

LECTIO DIVINA: (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 12 November 2017
32nd 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:

November 16: St. Gertrud the Great of Helfta (Benedictine woman saint)

November 17: St. Elizabeth of Hungary (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:

November 15: SALE – Patronal Feast (Our Lady of Perpetual Help).

WILCANNIA-FORBES. Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Barry Collins (2000).

The Social Justice Calendar:

November 12: Dili Massacre of 271 people in 1991.

November 14: World Diabetes Day.

November 16: 1989 – Murder of six Jesuit Priests and two co-workers in El Salvador

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Wisdom 6:12-16

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13.

***Lectio:* Read the First Reading from the Book of Wisdom, chapter 6: 12-16.**

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.**

Wisdom is personified here as a woman, - a feminine force in the lives of those who seek God and the gifts God offers. There is no obstacle to one’s seeking of wisdom, and one’s living of wisdom. She is readily found by those who look for her. She does not hide from those who love her. She is quick to anticipate those who desire her. She is one step ahead of them and reveals herself to those who desire her.

Then, that powerful command, “watch”, a word which means “be vigilant” and as a noun “vigilance”.

Then, “be on the alert”, another command equal to “be vigilant” or “be watchful”. To be vigilant, anticipating the next hour, half day, the next challenge in life, is to remain on a secure road.

One of the best lessons on vigilance is that given by Abba Orsisius: “If we do not guard our hearts well (remain vigilant, watchful), we will forget and neglect everything we have heard and then the enemy, finding room within us, will overthrow us.” And: “It is like a lamp filled oil and lit; if we forget to replenish the oil, gradually the lamp goes out and eventually the darkness will prevail..” (The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, edited by Sr. Benedicta Ward, SLG, page 161).
Watch for the wisdom of God...early in the morning and you will have no trouble.
WATCH FOR THE GOD WHO IS 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 62

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

Psalm 62 is a psalm of longing for God. One could add, the desire for wisdom, the wisdom of God.

Is this not the warmest and most intimate of expressions of love for God in the entire Psalter?

Lectio: Read the Second Text from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

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 marked as: “First Apocalyptic Disclosure: The Parousia”. It is divided into four sections:

1. Those who are asleep, a biblical image for those who have died.
2. Verse 14: Paul introduces an early Christian creedal formula. This two-part formula highlights the death and resurrection of Jesus and implicitly attributes Jesus’ resurrection to an act of God.
3. Verse 15: Paul assumes that the parousia will soon take place.
4. “Order” is a typical feature in apocalyptic descriptions: the trumpet shall sound, then the voice of the archangel will call out the command, then the Lord will come down from heaven – an ordered progression.
5. The same verb is used for the resurrection of the dead, as is used for the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of the dead takes place because of the resurrection of Jesus.
6. Lastly, the words of comfort.. Mutual comfort is the message. Sitting alone and becoming more and more depressed as one thinks about dying – NO! Mutual comfort is the message. Mutual comfort is about relationships.

(For most of this background summary, I have used the New Jerome Biblical commentary, 46:31-33). It is only a summary, but I believe this is enough for *Lectio Divina*.

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 24:42 and 44.

BE WATCHFUL AND READY:

YOU KNOW NOT WHEN THE SON OF MAN IS COMING.

(This message is for all of us). At the time Matthew was writing, the anticipated second coming of Christ was “on the radar”, to use a current expression. When the evangelists and writers of the New Testament Letters spoke of the second coming of Christ, they used it first of all as a fact of authentic faith and secondly as a tool to encourage people to stay on course. If we knew Christ was coming again tomorrow, wouldn't we want to be ready. This is how it is best for us to live: in faith, anticipation, authenticity, Gospel love.

***Lectio*: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 25:1-13.**

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

Forgiveness and un-forgiveness! This is the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Yes, we all know this parable as the wise and foolish virgins. The commentary in the NJBC adds that it is another twin parable, giving the feminine counterpoint to chapter 24:45-51. We need to stop here and read 24:45-51.

It is also said to be one of Matthew's editing developments on a text from Luke 12:35-38, alongside the teaching of Jesus about the nearness of the Kingdom of God and the urgency to be ready and waiting.

A few other notes:

The nuptial imagery, used in the Song of Solomon, was applied by the Jewish Rabbis to the relationship between God and God's people.

“The middle of the night”: the Lord is a God of surprises.

The “cry” expresses the longing of the early church for the consummation of the kingdom.

The oil stands for good works (Numbers 13:15 & 16). The foolish virgins lack good works.

An important last note is that the refusal of the wise virgins to share their oil, is not a lack of charity, or assistance. The good works of the wise are not completely transferable. Others can help, but readiness to accept salvation is ultimately a matter of personal responsibility.

Ready: this is the whole point of the parable. The groom is God. The shut door means that admission is not automatic. See Matthew 7:22, 23 and Matthew 24:42.

(For most of this background I have consulted the New Jerome Biblical Commentary 42:143)

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. I am responding to the exhortation to be vigilant, to watch, to be ready for the coming of Wisdom. Of the wisdom of God, John of Salisbury, Bishop of Chartres from 1176 -1180, said: *Wisdom is a fountain from which emanate rivers irrigating the whole earth. They do not solely fill the garden of the delights of the Holy Scriptures but also reach the Gentiles.* Fr. Edmund Campion in book, "Rockchoppers, Growing up Catholic in Australia", has offered this quotation. He also says, while describing Chartres Cathedral: *One notices that secular studies are the frame [of the door], not the centre of the Wisdom door. While the liberal arts cycle shows a person seeking to understand the Wisdom of the Lord through intellectual endeavours, in the central scriptural panels, incarnate Wisdom is communicated to Christ's Eucharistic community which lives by faith.* Here we are at the source, Jesus Christ the Incarnate Wisdom of God.
2. I meet a significant number of people who are afraid of dying. Some are Cradle-Catholics, as I am. Some are not Catholics, and haven't been gifted with faith. Every time one of their friends dies, they sink into a terrible state of not knowing how to respond. Grief is the first response, and this is the first response for all of us who lose family and friends. We can't see them anymore. Do you know anyone who is afraid of dying, or afraid of being caught off guard, not ready when God comes? Spend some time with that person this week. Be of comfort to whoever this person may be.
3. Am I vigilant for the coming of God? An elderly sister in my community said to me recently: "For me, it's about the way God comes to me every hour. I don't always like what God gives me, but I accept it as the best for me at that time. This for me, is the real awakening. This is surely what St. Hildegard of Bingen means when she used the word "viriditas", the greening. The opposite is "ariditas" barren earth. Vigilance is "viriditas". A lack of vigilance for the coming of God into our lives (every hour of every day) is "ariditas".

***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.***