

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday, 25 September 2016.

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C.

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 27: St. Vincent de Paul

September 28: St. Lioba (in Benedictine Houses)

September 29: Sts. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, archangels.

September 30: St. Jerome

October 1: St. Therese of the Child Jesus.

In the Australian Church: No anniversaries this week.

In The Social Justice Calendar:

September 25: Social Justice Sunday and World Maritime Day.

September 26: International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

September 27: 1988- Formation of Burma's National League for Democracy by Aung San Suu Kyi.

September 30: 1975 – Proclamation of Australia's Racial Discrimination Act.

October 1: International Day for Older Persons.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Amos 6:1, 4-7

1 Timothy 6:11-16

Luke 16:19-31

Lectio: Read the first reading from the Prophet Amos, Ch 6, vs 1 and verses 4-7.

Read it aloud. Read it slowly. Be aware of the Holy Spirit placing unction on the message of this text. When your heart responds to a word or a line, or a phrase, this is the Holy Spirit touching your heart and calling forth your response.

Meditatio: A little background to the text will help us understand it and make a response to it.

The Prophet Amos speaks again this Sunday. As we read the text, we soon see that nothing has changed. The gap between rich and poor is still widening in our own times. Amos, an unpopular layman called to be prophet presents an image of the oppressor. Amos was the first of the "writing" prophets. There is a very helpful historical note about the frequent references to "ivory" by the Prophet Amos: "From 1908-1910, excavations carried out under the direction of the Archaeologist Reisner led to the discovery of a hill-top palace under the Herodian Temple. It contained beautifully carved ivories...the luxury of these ivories...helps us to understand the

frequent tirades against social inequalities...by the first of the writing prophets, Amos.” (cf. New Jerome Biblical Commentary 74:114). The text is the third text of “three warnings”. The first warning is 5:18-20. The second warning is 5:21-27. And the third warning is 6:1-3. Verses 1-3 warn those who are secure in their riches. Verses 4-7, which form part of the text for this Sunday, warn the Idle Rich. The Jerome Biblical Commentary notes that verses 4-6 are not so much a condemnation of a life of pleasure, but the refusal to notice or care about what has happened to Israel. As the idle rich have been first in the receiving line of Israel’s bounty, it is fitting that they be the first to experience deportation. The exile to Babylon took place in 587 B.C.

After much pondering, take time to respond to the text. You may want to ponder for a day or more, as you rest, work, walk, garden...sit and watch the ocean, the lake, the river. Just take time. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 145

The response is: PRAISE THE LORD, MY SOUL.

Psalm 145 is a prayer in praise of God’s fidelity. God’s fidelity is pitted against the idle rich with their reliance on their own riches and their security in these riches. (First Reading). The Lord “gives bread to the hungry, sets prisoners free, gives sight to the blind, raises up those who are bowed down, loves the just, upholds the widow and orphan...” And the “idle rich” of our own times seem to care very little about what is happening overall to the poor of so many nations on earth.

***Lectio:* Read the Second Mass Reading: 1 Timothy 6:11-16.**

Meditatio: The text is addressed first of all, and very personally, to Timothy, a convert of Paul. It was during Paul’s first missionary journey that Timothy was converted. He then became “a fellow worker on the second missionary journey which took the gospel across the Aegean Sea into Europe (Acts 16:1, 3). This information can be found in Gardiner’s “Who’s Who In The Bible, and in the Jerome Biblical Commentary and other commentaries. In this light, we see why it is important to Paul that Timothy gets back into touch with his initial conversion or profession of faith, and the way he “spoke up for the truth in front of many witnesses.” Then Paul makes the comparison between Timothy and Jesus. Both spoke up for the truth in front of others.

Paul presents to Timothy “the duty of doing all that you have been told with no faults or failures, until the Appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ...” Gardiner notes that very high standards in ministry were expected by Paul, and “the call to Christian leadership made exacting demands which could not be avoided.”

The text ends with a hymn of praise – an attempt to describe the glory of God, which is indescribable.

Make your response in the days ahead. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from 2 Corinthians 8:9.

