

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES

Sunday 16 September 2018

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B.

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

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

In the Liturgy:

September 17: St. Hildegard of Bingen

September 20: Sts Andrew Kim Tae-gon, Paul Chong Ha-sang and companions.
(Martyrs).

In the Australian Church:

September 16: Melkite Eparchy – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Robert Rabbat, 2011.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

September 16: International Day for Preservation of the Ozone Layer.

1993: Death of Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Aboriginal poet, activist and artist.

September 18: 1961 – Death of UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld

September 21: International Day of Peace.

World Alzheimer's Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 50:5-9

James 2:14-18

Mark 8:27-35.

***Lectio:* Read the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 50, verses 5-9.**

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: Some informed background so that we can honour the text in its original meaning. This text is from Second (Deutero) Isaiah, and is situated in the middle of 50:1-11. Scholars inform us that in its origins, it is a disturbed text, and translated in a number of ways. The Biblical Scholar Caryll Stuhlmüller, C.P., suggests the following: “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.” The word “weary” is a key word in Second Isaiah (The

Book of Comfort). StuhlmueLLer takes the text into Messianic meaning when he refers the reader to the way prophets have been maltreated and even ignored. Texts for reference are: Isaiah 48:4; Jeremiah 3:3 and 18; Ezekiel 3:8-9. (Cf. New Jerome Biblical Commentary on Second Isaiah, 21:37 & 38).

With this background, read the text again, and take a long time to ponder on the overall message. Build into each day some quiet time. Be still before the Lord. After pondering over many hours (days), you will want to make your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 114

The Response is: I WILL WALK IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD;
IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING.

Psalm 114 is the prayer of a person saved from death. It is a simple “prayer of thanks to God after escape from death by sickness, accident or malice. The Psalm became part of the Hallel or ‘Hymn of Praise’ (Psalms 112-117) sung at the Paschal Supper.” (Notes in Jamberoo Abbey Psalters)

Pray with the Psalm throughout the week ahead, and listen to what the Holy Spirit is praying in your own heart.

Lectio: Read the Second text which is taken from the Letter of James, chapter 2, verses 14-18.

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: Some background to the text, so that we can more easily understand it and make our response to it.

This is probably a text which has been quoted to us since we were children: “Faith without works is dead.”

I remember the nuns who taught me in Primary School. They taught this text so thoroughly that it is written on my heart. “Faith without works is dead.”

The Glenstal Abbey Missal adds: “A faith which is never realised in deeds remains purely theoretical or abstract.”

The Jerome Biblical Commentary on James explains it differently: “James means by faith, the free acceptance of God’s saving revelation. By ‘works’ is meant the obedient implementation of God’s revealed will in every aspect of life, as illustrated by the numerous practical exhortations in the Letter.”

This is a fuller explanation of the same message: faith without works is dead.

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 Galatians 6:14.

MY ONLY GLORY IS THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHICH
CRUCIFIES THE WORLD TO ME AND ME TO THE WORLD.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from Mark 8:27-35**

Pause and ponder.

***Meditatio:* Some background to the text so that we can better respond to it.**

We need a commentary to help with this Gospel. This text includes Peter's confession of faith, and "Peter's confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah/Christ is pivotal in Mark." Jesus "clarifies the nature of his identity as the Messiah/Christ by means of the first Passion prediction." Peter's impetuous reaction (it is not a response), is to act like a personal bodyguard and take Jesus aside: No Lord, this won't happen. It can't happen. I'll be there for you. Jesus responds in front of the others: "Get behind me Satan, because the way you think is not God's way but man's way." That must have hurt Peter. (Some of this background can be found in 41:55 of the NJBC). And towards the end of the Gospel text there is the teaching on renunciation of self-will, taking up one's cross, losing one's life for Jesus and for the Gospel of Jesus.

This is a tough text. Are we up to it?

Stand back from the Gospel and ponder. Go to a quiet corner of your garden or a nature reserve, or your own home, or a church which is open for prayer. 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 words: "The Lord God has given me a disciple's tongue that I may know how to sustain the weary." As I understand this sentence, one must first be a disciple, before one can use words to sustain the weary. Being a disciple requires humility, and self-knowledge: "I don't know everything. I have a lot to learn. I will be a disciple of the Lord as long as I am alive on this earth. It is only in discipleship that I will have the words of comfort for the weary." I have seen some terrible mistakes made when certain persons think they know everything, and worse still, that they do not pray, and are always giving advice and instructions to the weary. I am to listen like a disciple before I can give sustenance to the weary. I am to be humble before the Lord, and receive my sustenance from the Lord before I can sustain anyone else. So, the lived response for me this week is to go to *Lectio Divina* faithfully each day, and to be equipped, (should the need arise), with sustenance for the weary.
2. My response is to the main message of the text: faith without works is dead. The "works" part of the quotation is more easily understood than the "faith" part. Writing about faith, John of Damascus (675-749) says the following: The bible [Sacred Scriptures] is like a scented garden, delightful, beautiful. It enchants our ears with birdsong in a sweet divine and spiritual harmony. It touches our heart, comforts us in sorrow,

soothes us in a moment of anger, and fills us with eternal joy. The soul is irrigated by the Scriptures and acquires vigour, produces tasty fruit, namely, true faith, and is beautified with a thousand green leaves, namely, actions that please God.”

3. My response to this “tough” text is to say up front that I am not good at any of it, but I try. Could I try harder? Yes, always. I have also been in the situation that Peter is in. I can appreciate his horror at what Jesus would suffer. My mother, a young cousin and a number of close friends have suffered and died from the dreaded cancer. I would have given anything to take it from them, and take their place. It’s so hard to watch our loved ones suffer and die. And we continue to ask, Why? Sr. Joan Chittister has a reflection on “A Life-Size Question”. She shares: “The great questions of life are questions that do not admit of cheap and easy answers.” (Sr. Joan Chittister, Essential Writings, Modern Spiritual Masters Series). And so I ask, “Why do people suffer terminal illnesses, or debilitating diseases?” – both are questions of life that do not give us cheap and easy answers. St. Mary of the Cross said that, “What we do not understand now, will be clear on that day when all things will be laid open.” There is another perspective on this reality: “The best view of suffering and death is in the rear vision mirror.” We live through suffering and grow through suffering, and we take the memories of suffering through life. We grow older and we mature, and no, our questions aren’t answered, but one day we look back and say, “God was there all the time.” God did it all first: the suffering God who “bore our sicknesses and carried our sufferings.” (Isaiah). God was with us at the time we agonized over the terrible illnesses of our loved ones. God cried with us. God had a break-down with us.

***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.***