

LECTIO DIVINA: (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 11 March 2018
4th Sunday of Lent, Year B.

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:

March 17: St. Patrick (Solemnity in Australia)

In the Australian Church:

March 16: Anniversary of the death of John Bede Polding, OSB, first Catholic Archbishop of Sydney. (1877).

March 17: Patronal Feast in Adelaide, Ballarat, Bathurst, Hobart, Lismore and Melbourne.

In Bunbury, it is the anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral (2011).

In the Social Justice Calendar:

March 11: Earthquake and tsunami in Fukushima Prefecture (Japan). Death toll: 18,500. (2011)

March 12: Founding of Canberra as Australia's Capital, 1913.

March 15: National Close the Gap day. This day is a National day of action to pledge support for achieving Indigenous Health quality by 2030

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

2 Chronicles 36:14-16 & 19-23

Ephesians 2:4-10

John 3:14-21

***Lectio:* Read the First Reading from 2 Chronicles, chapter 36, verses 14-16 and 19-23.**

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.**

If you are, or were, a student of Ancient History, you will feel at home with characters such as Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. 2 Chronicles is one of the History books of the Old Testament. The story is familiar:

The people of the Lord turn their backs on the Lord. They are unfaithful.

The Lord tirelessly sends prophets to warn them. They mock and persecute the prophets.

The Lord rises up in anger – the Lord allows the Babylonian exile to take place. And the Lord uses Cyrus, king of Persia, as his instrument in bringing the Jewish people back from exile.

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 136

The response is: LET MY TONGUE BE SILENCED IF I EVER FORGET YOU.

Psalm 136 is a Psalm of exile. It was sung by the people of Israel, while they were in exile in Babylon. It is ever new, relevant in any age for any people who are taken into exile. The concentration camps of the Second World War gave us dedicated Christians who continued to pray the Psalms. We know of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Corrie Ten Boom, St. Maximilian Kolbe and St. Edith Stein. LET MY TONGUE BE SILENCED IF I EVER FORGET YOU. The underground Christian churches in many countries keep alive the psalms and the scriptures in our present age. May we pray for them as we hear this Psalm read or sung in our Parish Church this Sunday.

Lectio: Read the Second Reading, from the Letter to the Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 4-10. 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 that we can make an informed response to it. This text is part of the unit, 2:1-10. Theme: from death to life in Christ. “What was said of Christ in Ephesians 1:20, is now said of all Christians: they are raised and enthroned with him in the heavenly heights.” (New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 55:20).

Our salvation is all gift.

We are god’s work of art.

We are created in christ jesus

For what purpose? To live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it.

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 John 3:16.

GOD LOVED THE WORLD SO MUCH, HE GAVE US HIS ONLY SON,
THAT ALL WHO BELIEVE IN HIM MIGHT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from John 3:14-21

Meditatio: A little background to the text, so that we may gain an understanding, and make an informed response.

The first three lines of the text (in the Sunday Missal), contain the “first of three ‘Son of Man’ sayings which refer to the exaltation of Jesus.” (NJBC 61:52). The overall commentary on this text is too complicated to be helpful for *Lectio Divina*. I find the comparison between Jesus being lifted up [on the cross and on Calvary], and Moses lifting up the serpent in the Desert, as speaking of the power of God to conquer the devil, sin and darkness.

Then there are the key points of the text:

- God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that the world might be saved.
- The coming of the Son of God was not meant to condemn the world, - only to save the world.
- Then we are confronted with the comparisons between darkness and light, and the choices people make.
- Finally, those who live by the truth come into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what they do is done in God.

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 Cyrus as the Lord's instrument. Last time we had this text and I shared with you, my response was the same. This time, I have experienced even more than one Cyrus, who has been their to help me return from exile. When I go into exile, it is because of my own vulnerability. I don't turn my back on the Lord, but I do go off on my own and sit with my struggles. Perhaps “hurt” is the most powerful trigger which causes any of us to exile ourselves from the family, or community. Hurt, mockery, and making fun of people is a sure way to send them away from the family or community. Since it's the fourth Sunday of Lent, it may be not too late, to fast from hurtful remarks, or words of mockery, or disdain towards others. We could give instead, encouragement, positive upbuilding, words of kindness. We could be the “Cyrus” whom the Lord uses to bring another person back from exile. Exile is a terrible place to be, whether people or circumstances put us there, or whether we go there ourselves.
2. Recently, an Oblate of our community was sharing with me about tomb stones, or memorial stones in cemeteries. One reads the name of the person, the date of birth and the date of death. In between is a dash – The dash represents the whole of a person's life, from birth to death. If we are

to understand the “dash”, we need to understand that this person was God’s work of art, and over a long life, was “created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he [God] had meant us to live it”. This pilgrimage of life would have been characterized by joys and sorrows, responses to God’s gift of salvation, struggles to go on choosing the God-life within such a person. And what if the person is me? One day there will be a memorial stone on my own grave: the date of birth, then the “dash” and the date of death. That “dash” is the important mark. It does not tell the story of my life. That part is left for others to tell. Only those who know me: my sisters in community, our Oblates with whom I have journeyed for twenty-eight years, the choices I have made for Jesus above all, and the historical and unique pilgrimage I have made from birth to death is told by those who have witnessed my journey. Because it is “by grace that [we] have been saved...by a gift from God”, it is worthwhile spending some quality time this week, recalling your unique pilgrimage made in the strength of God’s grace.

3. I am responding to two aspects of this Gospel text: (1) – the exaltation of my Saviour on the Cross of Calvary, and (2) – the Light of Christ which lights up my path as I journey onwards. Fr. Karl Rahner sums up my response to the first aspect: “God has spoken his final word in this world and in its history, the word that is the cross of his Son...and in the two thousand years since the crucifixion, what came to pass during those three hours – when the cross on Golgotha pierced the heavens and the man thrust out upon it died – what took place then, happens again and again continually. Many pass by, and many remain.” (The Great Church Year, page 150). Will I pass by quickly hoping that I am not noticed, or will I remain? I pray to remain with Jesus on Calvary, the Calvary of God’s suffering, persecuted, dying people, so that I will come through to the Light of the Resurrection, and bring them with me.

*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.*