JESUS CHRIST WAS RICH BUT HE BECAME POOR, TO MAKE YOU RICH OUT OF HIS POVERTY.

Lectio: Now read the Gospel text from Luke 16:19-31.

Read it aloud and listen to your own voice. Be aware of the unction placed on parts or all of the text – this is the Holy Spirit speaking within you and touching your hearts – calling forth the most beautiful and faith-filled response to these words of the Sacred Scriptures.

Meditatio: Some background to the text which will help us respond.

Again, we are confronted with the rich and the poor. And again we must ask questions:

How much will it take to wake us out of apathy and include the poor in our hearts and lives? Who are the poor?

- The elderly man or woman living alone?
- The child who has no love – living in a situation of domestic violence?
- The person who has just been made redundant from the work place and has to go home and break the news? Perhaps he or she has three children at school, three children to feed and clothe.
- The newly-arrived refugee family who would be helped by a welcome, a meal, a gathering?

And then there are the spiritually poor. Those who don't know God.

The hardest part of the text is that the rich man had plenty of warning, plenty of exhortation from Moses and the Prophets and so did the other Jews who lived before him. Can these be compared with those in the world today who have had plenty of warning, plenty of exhortation to narrow the gap between rich and poor, and who just refuse to make the effort?

Stand back from the Gospel, having read it a number of times. Ponder over it, and be still. When you feel called to do so, make your response to the text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 3*.

EVANGELIZATIO. Evangelizatio is about the evangelization of the “self”. It is that part of Lectio Divina where we make our lived response to the text. First of all we pray with the text, take time to ponder and understand the text, be still with the text and listen to the response we are being called to make.

1. I am responding first of all to the use of “ivory”. In our own times, we are being warned over and over about the destruction of the magnificent beasts God has created, so that we can have the ivory. We have all seen the destruction in photographs or on the television or in documentaries. When we moved to Jamberoo in 1989, it was comforting to see that the refurbished church organ had wooden keys. Ivory was no longer available – forbidden. Next I am responding to the plight of the poor of this world. In the patriarchal society of Amos's time, it was surely widows and orphans, those left without a father or husband. In this case they were destitute. It was the male who gave them security and a position in society. This went on for centuries – even into the 20th century. In the 19th century, Walter Bagehot wrote in “Literary Studies”: *Poverty is an anomaly to rich people. It is very difficult to make out why people who want dinner do not ring the bell.* (I have shared this

with you before). Also written into history is that terrible comment of George Crabbe: “The murmuring poor, who will not fast in peace.” (1785). And Bob Geldof, in 1989: “I’m not interested in the bloody system! Why has he no food? Why is he starving to death?” So, if we are asking our own questions about the gap between rich and poor, that means we too are disgusted at the plight of the millions of poor across our world, and at the same time, grateful for those who are bringing relief to the poor wherever they are – from our city streets and doorways, to the latest tent in a refugee camp. Like Amos the prophet, we need to expose ourselves to the plight of the poor, watch the images of the hungry and go on asking ‘why?’ Why are they hungry?

2. In response to this reading, I hear a “call” from God to return to the moment of my profession, the day I promised to give myself to God for the rest of my life. And – I am looking at the way I live out that profession on a daily basis, meeting the demands of the Gospel path in every situation. We all made a commitment at some stage: marriage, the single life, the religious life, an Oblate of St. Benedict, a Lay Carmelite, a monk or nun in the monastic life. It is a positive thing to re-visit that event and renew that commitment.
3. How does one respond to this Gospel? I believe we respond according to our circumstances in this life. Whoever I am, there is a poor person at my door: on the end of the telephone, the email, or in person in my neighbour. A friend told me that the poorest people (in his experience) are those in nursing homes who have no caring family. I have a friend who is a doctor who visits a nursing home in a professional capacity. My sister works in a nursing home. I hear many stories from her – tragic stories of someone brought there and left by family who just want to off-load the burden. And then they don’t visit. Yes, we don’t have to go far to find the poor.

*Lectio Divina is prayer with the Sacred Scriptures.
We read,
we seek to understand with the help of a commentary,
we ponder,
we take time for stillness
and we respond.
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
Take the Mother of God as your model.*