

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 25 March 2018**

**Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord – the first day of Holy Week.
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:

March 29: The Sacred Paschal Triduum begins with Mass on Holy Thursday evening.

March 30: Good Friday.

March 31: Holy Saturday

April 1: EASTER SUNDAY

In the Australian Church:

No Anniversaries this coming week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

April 2: World Autism Day

April 4: International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action.

April 7: World Health Day

International Day of Reflection on the Genocide in Rwanda.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 50:4-7

Philippians 2:6-11

Mark 14:1-15:47.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from Isaiah 50:4-7.**

Be aware of the way you handle your bible. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep reverence. This text is given to all of us on this particular day in the Church's Liturgical Year, for our formation as Christians.

***Meditatio:* Some background on the text, so that we can understand it more profoundly, and make our response to it.**

Isaiah 50:1-11 summarizes the confidence of the servant-prophet. Of verses 4-7, it is noted in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary that:

Verses 4-5 are textually disturbed and variously translated. In simpler terms these verses have been a problem for Biblical scholars. Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. (in the NJBC) suggests the following translation: *The Lord God has given me a disciple's tongue, that I may know how to sustain the weary. The Word rouses me in the morning, in the morning he rouses my ear to hear like a disciple.*

Verse 6: Like the prophets before him, the servant is ignored and maltreated.

Verse 7: this phrase, "face like flint" is frequent in prophetic preaching. (Cf. Isaiah 48:4; Jeremiah 1:8, 18; Ezekiel 3:8-9).

For those of us living as Christians of the 21st century, this text takes us to the face of our Saviour, His face was covered in spittle, slapped and mocked.

Read the text again a couple of times. Ponder on the text for a day or more. However, if you are aware of the Holy Spirit calling forth your response to the text, note it down. When the Holy Spirit prays within you or pours unction on a text and calls you forth, this is the true “prayer” (*oratio*) of *Lectio Divina*. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 22:8-9,17-18,19-20,23-24

The response is: MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME? This is the Calvary Psalm, the one Jesus prayed in desperation, the despair of being abandoned by God.

Lectio: Read the Second text from the Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians, chapter 2, verses 6-11.

Meditatio: Brief background to the text or brief explanation of the text, so that we can understand it and respond to it.

This part of *Lectio Divina* is the “time” when the monks of old, having heard the Word read to them, would now listen to one who was educated in the Scriptures, explaining the meaning to them. Many monks in the early centuries were uneducated and illiterate.

This text is a liturgical hymn used in the first Christian communities. One of the tools for our education in the scriptures is repetition. If this text was read or sung every time we went to Mass, we would soon know it by heart, as we once knew the “Last Gospel” which was read at the end of Mass in the 1950s/early 60s: *In the beginning was the word and the word was with God...*”

Repetition is all through the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours) for our on-going formation as Christians.

And this is in stark contrast to the “novelty” attitude: Change this, change that, try something new”, as if we were downloading the latest computer upgrade.

Our formation as Christians is slow, as is the growth of a magnificent Eucalypt tree, or a Moreton Bay Fig Tree. The rain and the sun are like the repetitive texts of the Scriptures, which help us to put down roots and become firmly grounded.

Take time to ponder on this reading. This is done as we go on with each day’s work, or rest, or travelling to work on the train and bus. We don’t need perfect conditions. *Lectio Divina* is a way of life. Once it becomes so, then we can ponder anywhere. Write your response to the text. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is taken from Philippians 2:8-9.

CHRIST BECAME OBEDIENT FOR US EVEN TO DEATH, DYING ON THE CROSS.
THEREFORE GOD RAISED HIM ON HIGH AND GAVE HIM A NAME WHICH IS ABOVE ALL NAMES.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from Mark 14:1-15:47.**

Read it slowly and reflectively, and maybe a second time. Try to read aloud rather than with the mind. Listen to the text as you read. Stand back from it and ponder.

***Meditatio:* Some background to help us understand the text and respond to it.**

The reading of the Passion Narrative is probably best read in sections.

If we take a section each day for *Lectio Divina* and listen to the Holy Spirit praying within us and prompting us to respond, then our receptivity will be heightened by the time we hear the whole account on Palm Sunday.

Our response will become clear as the week progresses.

Read the Gospel text again slowly. Stand back from the text and the commentary and go about your work quietly ruminating. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 3.

EVANGELIZATIO: My lived response to the texts with which the Church exhorts me to pray. St. James says “Be doers of the Word.” And the Book of Deuteronomy tells us that the Word of God is in our hands to do it.

1. My response is as follows: *In the morning he rouses my ear to hear like a disciple.* This presupposes there is a connection between ear and heart – the heart of a disciple. It means for me that the word cannot be stifled, because the Holy Spirit, praying within me, is prompting me to respond, as a disciple of God, of the Word, of the Word made flesh. A disciple is someone who follows a master, and who learns from the master what is acceptable and what isn’t acceptable. A disciple imitates the words and actions of the master. I believe discipleship is what St. Hildegard of Bingen calls “the greening power of faith”, and “an understanding of scripture”. Faith and the Word of God as it comes to me in the morning, and through the day, this is my life.
2. My response is to the importance of repetition in the liturgy. I have been in my Benedictine monastic community for thirty-five years and have chanted the psalms and listened to the readings both at Mass and in the Liturgy of the Hours. Year after year they come around, and there is a power in repetition. Each time I hear the Word of God in the Mass, and in the Liturgy of the Hours, I know that the word is being written on my heart. And it hurts from time to time, when I know that the Lord is challenging me yet again, and I feel that I can’t do it anymore. That is when I need the grace of God to carry on. That is when I need to go back to the well of ever flowing divine water, and drink deeply so that I will be receptive once again. Jesus said: *Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains only a single grain, but if it dies it bears a rich harvest.* This is the essence of *Lectio Divina*. The seed is the word of God. Christ is the sower.
3. My response is to what the commentary calls, the three mockeries, plus the early mockery by the soldiers. A group of soldiers mock Jesus on the basis of the title “king of the Jews”. The crown of thorns is part of the mockery. More mockery is to come when in verse 29, some passers-by

mock Jesus about the issue raised in 14:58 – threatening to destroy the temple. Then the high priests mock Jesus because he claimed to be the Messiah (Cf 14:61). Then yet again he is mocked by those crucified with him. Mockery means ridicule, scorn, derision, taunting, making fun of! This was the reality of the Passion of Jesus. It has also been the reality of Christian missionaries throughout history. Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận was mocked and imprisoned for his faith and his position in the Catholic Church. He endured prison for 13 years, then a further period of house arrest. He wrote from prison: “A Christian loves the cross of Christ and carries it [through] life. A Christian is a living *Credo*, continuing the work of Jesus here on earth, and making the song of hope resound in the midst of the world’s trials.” (Prayers of Hope, Words of Courage). We need to hear this as never before.

Lectio Divina is about reading the Sacred Scriptures and reflecting on them from an informed background.

It is allowing the Holy Spirit to play on the fibres of my heart like a harpist, and bring forth the beauty of my response.

In responding to the text, my life is changed more and more into Christ. Lectio Divina is a way of life not a method of prayer.

Hosanna!

