

***LECTIO DIVINA* (Holy Reading)  
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES  
Sunday 18 March 2018  
Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year B.**

**For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, 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:**

March 19: St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Solemnity).

March 21: The Passing of St. Benedict (celebrated in Benedictine Abbeys as a Feast or a Solemnity).

**In the Australian Church:**

March 18: Broken Bay – Anniversary of the death of Bishop Patrick Murphy, 2007.

March 19: Rockhampton – Patronal Feast.

March 21: Adelaide – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. James Gleeson, 2000

March 24: Toowoomba – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, 1935.

**In The Social Justice Calendar:**

March 19: Invasion of Iraq by USA and Allies – 2003.

March 21: International day for the elimination of racial discrimination; International Day of Forests; World Down Syndrome Day; World Poetry Day; Week of Solidarity with the Peoples struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination; National Harmony Day (Australia). The theme of National Harmony Day this year is: “Everyone belongs...”

March 22: World Water Day.

March 23: World Meteorological Day.

March 24: International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning gross human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims; World Tuberculosis Day; Earth Hour (8.30 – 9.30 p.m. local time).

**LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS**

**The readings are:**

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 12:20-33.

N.B. The Year A readings may also be used where the RCIA is operative.

***Lectio*: Read the first reading from the Prophet Jeremiah, 31:31-34.**

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.**

This text heralds the New Covenant. With the power of its proclamation, it brings us closer to the Covenant of the New Testament: “Love one another, as I have loved you.” This is the law of the New Covenant.

This is the Covenant which will be (already is), inscribed, not on stone tablets, but rather on one’s heart.

“Deep within them I will plant my law, writing it on their hearts...I will be their God and they shall be my people.

The Covenant of the Lord, with its binding love and fidelity, is no longer written on stone tablets or any other external material. There is no longer a person to be the “go-between” or intermediary (between God and God’s people).

God now comes right inside each person and writes his law (his law of love and all love’s attributes) on the hearts of his people.

HEART: What does it mean?

Vine’s Expository Dictionary sheds light on the meaning of “heart” when it is used in the Scriptures.

“Heart” means the entire mental and moral activity of a human being.

“Heart” means the hidden springs of the personal life.

After 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.

**The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 50**

**The response is: CREATE A CLEAN HEART IN ME O GOD.**

Psalm 50 is a prayer of contrition. And in the Psalter, is the fourth psalm of repentance – the finest of penitential psalms. (Cf. Jamberoo Abbey Psalters).

The Psalmist stands before God guilty but unafraid. We too, the people of the New Covenant, stand before God guilty because of sins against the Gospel. We also stand unafraid because we are sure of God’s mercy.

“Have mercy on me God, in your kindness.”

“A pure heart create for me O God.” (Cf. Jamberoo Abbey Psalters, Introductory Notes)

***Lectio:* Read the Second Mass Reading: Hebrews 5:7-9.**

***Meditatio:* A little background on the text, so we can best respond to it.**

The main point of Verses 7-8 is “to show that He (Jesus) is qualified as one who can sympathize with sinners, [and] there is no doubt...that the author (of Hebrews) does consider that Jesus’ ability to sympathize with sinners is based on the fact that he knew temptation as they did.” (Cf. New Jerome Biblical Commentary 60:28).

In verse 9, Jesus’ obedience leads to his priestly consecration, which in turn qualifies him to save those who are obedient to him. (Cf. 60:28).

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

**The Gospel Verse is from John 12:26.**

IF YOU SERVE ME, FOLLOW ME, FOLLOW MY SAYS THE LORD;  
AND WHERE I AM, MY SERVANT WILL ALSO BE.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel from John 12:20-30**

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.** The most important text in this gospel is: “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.”

Jesus’ reply to the request announces:

1. The conclusion of his life on earth.
2. The truth of what it means to follow Jesus.
3. Those who serve Jesus will be honoured by the Father.
4. And the text we pray during the Sacred Paschal Triduum: “Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say: ‘Father, save me from this hour?’”

Ponder over this text. Listen for the message you are to hear, and be still, as you receive the visitation of God into your life through God’s Sacred Word. 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. The Holy Spirit has placed unction on the words: “writing it on their hearts...” This is a painful process. When the Gospel is written on our hearts, not once, but over and over, it is painful. It hurts. St. John Cassian urged his monks to “till the soil of the heart every day, with the plough of the Gospel.” By allowing this to happen every day, we are airing the soil, and keeping it free for more and more planting of the seeds of Gospel truth. It is hard work indeed.
2. In response to the essence of this text, my heart goes straight to the words of Isaiah: He bore our sicknesses, He carried our sufferings. And here in Hebrews, he is the Lord who knew temptation and human weakness. What more could I want on this life’s Journey? We have a God who understands what it is to be human. We have a God who cries with us because he too was mocked and betrayed; he entered into the grief of others (Martha, and the Widow of Nain). He loved his friends, and stood by his friends and was faithful to them. He did hard labour with his father in a carpenter’s shop – no machines in that era! His parents may have been the first in their street, to take a “casserole” around to a family whose mother was sick. This is what it means surely when we believe that Jesus took on the human condition. He

wasn't in a glass case, being preserved and protected from life because he was the Son of God. I believe his mission was to "get down and get dirty!"

3. My response is to the text: "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say: Father, save me from this hour." I believe that unless we have come face to face with this text in our lives, and cried out to God in those words, we haven't yet lived. A friend of mine was recently homeless. She and her autistic son, and their dog. Being evicted because of the demolition of some public housing, she had nowhere to go, and of course the dog was a problem. She cried and cried in despair at her situation, and I carried her cries to God. Henri Nouwen said about prayer, that when we pray for the other, we become the other. We must get inside the other to understand their suffering, to reach empathy, which is much more than feeling sorry for someone. "We would like to see Jesus", as did the Greeks in the Gospel. Seeing Jesus begins with the great love of empathy.

*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.*