

LECTIO DIVINA: (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 11 February 2018
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B.

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 this week:

February 14: Ash Wednesday

In the Australian Church:

February 12: Darwin – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Eugene Hurley. (1999).

Tuesday 13: Syro-Malabar Eparchy – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Bosco Puthur, 2010.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

February 11: World Day of Prayer for the Sick

Project Compassion Sunday.

International Day of Women and Girls in Science.

February 12: Murder of Sr. Dorothy Stang in Brazil (2005).

February 13: 1958 – Establishment of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

10th Anniversary of the Apology to the Stolen Generations by the Australian Government (2008).

2015: Death of Faith Bandler AC., activist for Indigenous and South Sea Islander rights.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Leviticus 13:1-2 and 44-46

1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

Mark 1:40-45.

***Lectio:* Read the First Reading from the Book of Leviticus, 13:1-2 and 44-46.**

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.**

Roland Murphy, in his introduction to the Pentateuch, takes us to the origins of a Book such as Leviticus: “The term “Pentateuch” is derived from the Greek *pentateuchos*, five containers, indicating the written leather or papyrus rolls that were kept in receptacles. These five rolls are the first five books of the Bible...together they constitute the law, **Torah** meaning “teaching”. (Cf. 1:3)

The third book of the Pentateuch is the Book of Leviticus. We are given part of chapter 13 to reflect upon and to make our response. The whole unit is 13:1-46. A few verses have been chosen within this framework: 1-2 and 44-46. Verses 1-2 introduce the reader to disorders of the skin, most likely leprosy. But there were other skin disorders and these are presented in the entire unit. A leprosy person must live outside the “camp” or city – mostly in an arid or run-down place. In our present age, it would be the rubbish dump, or the “tip” as Australians refer to it. These persons, if they were near other people, must cover their upper lip and cry “unclean, unclean”. The covering of the upper lip would surely be done so that the leprosy person doesn’t breathe on the other person. The references to leprosy in the Old Testament are found in: Exodus 4:6, Numbers 12:10-15; 2 Samuel 3:29; 2 Kings 5:1, 27. We could read these during the week. There was no cure for leprosy. Hence, banishment from the community was necessary. Leprosy was contagious. In our recent past, we will have heard the heroic story of Damien the leper priest, who, after years of ministry to lepers, was, in the end, afflicted with leprosy. In the Old Testament, the person who determined the state of someone with a skin disease or a simple sore, or a scab, burns, scalp disorders and so on, was the priest. Roland Foley, in his commentary on Leviticus, says that “The priest was a judge and interpreter of the law, whose favourable decision was required before purification rites permitting re-entry into the community could be initiated.”

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 31

The response is: I TURN TO YOU LORD, IN TIME OF TROUBLE,
AND YOU FILL ME WITH THE JOY OF SALVATION.

Psalm 31 is about the joy of being forgiven. This jolts our memory – that up until the time of Jesus, people with leprosy or any other chronic illness or terminal illness were considered to be sinners. Sin equalled sickness or deformity.

***Lectio:* Read the Second Text from 1 Corinthians 10:31.**

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 short text continues on from last Sunday’s text. Paul now reaffirms that he tries to be “helpful to everyone at all times”, not anxious for his own advantage, but “for the advantage of everybody else, so that they may be saved.”

The theme of salvation is carried on from the Responsorial Psalm: “I turn to you Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.”

This Sunday concludes the texts from First Corinthians.
The last sentence brings Paul's teaching to an appropriate climax: "Take me for your model, as I take Christ."

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 from Luke 7:16.

A GREAT PROPHET HAS APPEARED AMONG US; GOD HAS VISITED HIS PEOPLE.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from Mark 1:40-45.**

Meditatio: Some informed background to the text. This is the beautiful story of a changing era – the era of Jesus. No longer is it necessary to be banished because one is ill or leprous. Jesus has come, and is teaching, healing, and training those who will follow when he goes.

Jesus is also obeying the law of Moses, and tells the leper to show himself to the priest, and make the offering "for your healing prescribed by Moses as evidence of your recovery."

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 word "unclean" and thinking about the people we cast out of our communities, parishes, villages, towns and cities. I am thinking about the people I cast out of my heart, out of my love. Sr. Joan Chittister says it strongly and without an apology: "The beauty of the open soul is not easy to come by in a world where the other, - the alien, the foreigner, the stranger – threatens my sense of security and the pyramids of social control. After all, we know who's meant to be in charge, and we cannot allow outsiders to jeopardize a system built on the absolutes we have devised for ourselves." (Illuminated Life, chapter on Xenophilia) I am grateful that I follow the way of St. Benedict, as does Joan Chittister. Benedict casts out no one, unless that person is corrupting the rest of the community. He caters for the weak and the strong, for the healthy and the sick. He teaches that the abbot or abbess must seek out the lost sheep, as did Jesus. He reminds us that Christ is in the guest or pilgrim, in the abbot or abbess, in the sick and in all humanity. Once again Sr. Joan nails it for me: "We" and "they" are the hallmarks of an age awash in refugees, under siege from immigrants, and yet inseparably linked in a world in which there

are no more natural boundaries (Illuminated Life, page 128). Once again, who is the one I ostracize? The gay or lesbian person, the refugee, the asylum seeker, the Indigenous person, the South Sea Islanders who tend to huddle together in certain suburbs of our cities. The “we” and “they” mentality has no place whatever in the heart of a Christian. So, I need to look into my heart this week.

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2. My response is to the few words at the end of the text: “As I take Christ”. In our family Library, when I was growing up as a teenager, I remember two copies of “The Imitation of Christ”. At that stage in Church history, Catholics didn’t have bibles, but we had “The Imitation of Christ”. This book equipped me for Christian life. Only by imitating Jesus the Christ, will I bear the fruits of compassion, kindness, caring for the lost one, visiting the sick, ministering to the grieving, looking after the homeless. But most of all, I must imitate Jesus who prayed and taught us to pray. Jesus was the model for Paul and the Apostles before Paul. Jesus remains the model for every person who claims to be Christian. Jesus wasn’t a man of racial and religious prejudice. He wasn’t a cut-throat businessman who made sure that the poor became poorer. Neither was he meek and mild. On the contrary, he threw challenge after challenge our way. Perhaps this week, we could call to mind the greatest challenge with which we are confronted in the Gospel.
3. My response is to go back to the words of Pope Francis: “I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.” Jesus touched the “unclean”, who were brought to him for healing.

*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.*