

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 4 November 2018
31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B.

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

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

In the Liturgy:

November 9: Dedication of the Lateran Basilica (Feast)

November 10: St. Leo the Great (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:

November 8: Rockhampton – Anniversary of the death of Bishop Bernard Wallace (1990).

The Social Justice Calendar:

November 4: Day of Prayer for Anglican and Roman Catholic Reconciliation.

November 5: World Tsunami Awareness Day

November 6: International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in war and armed conflict.

November 8: 1907 – Harvester Case. Minimum wage judgment by Justice Higgins.

November 9: 1987 – Opening of the Berlin Wall.

November 10: Execution of 9 Nigerian environmental and human rights' activists. (1995)

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Deuteronomy 6:2-6

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 12:28-34

***Lectio:* Read the First Reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, ch. 6, verses 2-6.**

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.**

Verses 2 and 3 form the final clause of the conclusion an address of Moses.

Verses 4-6 begin with the call to hear.

This call is paralleled in the sapiential (wisdom) books. Cf. Proverbs 1:8

The call to hear introduces the command to love the Lord alone.

It is about exclusive devotion to the Lord, the Lord alone. This is a dominant theme in Deuteronomy.

The text given to us this Sunday is part of a second address of Moses - homiletic introduction to the Law Book. (5:1-11:32).

It is outlined thus:

A: Summons (5:1-5)

B: Decalogue (5:6-21)

C: Sequel to the Decalogue (5: 22-6:3).

D: A Law for life in the Land. (6:4-25)

“A land flowing with milk and honey” occurs often in Deuteronomy. (Cf. 11:9; 26:9 & 15; 31:20).

It is suggested by Biblical scholars and textual editors that this description of the Promised Land may be borrowed from Canaanite poetry of the Late Bronze Age. (1550-1200 B.C.). This background has been summarized from the Commentary on Deuteronomy in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 6:21 and 22.

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 17

The response is: I LOVE YOU, LORD, MY STRENGTH.

Psalm 17 in its original context, is King David’s gratitude for victory. It is sung every Sunday at the Hour of Vespers in our monastic community. The commentary in our Psalters notes: *The stormy history of David is well known to us. But the historical situation will not help...we have to take the words to ourselves, and the ‘enemies’ we pray against have intangible arrows: we need the shield of God and all the warlike but spiritual apparatus that St. Paul asks for: ‘the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God’ (Ephesians 6:16f.)*

Lectio: Read the Second Text from the Letter to the Hebrews, ch. 7, v’s 23-28.

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.

The text is repeating with different emphases, and a different mixture of words, phrases and sentences, the truth that Jesus is our eternal High Priest who lives to make intercession for us. Again, we are reminded (as we were last Sunday), that there is a vast difference between the priests of the Old Testament and the High Priest, Jesus the Christ. “The Law appoints high priests who are men subject to weakness; but the promise on oath, which came after the Law, appointed the Son who is made perfect for ever.”

Take time over this text before making your response. Allow the Holy Spirit to prompt your response, by placing unction on a word or words. Or, if the Holy Spirit is not prompting you to make a response to this text, move on to the Gospel Verse. Sometimes a text like this which we have had for two or three Sundays can lead to a dry spell which we might need to move on from.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from John 14:23:

ALL WHO LOVE ME WILL KEEP MY WORDS,
AND MY FATHER WILL LOVE THEM, AND WE WILL COME TO THEM.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from Mark 12:28-34.**

Meditatio: Some informed background to the text.

This text could be seen as the most important text in the New Testament. The Old Covenant with the ten commandments comes to its fulfilment in the Lord of the New Covenant. A scribe comes up and tests Jesus as to the first commandment. Jesus replied: *This is the first: Listen Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all you soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.* The important word here is “Listen”. It is a listening which is different from listening to sounds or machinery, or even the leaves rustling in the trees. It is a listening which demands a response from the heart. The word “listen” is spoken by the Father at the Lord’s baptism in the Jordan, and again on Mt. Tabor at the Transfiguration. *LISTEN TO HIM.*

Listen with the “ear of your heart”, as Benedict says in the Prologue to his Rule for Monasteries.

Mark 11:27-12:37 presents five stories about Jesus’ controversies with his opponents (plus one parable). Cf. NJBC 41:74.

The text we are given narrates the fourth controversy.

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. I am prompted by the Holy Spirit to respond to the words, “...written on your heart”. These words are the focus of my response. Depending on my openness to the Word of God, the Word of God will be written on my heart, etched into my heart, or left standing at the door of my heart. I have been taught since I first entered a monastic community, that all prayer in the

monastic tradition is about working with the soil of the heart. Is the soil of my heart moist and workable. Is it clay soil which needs help to open up its richness. Is it soil which is full of tree roots and unable to make space for the Word? No room? If we don't want to hear the Word of God as it comes to us in the Sacred Scriptures, through friends, family, counsellors or colleagues, there are ways of shutting it out. Peter of Celle, in "The School of the Cloister", taught: "When you read, bring a friendly simplicity to the Divine law. Read (lectio) [in order to] understand (meditatio/oratio). Understand [in order to] do the commands of God (evangelizatio). What lies dead and deformed in the letter on the dead parchment comes to life when what is read is put into practice." "If you hear his voice today, harden not your heart".

2. My response is to once again gather God's people into my prayer, and to do so in union with Jesus who lives to make intercession for all of us. Henri Nouwen once said (and I have shared this with you before): "When we pray for the other, we become the other." This was his understanding of compassion. It changed my life of prayer about 29 years ago when I read it for the first time. When I enter into another's pain, grief, hurt, loneliness, I become as they are and therefore I am united with Jesus who is in each one of his children and who lives to make intercession for each one of his children on earth. When I toss and turn at night in a comfortable warm bed, it is because I know how many Australians are not as privileged as I am. And in my tossing and turning, I pray for those Christians who are out in the streets bringing comfort to the homeless. Awareness is the beginning of all prayer as I understand it. If I am not aware of my neighbour, then I am not stretched "beyond my superficial self to my better self, to the Ultimate Good who is God." (Sr. Joan Chittister, "Illuminated Life, Monastic Wisdom for Seekers of Light". Page 23).
3. I am responding to the statement that LOVE is better than any holocaust or sacrifice. We often see that quotation: "In the evening of life we will be judged on love" – how we have loved God and neighbour. Matthew is the author of this quotation. In the 25th chapter of his Gospel, the way forward is made clear for each of us. Whenever we love another person in need, or not in need, we love Jesus: a cup of cold water, a meal, a card, an email, flowers, a visit.

***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.***