

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 5 August 2018

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B.

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

Before beginning *Lectio Divina*, let us look at the week ahead in Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

August 6: The Transfiguration of the Lord.

August 8: St. Mary of the Cross (Solemnity in Australia).

August 9: St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. (Edith Stein).

August 10: St. Lawrence.

August 11: St. Clare.

In the Australian Church:

August 8: Australia's National Patronal Feast.

Patronal Feast for Brisbane, Parramatta, Port Pirie, and Wagga Wagga.

August 8: Darwin: Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Edmund Collins (2014).

In the Social Justice Calendar:

August 5: Beginning of National Missing Persons' Week.

Also, the beginning of Homeless Persons' Week.

August 6: Destruction of Hiroshima by the Atomic Bomb (1945).

August 9: Destruction of Nagasaki by the Atomic Bomb (1945).

August 9: International Day of the World's Indigenous People.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Exodus 16:2-4 and 12-15

Ephesians 4:17 & 20-24

John 6:24-35.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Book of Exodus, chapter 16: 2-4 and 12-15.**

Read slowly and prayerfully, really listening to the text as you read aloud. This is about our on-going formation as Christians.

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

Complaints, lack of faith, yearning for what was! And Moses is dealing with all this, pleading on behalf of his people. Of course the principal person in this text is God, the God who is Divine, the one who provided the people with quails and bread.

It is a story of a **faith crisis**.

Thomas Merton, writing on faith, says that: “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, p. 101).

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 77

The response is: THE LORD GAVE THEM BREAD FROM HEAVEN.

Psalm 77 is about God’s patience with humanity’s ingratitude. It contains the lesson of past history: “He rained down manna for their food, and gave them bread from heaven. He sent them abundance of food. He brought them to his holy land, to the mountain which his right hand had won.”

***Lectio:* Read the second text from Ephesians 4:17 & 20-24.**

Meditatio:

This part of *Lectio Divina*, is about explaining the text and reflecting as we hear the explanation (like the monks of the early centuries). We are reading this explanation either on the computer, or in the leaflet we receive weekly. Be aware, that we can easily read too quickly, or be distracted.

About LECTIO DIVINA, Blessed Columba Marmion says: “We read under the eye of God until the heart is touched and leaps into flame.”

These few lines from Ephesians are powerful enough to project us through the fire of purification (the spiritual revolution), and bring us into the light of newness: “You must be renewed by a spiritual revolution so that you can put on the new self that has been created in God’s way, in the goodness and holiness of the truth.” It is a magnificent and magnanimous text. There is to be no more aimless living: sitting around like senseless people, loafing on the couch in front of the television, flicking from one channel to another – eating and drinking to excess, buying things we don’t need, and so on – we could go on and on. This text is just as relevant for us now as it was for the Ephesians. We – all of us, must put aside our old self, the self which is corrupted by illusory desires - (false or deceptive needs and wishes).

Read the text again and allow the Holy Spirit to work on your heart. What words, what phrases, what sentences are to change your life? I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from John 6:51-52.

I AM THE LIVIING BREAD FROM HEAVEN, SAYS THE LORD; WHOEVER EATS THIS BREAD WILL LIVE FOREVER.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from John 6:24-35.

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 is in the form of a dialogue built around “bread”. It contains one of the “I am” proclamations of John’s Gospel: “I am the Bread of life.” This is followed by the promise: “Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never thirst.”

A helpful note on “the bread of life” presents the shift from the Old Testament, where the bread in the wilderness is described as the “bread from heaven”. . In the New Testament, it is described as “the bread of God”, and finally as the “Bread of Life” – the Bread which will give life to the world. The bread of life is the Son of God, who will continue to nourish believers through the Divine Love which is sacrificial, and never ending.

(There is a long and intricate commentary on this text in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 61:90-92.) There are other commentaries in Bibles. I have chosen to pray with the “bread of life”. This, to me, is the foundation of the text.

Read this Gospel text a number of times, and as you read, 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 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. The Word of God is life-changing for me, when I respond to it in a practical way.

1. My response is somewhat “raw”. Complaining and lack of faith. This is a situation in which I find myself a lot lately. My brother had a major stroke on Christmas Eve, 2016. Now, on August 5, 2018, he remains in a wheelchair, he is in pain, unable to walk. His speech is unintelligible. I pray over and over, that he will die. Death is the only means of relief from his condition. No doubt, there are thousands of Australians in the same predicament. The statistics are that every three minutes in Australia, someone has a stroke. “Why O Lord, don’t you relieve them of their living hell?” Why do children suffer from cancer? So many prayer requests come to us via email or other means. There are no answers, but to go on trusting that God’s presence is in there somewhere. Surely God is suffering within each of his suffering children, and crying with those who watch them suffer.
2. My response to this text is to the phrase: “aimless kind of life...” and the words “illusory desires.” I am challenged by these words in my own daily life. I came across a few words of gold recently and was helped by them: “I believe in the sun, even when it does not shine, I believe in love, even when I do not feel it, I believe in God, even when God is silent.” (The author of these words is Anonymous). And I hear the words of Jesus: “Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” Illusory desires are in each one of us. No single person is free of illusory desires, during at least one phase of life.

We have all been tempted to go after something which will take us away from God rather than help us draw nearer to God. There is another lens through which this text can be viewed – depression. One in three Australians suffers from depression of one kind or another. Depression can lead to aimless wandering through life. Depression untreated can lead to terrible domestic violence or to suicide. Standing by someone who suffers depression is a “saintly” way of life. I inherited depression after brain surgery. Apparently, it is expected! The psychiatrist who interviewed me told me that all the things I was experiencing were normal. For the first time, I began to understand depression, and take a different attitude to those who are afflicted in this way. Not only depressed persons can wander aimlessly through life. There are other situations which cause this. When a marriage breaks down, husband or wife can be hurt so badly that they become depressed and spend a lot of time sitting or walking aimlessly. Within the last week, a local “homelessness” organization found a woman walking aimlessly (in a daze) through the main street of Kiama. The woman had bruises, cuts and other visible marks that told the story of what had happened to her. Is there someone we know who is wandering aimlessly through life, without much incentive, contented just to sit or walk along the streets without purpose. Why not be there for such a person this week?

3. I am responding to the words of Jesus: “I am the Bread of Life.” Fr. Karl Rahner, in a homily for Corpus Christi, shares that “we receive this bread of eternal life as pilgrims between time and eternity, until the journey is at an end and God unveiled becomes for us the eternal bread of glory.” (“The Great Church Year”, page 231).

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.