" character.

In the second part of the text, Jesus addresses firstly his disciples and secondly, all who would come after the disciples, everyone down to our own times: *Those who lose their lives for my sake, will find it.*

The message once again, is there to lead us to Jesus, and to do as Jesus did: gave his very life up for LOVE. In his case, it was a cruel form of execution, engineered by the Roman/Jewish authorities. For us, it will be an on-going challenge to love, not hate, to give as well as to receive, to encourage rather than discourage, to smile warmly rather than scowl horribly. Love is the way of life for us, a way of life taught to us by Jesus. The "me, me, me" kind of life is not at home with the love Jesus taught to his followers.

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. My response is to something Sr. Joan Chittister once wrote on contemporary prophets: "Prophets of a Future Not Our Own": *Prophets are those who take life as it is and expand it. They simply refuse to shrink a vision of tomorrow to the boundaries of yesterday. The prophets, when they came to the crossroads, when they came to a chance to settle down there, to quit, to accept what was, chose instead to keep on going.* These words have never been more apt than they are now, as we, the Catholic Church of Australia, stand at the crossroads. May we, taking the hand of the Lord, "refuse to shrink a vision of tomorrow to the boundaries of yesterday."

2. When I live aware of the interior liturgy, an on-going event which keeps me in union with God, I find myself laying down my life for others. Living this way enables me to stretch beyond my limits, to stop calculating and assessing how much I can or will, give. Without being ridiculous, and destroying my own health, there are so many ways in which I can stretch. I notice that in the Social Justice Calendar for this week, International Literacy Day is marked. I have a friend who reads to her mother every day in the late morning. Her mother is losing her sight through macular degeneration. I have another friend who reads to very young children in her neighbourhood. These little ones are not of school age yet. And, then there is the beloved grandmother or grandfather who read to us when we were children. We couldn't get enough of those stories.

3. My response is to the first part of the Gospel which addresses the "control freak" in me. In my younger years I often acted like Peter, trying to prevent others going through what they needed to go through. One of the prime examples for me was the death of my mother, when I took charge of the situation, and despatched my younger brothers and sisters to various tasks which would keep them occupied and away from the terrible event. I remember it, and they remember it. They didn't like being organized in this way. Who would? There are people who try to control the outcome of a business meeting, or staff meeting. Then there are people who are given a little bit of authority and it goes to their head. Aung San Suu Kyi, speaking of political power said in 1994: *Concepts such as truth, justice and compassion are often the only bulwarks which stand against ruthless power.* She is talking about political power. But power comes in many guises. Trying to control the life of one we love, or preventing one we love from suffering can be a death blow to that person. The Christian approach is one of solidarity, not control.

***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.***