

LECTIO DIVINA: (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Monday 1 January 2018
Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, from Tuesday onwards,
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:

January 2: Sts Basil and Gregory Nazianzen (Memorial)

January 3-6: Weekdays of Christmas time.

In the Australian Church:

No Anniversaries this coming week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

January 1: World Day of Prayer for Peace.

January 1: 1901 – Foundation of the Commonwealth of Australia.

January 1: 1994 – Commencement of the Native Title Act.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Numbers 6:22-27

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:16-21.

***Lectio:* Read the First Reading from the Book of Numbers, ch. 6, verses 22-27.**

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.**

It is a text with which we are familiar: *May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord let his face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord uncover his face to you and bring you peace.*

In its original setting it is known as the Priestly Blessing (cf. Leviticus 9:22-23) It reflects God’s response to those in the community who are stable, faithful, generous and dedicated.

The shining of God’s face (or presence) is more of a theophany experience – the manifestation of God’s presence.

The uncovering of the Lord’s face is a favourable gesture (cf. Pss. 4:7; 33:16). In times of distress, it was believed that God had “hidden his face” and abandoned his people. We can see this in Deuteronomy 31:18, Pss. 30:8, 44:25 and 104:29. The

word “peace” means (in the Hebrew context), wholeness or well-being. (For some of this background I have used the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament words, and Bauer’s Dictionary of Biblical Theology, Volume I).

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 66

The Response is: MAY THE LORD BLESS US IN HIS MERCY.

Psalm 66 is a harvest song. May we remember, on this world day of prayer for peace, that in so many war-ravaged and famine-ravaged countries, there is no harvest, and thus no song – just a cry of deep distress.

Lectio: Read the Second Reading, from Galatians 4:4-7.

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 so we can make an informed response to it.

The appointed time or “fullness of time” refers to that date in history “when God’s salvific intervention took place.” The main message is, that our freedom came with Christ. Jesus took on the human condition, and in so doing, carried our sicknesses and bore our sufferings, as the Prophet Isaiah proclaimed. Here too, in this text, is the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus is sent by the Father, so too, the Holy Spirit is on a mission for the Father.

In verse 4, Paul uses a verb which was developed in the early Church as having a specific religious meaning: to send someone in service of the kingdom, with authority fully grounded in God.

Jesus is sent by God.

The Holy Spirit is sent by God.

This is a brief summary of 47:26 in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary.

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 Hebrews 1:1-2.

IN THE PAST GOD SPOKE TO OUR ANCESTORS THROUGH THE
PROPHETS;

NOW GOD SPEAKS TO US THROUGH HIS SON.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 2:16-21.

Meditatio: The background to this text shows that it has three life-giving movements:

The shepherds hurry to Bethlehem – they see Jesus face to face. LIFE-GIVING

They proclaim what they had heard. The news is spread around. LIFE-GIVING
Jesus is circumcised and given the name the angel had given him before his conception. (Luke 1:31). It is LIFE-GIVING.

JESUS MEANS: The Lord is salvation. In that deeply spiritual reflection on the Jesus Prayer, by a Priest of the Byzantine Church, we read: “This is the Name by which all people are saved, and without which no one can be saved...” He also quotes for prayer John 1:12; Philippians 2:9-11 and Acts 4:12. We can spend time with these texts during the week ahead.

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 the Hebrew word “peace”, meaning wholeness or well-being. I have a number of people for whom I pray each day. This week I will pray for the gift of wholeness and well-being for them. I will sit quietly in our Abbey Church or in my prayer space and call each one to mind. I will stretch out my hands over them and pray: “May the Lord uncover his face to you and bring you peace.” Spiritual connection is vital when we pray for others. Henri Nouwen, in the Genesee Diary, said: “When I pray for the other, I become the other.” Sr. Stan of Dublin quotes his holiness the Dalai Lama, as saying: “If you wish to experience peace, provide peace for another.” So, the responsibility is mine. Can I stretch out my hands over others and pray for peace if I don't first have peace? St. John Vianney said: “You can't give what you haven't got.”
2. My response is to the words: “When the appointed time came...” I believe there is an appointed time for the birthing of Christ within me. This can occur at heightened moments in my life or on a daily basis with simple occurrences such as an act of kindness, a smile, a card or email to someone who needs my love, care, solidarity. I believe that the birthing of Christ within me is the work of the Holy Spirit. I used to sing that beautiful hymn: ‘Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me. Melt me, mould me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on me.’ I will pray that song throughout the days leading up to this Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God.
3. My response is to the last part of the text: “They gave him the name Jesus...” Fr. Karl Rahner speaks most powerfully to me when he says: ‘Let us inscribe above the gate of the new year the name of God, the name of the God in whom is our help, the name of Jesus. Jesus means ‘God helps’. And Jesus as a proper name tells us how God willed to be in our

regard: close, loving, helpful, faithful to the end. We as Christians know the definitive name of God: Jesus. For this is the name which that child received who is God and the eternal youth of the world.” (P. 89 – The Great Church Year, The Best of Karl Rahner’s Homilies, Sermons, and Meditations. Cross Road publishing, New York). Jesus is the mercy of God. Let us give this name to the coming year.

*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.*

