

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 24 June 2018
Solemnity of the Birth of John the Baptist, 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:

June 28: St. Irenaeus (Memorial)

June 29: Sts. Peter and Paul (Solemnity).

In the Australian Church:

June 26: Bathurst – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Michael McKenna (2009).

June 27: Maitland-Newcastle, and Wilcannia-Forbes: Patronal Feast – Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

June 28: Geraldton – Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Michael Morrissey, 2017.

June 29: Bathurst – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, 1865.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

June 26: International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

June 30: Introduction of unemployment benefits in Australia – 1945.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 49:1-6

Acts 13:22-26

Luke 1:57-66, and vs. 80.

***Lectio:* Read the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 49, verses 1-6.**

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:* Understanding the text so that we can make an informed response.**

This text, in its original setting is a commissioning of the servant prophet. Some of the verses will be seen in the Liturgy of the Hours for this Solemnity. The prophet speaks in his own name, and presents himself as another Jeremiah. He is called from his mother’s womb. (Vs. 1 – Cf. Jeremiah 1:5). He has a vocation to outsiders. (Vs6. Cf. Jeremiah 1:10 and Jeremiah 25:13-38).

He responds at times with discouragement. (Vs. 4. Cf. Jeremiah 14:17)

God sets his chosen ones on the way of their vocation, from their mother’s womb. (Cf. Psalm 138:13-15; Luke 1:15-31; Galatians 1:15.)

Spend time with these texts as they take us more deeply into the call of God. The image of the sharp sword as applied to the mouth of the prophet, is taken up later in Hebrews where the Word of God is described as a two-edged sword. (Cf. Hebrews 4:12, which is a basic text for all of us who are given to daily Lectio Divina). The servant of the text comprises all faithful people. The text ends with the image of light: I will make you the light of the nations, so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

Now take time apart with this reading. Listen to the Holy Spirit placing unction on certain words and phrases. The prayer of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is the *oratio* of Lectio Divina – the true prayer which will lead to a lived response. After quietly pondering over many hours (days), you will want to make your response. Maybe your response will be an immediate one. This does not mean that we cease to ponder on the text throughout the week. *Lectio Divina* is a way of *life*. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 138

The response is: I PRAISE YOU LORD, FOR I AM WONDERFULLY MADE.

Psalm 138 is often referred to as “the Hound of Heaven”, after Francis Thompson’s 182 line poem: “I fled him down the nights and down the days, I fled him, down the arches of the years...”

One can’t run from God forever is the message.

Lectio: Read the Second Text from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 13:22-26.

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 in order to make an informed response to it.

Paul is at Antioch in Pisidia. It was his first Missionary journey. We can follow its course by reading Acts 13:2-14:28. This journey was made over two years, 46-48 A.D. It was a journey of 300 kms. We need to be aware of time and travel in this particular age. He would have preached at all the towns on this journey, and earned his living as he went. Paul didn’t rely on the dole!

To the Jews, his own people, Paul sums up, in a brief but profound way, the essence of the salvation of humankind. Beginning with David in the Old Testament, Paul makes the connection between David and Jesus who was descended from David: “To keep his promise, God has raised up for Israel one of David’s descendants, Jesus, as Saviour...”

John the forerunner of Christ, whose nativity we are celebrating today, is also brought into the address, and the words of John are proclaimed by Paul to keep the coming of Christ in its biblical context.

The text finishes with Paul claiming those present as his very own: “My brothers, sons of Abraham’s race...this message of salvation is meant for you.”

Paul, the fearless preacher, seems tireless in his mission to bring Jesus to all people.

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 from Luke 1:76.

YOU, CHILD, WILL BE CALLED THE PROPHET OF THE MOST HIGH; YOU WILL GO BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 1:57-66 and 80.

***Meditatio:* Some informed background to the text.**

Fr. Karl Rahner notes three important aspects of the story of this holy birth. First of all we are told that the friends and relations rejoiced because of God's favour to the mother and hence also to the child. It is a favour when God calls a human person into being, it is an act of grace, or love, and of unspeakable mercy. This would apply to all births.

The second thing which is to be noted is the fact that all the people around the parents of John, were seized with fear on the occasion of John's birth. This fear is one of deep reverence in face of the fact of human existence. All the people who had witnessed the expectation of this child and had lived through the strange circumstances surrounding the birth, knew there was a mystery about it.

The third thing comes at the end. The father thanks God and praises him, in the words which we now pray every day in the Church's Liturgy, as they have come to us in the "Benedictus", at Lauds (Morning Prayer). Fr. Karl Rahner finishes his reflection with the words: "Praised be God who has called us into fellowship with his Son, who has loved us and saved us and called us into his unspeakable light..."

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 the call of this text. I am experiencing it as a personal call. The servant comprises all faithful Israelites. The call today is to all faithful Christians, those who profess to be followers of Jesus, to be what we are called to be: lights to all nations on earth. This may mean that we challenge established Institutes by asking uncomfortable questions. It may mean that we challenge a friend to forgive, rather than go on in bitterness and unforgiveness towards those who have inflicted hurt and abuse. It may mean challenging those who can't say a kind word about anyone. A friend of my mother rang me recently to tell me of the death of their mutual friend. This lovely woman is 92. My mother died at 52, so this lady is somewhat of a mother figure for me. In the course of conversation, she said that in 2017, when she made her last visit to Brisbane (her home city), she attended a reunion of some women who had gone to St. Rita's College, Clayfield. One woman lashed out with harsh critical words against the Presentation Sisters who taught her. My 92 year old friend confronted her for her words and for her bitterness. There was quite a

scene! My friend, said to me over the phone: “I will not tolerate criticism of the nuns who taught us. They were holy and dedicated women.” So – my friend was a light in the gathering, a dedicated Christian and Catholic all her life. Thanks be to God there are people like her who will be that confronting light!

2. My response is to the fearless apostle Paul. Can I be like Paul this week and stay, remain, abide, with a friend, or friends, or strangers, speaking of Gospel values, not in a preachy way, but in a gentle, gifting way? Can I do this without panic and rushing, and impatience? Stay, remain, abide. My ability to stay with someone might be that person’s only chance of coming to the Divine Light.
3. I am responding to Fr. Karl Rahner and hearing the three aspects of the text as a new challenge to the mystery of human life. I (we) live in an age when disregard for human life is rife and birth in many developing countries, or in poverty-stricken countries is often dreaded – another mouth to feed; another body to clothe. Most of us don’t know this kind of poverty, because we haven’t experienced it. One scene stays in my mind: a woman with a baby at the breast, surrounded by dead bodies. The woman is like a bag of bones. She hasn’t any milk for the infant. She has two other small ones clutching at her legs. They are small bags of bones. They are terrified. And yes, this is Syria, and yes, this destruction of human life has been caused by those who have no reverence for human beings created in the image and likeness of God. It is time to reclaim reverence for human life. It is time to reclaim respect and that sense of mystery surrounding every birth. If I (we) do this, it will bear fruit. It starts at home, then at school, if we are still at school, and then as adults in the workplace, or on the sports field. Respect! Reverence! Courtesy! Every person deserves it.

***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.***