

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 8 April 2018
Second Sunday of Easter, Year B.
It is also Divine Mercy Sunday.

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week 2.

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:

April 9: The Annunciation of the Lord – transferred from March 25, Palm Sunday.

April 11: St. Stanislaus (Memorial).

In the Australian Church:

No Anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

April 11: Pope John XXIII's Encyclical, "Peace on Earth" was released. (1963)

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Acts 4:32-35

1 John 5:1-6

John 20:19-31.

Lectio: Read the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, ch. 4, verses 32-35. Read the sacred text slowly and prayerfully, really listening as you read aloud. This is about our on-going conversion.

Meditatio: Understanding the text so that we can immerse ourselves in it, and make our response to it.

This is an "ideal" portrayal of the apostles and other believers coming together, united in the same faith and sharing their material possessions. It has been the model for religious life and monastic life through the centuries. The beginnings of monasticism, as lived by the desert fathers and mothers, took on voluntary renunciation of their wealth, and lived in desert solitude. Some of them instructed aspirants to do the same and to live in continuous prayer. In the Rule of Benedict, a person is asked to leave his or her possessions behind when entering the monastery. All tools, books, clothing and utensils are held in common.

Acts 4:32-35 is also the ideal for Christian fellowship, in lay communities.

Sometimes though the reality is very different. In my own community, our founding father, Archbishop Polding (first Catholic Archbishop of Sydney), had this vision for his monastic community at St. Mary's in Sydney and our community at *Subiaco*, near Parramatta. The monks and nuns would share the same vision and be in harmony. The nuns (two to begin with, then five), did the laundry for the monks (the laundry

would come down by boat from Sydney), darned stockings for the boy oblates, made and mended habits for the monks, and made/washed liturgical garments. In return, a stipend was given to the nuns. It was frequently inadequate and caused needless hardship. There is an episode in the Acts of the Apostles which is comparable, except that in the case of the nuns, there was no complaint. They just put up with their lot. In Acts 6:1, we read: “Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.” The situation was rectified.

Take time to ponder on this text in the days ahead as you go about your work, rest, recreation. Allow the Holy Spirit to work on the fibres of your heart, and bring forth the melody of your response to this text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 117

The response is: GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD FOR HE IS GOOD,
HIS LOVE IS EVERLASTING.

Psalm 117 is a processional song of praise, and contains the prophetic statement: The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

***Lectio:* Read the second text from 1 John 5:1-6**

***Meditatio:* Some background to the text so that we understand it better and can then make our response.**

Faith overcomes the world is the message.

The victory over the world was won when Christians were converted. (Cf. 2:13&14). The Word of God or the “anointing” is the source of this victory (4:4), a share in the victory won by Jesus. (Cf. New Jerome Bib. Comm. 62:30)

And so, overcoming, winning, or conquering, is possible only for those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. It does not mean believing in Jesus, but rather in Jesus as the Son of God.

Read the text again and allow the Holy Spirit to work on your heart. Listen to the Holy Spirit praying within you and prompting you to respond to words, phrases, sentences which call you forth and challenge you. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from John 20:29.

YOU BELIEVE IN ME THOMAS, BECAUSE YOU HAVE SEEN ME.
HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN ME BUT STILL BELIEVE.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from John 20:19-31.**

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.

Meditatio: What is it about?

This gospel text has a number of sections: in John 20:19-33, the Risen Lord appears to the disciples. In John 20:24-29, Jesus appears to Thomas. John 20:30-31, states the purpose of the Gospel. In the second section, the elements of the text are particularly Johannine:

- (a) The summons to become a believer
- (b) Thomas's confession, "my Lord and my God".
- (c) The blessing on future believers.

Thomas's confession of faith is the culmination of the Gospel's Christology, since it acknowledges the crucified/exalted Jesus as "Lord and God". We can compare other acclamations in John's Gospel: 1:49, 4:42, 6:69, 9:37-38, 11:27, 16:30.

The concluding blessing insists that all those Christians who have believed without seeing have a faith which is in no way different from that of the first disciples. Their faith is grounded in the presence of the Lord through the Spirit. (Cf. New Jerome Biblical Commentary 61:234-236).

Read the Gospel text a number of times during the week. Sit with the text for many "quiet" times. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing like a harpist on the fibres of your heart, to bring forth the melody of your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 3*.

EVANGELIZATIO: My lived response to the texts with which the Church gives me each Sunday for my formation as a Christian. 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 a little too close to home, but it is an honest one. I have seen, through my thirty-five years of monastic life, a number of women who give away their possessions, and then enter the community. Strictly speaking they may keep a Master Card and a bank account until they make Solemn Vows. However, when they give a precious possession, such as an expensive piano, I have noticed that they don't really give it to the community. They keep an eye on it, making sure that the lid is down, the dust is wiped away, and so on. They don't really give it away! And yes, it is responsible to keep it clean and whatever else! But to stand over it, keeping watch for any breach of unspoken rules, is not freedom, either for the giver or the receiver. The ideal portrayal of Acts 4:32-35 remains in this case, just an "ideal". The giver can't really let go.
2. My response is to the miracle of faith. Thomas Merton wrote: "Faith is the opening of an inward eye, the eye of the heart, to be filled with the presence of divine light. Ultimately faith is the only key to the universe. The final meaning of human existence, and the answers to questions on which all our happiness depends cannot be reached in any other way. (Seeds of Contemplation).

3. My response is to focus on Thomas. Fr. Thomas Keating presents Thomas in a “down to earth” way: “...it is obvious from this event that Thomas was still heavily under the influence of emotional programs for happiness. Because Jesus chose to visit the apostles at a time when Thomas was absent, his reaction was, ‘How come I was left out? What’s wrong with me?’ ...As Thomas thought about the situation, his indignation continued to increase. The other apostles kept telling him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ He felt neglected, rejected, frustrated, and finally, enraged.” I can identify with Thomas, because I am, from time to time, left out of things. My deafness excludes me from a number of important announcements in community. I rely on someone to tell me what was said. I have also experienced what Thomas experienced: “How come I was left out? What’s wrong with me?” And, I have felt neglected and rejected many times in my life. It would be realistic to say that most of us have experienced rejection of one kind or another. It is important for our inner freedom that we bring that rejection to Jesus and ask for healing. We need to break free of rejection. But – only the grace of God can equip us for this freedom from rejection, this journey from slavery to freedom. All the negative emotions we experience, and which we allow to dominate us, are forms of human slavery.

*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.*



Image: The Doubt of Thomas by He Qi