

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 17 June 2018

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B.

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Three

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:

June 21: St. Aloysius Gonzaga (Memorial)

June 22: Sts. John Fisher and Thomas More, martyrs of the English Reformation.

In the Australian Church:

June 17: Sandhurst – Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Leslie Tomlinson, 2009.

June 23 Parramatta Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen, 2011.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

June 17: Beginning of National Refugee Week

World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought.

June 19: International Day for the Elimination of sexual violence in conflict.

Also on this date: Affirmation by Arbitration Commission of the principle of equal pay for women performing equal work. (1969)

June 20: World Refugee Day

June 23: United Nations Public Service Day. It is also International Widows Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Ezekiel 17:22-24

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Mark 4:26-34.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Prophet Ezekiel, chapter 17, verses 22-24.**

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 Sunday, 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.**

The name 'Ezekiel' means "God is strong". Ezekiel was one of ten thousand captives taken from Jerusalem during Nebuchadnezzar's campaign of 597 B.C. (cf. 2 Kings 24:10-17). Although the place where he prophesied is not certain, it is agreed by scholars that Tel-Abib on the river Kebar was the place of his prophetic ministry. (Ezek. 3:15, (Paul Gardiner, "Who's Who in the Bible). I have found Gardiner's narrative description of Ezekiel to be one of the best. It is comprehensive, and clearly presented). The New Jerome Biblical commentary focuses on the imagery: "The new twig from the top of the cedar represents a future king from the house of David (2

Samuel 7:13). Birds of every kind were first used in the flood story to describe all the species on the ark. Birds sheltering in the cedar is used again in Ezek. 31:6, to describe Pharaoh as a great king.

If the cedar is the king of Judah, then the trees are the kings of surrounding nations. They will know that God humbles the mighty and raises up new power from nothing. The lesson is repeated in chapter 31, in which Pharaoh is humbled. Here God brings a new king of Israel to glory from the lowly state of punishment to which Judah has fallen in verses 1-21. (Cf. NJBC 20:49)

With this background in mind, read the text again. Ponder for a while. Maybe a day or more! Make your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 91

The response is: LORD, IT IS GOOD TO GIVE THANKS TO YOU.

Psalm 91 “is the song of a happy person. We are children of God, and we learn in prayer to look at the world as God sees it. We are joined to Christ as branches to the vine, and we try to make our new minds, and our lives, grow more like his.” (Abbey Psalters) This short commentary opens out a different way of interpreting the giant cedar. Does the giant cedar represent God, and we the branches?

Lectio: Read the second text from the Second letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 5, verses 6-10.

Meditatio: A little background to the text, so that we can make an informed response to it.

There is not much background to draw on. Apart from certain technicalities (the Greek in vs. 6, for example), the commentaries mostly focus on the hope of Christians, for full union with the Lord. Paul expresses it succinctly: “We are full of confidence, I say, and actually want to be exiled from the body and make our home with the Lord.” Then there is the phrase: “Whether we are living in the body or exiled from it, we are intent on pleasing him.

Finally, there is the judgment on the “truth about us”.

“For all the truth about us will be brought out in the law court of Christ, and each of us will get what we deserve, for the things we did in the body, good or bad.”

Stand back from the reading and go about your work for a while. Maybe a day or two. Be alert to the grace of God. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist on the strings of the harp. The Holy Spirit will bring forth the most beautiful response to this reading. You will be surprised by the Spirit.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse:

THE SEED IS THE WORD OF GOD, AND CHRIST IS THE SOWER;
WHOEVER FINDS THE SEED WILL REMAIN FOREVER.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Mark 4:26-34

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.**

Jesus speaks to the people in parables. These parables are full of the imagery which we saw in the first reading from Ezekiel. The first parable is simple in its message: God is acting all the time. The seed which was planted within us in the Sacrament of Baptism, grows silently. It can best be described as a “thirsty” seed. It makes us thirst for God and the beauty of God. It encourages us to become fully alive, and so give glory to God. One can’t always measure its growth. But God is measuring the growth and the readiness of the fully grown crop. God loses no time: “he starts to reap because the harvest has come.”

The second parable is also about the kingdom of God. This time it is described by the smallest of seeds, the mustard seed. When fully grown it is the biggest shrub of all and yes, it puts out branches so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade.

This was the way Jesus taught.

Why complicate the Gospel stories? Why analyze every word and get one’s head into a whirl, when Jesus spoke so simply?

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. I believe that the Lord can use any of us as a shoot which is planted on the high mountain of the Israel of today. We can bear fruit, and become a noble tree. From our lowliness, the Lord can do this. And when we become that fruit-bearing tree, we can be tall and strong for those who are weak, wounded, and hurting. A prophet speaks on behalf of God. This week, I will be an “Ezekiel” for the exiles of my family, extended family, parish or local community. Exiles are everywhere. Outside the Jamberoo Post Office, I recently met an elderly woman who lives alone in the village. She shared with me that she feels useless, unwanted, and is just waiting to die. She had a small dog with her, and my passion for dogs kicked in. We sat outside the Patisserie and had a long chat. Her children had moved away and had families of their own. Her husband had been dead for over twenty years. She seemed more positive by the time we finished. I made some practical suggestions, which she graciously accepted. I have since asked a woman in the Jamberoo Parish to look in on her, if at all possible.
2. I’m responding to the “law court of Christ” and feeling rather nervous. So, I need to look at one area of my life this week. I am going to look at, and be aware of, my thoughts. Are they always loving? No – I’m afraid they aren’t. Do I act out of unloving thoughts? Yes, sometimes I do. Do I hurt others by speaking and acting negatively? Yes, I do. Do I have days when negative words dominate? Yes, I do. So – a week of awareness of negative thinking, giving way to negative words, and to negative actions.

3. My response is to the image of nature. As a passionate gardener, I believe I (and other gardeners) have a head start on this text. We know about seeds and shrubs. We know about the silence under the soil, and the miracle that is surely taking place while we sleep, and work, and recreate. When I was a child of about 8 or 9, my father took me to what was Mt. Olivet Hospital for the dying, in Brisbane. There was a Presentation sister who was on her homeward run, so to speak – waiting for God. My sister and I sat by her bed, and she told us stories that Jesus had told to his disciples, or which were written up by the Evangelists. These were the days when as Catholics, we didn't have bibles at school or in the home. We loved our visits, and we couldn't get enough of the stories about Jesus. There has been a great "listening" to stories over the last five years by members of the Royal Commission. They have listened, not to stories Jesus told, but to the horror stories of the sexually abused, those children of God, who, by virtue of their Baptism, are temples of the Holy Spirit. There are religious sisters who go into the Detention Centers run by the Australian Government and listen to other horror stories: what men, women and children have done to escape the violence of war, the rape of wives and daughters, the slaughter of husbands and sons. I will try this week to listen to someone who needs to tell me his or her story. Story matters. How else do we get to know one another? How else do we learn empathy, compassion, genuine care?

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.***

