

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 16 December 2018
3rd Sunday in Advent, Year C (Gaudete Sunday)
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

17-22 December – Greater Advent Ferias, with an “O” Antiphon at Vespers, introducing and concluding the Magnificat.

Dec. 23 is the Fourth Sunday of Advent – it also has an “O” Antiphon for the Magnificat. The rest of the liturgy on this day is for the Fourth Sunday of Advent.

December 24 is Christmas eve – it takes First Vespers, or Evening Prayer 1 of the Nativity of the Lord.

In the Australian Church

No Anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar

December 18: International Migrants’ Day

December 18: 1894 – the South Australian Parliament was the first in Australia to give women the right to vote.

December 20: International human solidarity day.

December 21: 1991 – Dissolution of the USSR and the founding of the Commonwealth of Independent States, including Russia.

December 21: 25th Anniversary of the passage of the Native Title Bill by the Australian Senate (1993)

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Zephaniah 3:14-18

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:10-18.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Prophet Zephaniah, chapter 3, verses 14-18.**

Be aware of the way you handle your bible.. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep awareness. This text is given to all of us on this particular day in the Church’s Liturgical Year, for our formation as Christians. It is not information we need, but formation.

***Meditatio:* Some notes on the background of this text will help us to both understand it, and make a response to it.**

Paul Gardiner, in his list of Biblical persons notes that “the verb on which the name Zephaniah is based occurs frequently, with the idea of being hidden by the Lord from evil (Pss 27:5 and 31:20), or of his saints being his treasured ones. (Psalm 83:3)

Both would be appropriate ways to describe the Prophet's relationship to the Lord." (pp. 679-680).

Chapter 3, 1-20 contains two ambiguous oracles: 3:1-5 and 3:6-8. Verses 9-20, present a promise of transformation and peace. The text we are given for *Lectio Divina* is part of the promise of transformation and peace. The promise is also an exhortation to shout for joy, rejoice, exult. The words: "The Lord, the king of Israel is in your midst; you have no more evil to fear", are comforting words for all who pray with this text. And again: "Zion have no fear, do not let your hands fall limp. The Lord your God is in your midst."

Read the text again a couple of times. Stay with it. Ponder on it for a day or more. However, if you are aware of the Holy Spirit calling forth your response to the text, note it down. When the Holy Spirit prays within you or pours unction on a text and calls you forth, this is the true "prayer" (*oratio*) of *Lectio Divina*.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm:

The Response is: CRY OUT WITH JOY AND GLADNESS:

FOR AMONG YOU IS THE GREAT AND HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL.

The text is a Psalm within First Isaiah, chapter 12, verses 2-6. It begins: "Truly, God is my salvation, I trust, I shall not fear."

It is a beautiful tribute to our Saviour. Why not pray it daily?

Lectio: Read the Second text from the Letter to the Philippians, ch. 4, verses 4-7.

Meditatio: Brief background to the text or brief explanation of the text, so that we can understand it and respond to it.

This is a simple, beautiful text of reassurance, and can be linked directly to the first text from Zephaniah. Paul is exhorting the Christians of Philippi to be "Happy in the Lord" Then he says: "The Lord is very near."

Zephaniah says: "The Lord your God is in your midst."

Paul says there is no need to worry.

Zephaniah says: "Have no fear."

Paul says that we only have to ask God for what we need.

Paul also says that the gift of peace will guard the hearts and thoughts of the Christians of Philippi.

The only line which is different is also an exhortation: "Let your tolerance be evident to everyone: the Lord is near."

Take time to ponder on this reading. This is done as we go on with each day's work, or rest, or travelling to work on the train and bus. We don't need perfect conditions. *Lectio Divina* is a way of life. Once it becomes so, then we can ponder anywhere. Write your response to the text. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is taken from Isaiah 61:1 (which is repeated in Luke 4:18).

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME;

HE SENT ME TO BRING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 3:10-18

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.

The forerunner of the Lord is center stage in this text. To begin with, John is besieged by questions from: people in general, tax-collectors, soldiers. The answer to all of them has one common denominator: dignity for all. A policy of dignity for all excludes greed, dishonesty and oppression of others.

The more they listen, the more a feeling of “expectancy” grows.

Then John announces the coming of “one who is more powerful...” The baptism of Jesus will be with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Fr. Karl Rahner summarizes the first part of this text with brilliant insight, with a focus on the first question asked of John: “What shall we do? Somewhat intimidated, people asked the question after John the Baptist’s frightening sermon about sin and the inevitable judgment, about all-transforming conversion. John answered them; and suddenly his answer holds us just where we are, living quite ordinarily; where we are, carrying on patiently. His answer means that it is here precisely that we can experience the coming of the Kingdom of God, if only we want to, and if only we can surrender in hope to the hidden meaning and innermost power of this everyday life of ours.” (page 40, “The Great Church Year”)

Read the Gospel text again slowly. Stand back from the text and the commentary and go about your work quietly ruminating. (*Ruminatio* in Latin), is just as important a part of *Lectio Divina* as reading, opening out the text and responding to it. *Ruminatio* goes on day after day. The text is always with us, as we live day by day.

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 am responding to the words: “Have no fear, do not let your hands fall limp. The Lord your God is in your midst...” I went to a hospital many years ago to visit a close friend who was dying from cancer. She didn’t have long to go. In order to reassure me, she told me that she wasn’t afraid, because the Lord was with her, right there in her hospital room. I’m always helped by the words of George Bernard Shaw who wrote in “Man of Destiny” (1898): “There is only one universal passion: fear.” It is everywhere, and in everyone at some stage of life. Then there are the words of Marie Curie: “Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood.” I feel called to visit my fears once again, and face them honestly, and believe that the Lord is in my heart – in the midst of my life. Sr. Joan Chittister gives some wisdom when she says: “What we do not challenge, will always control us.”
2. I am responding to the words: “Let your tolerance be evident to everyone; the Lord is near.” This is a message for me, because I am not a very tolerant person. Tolerance has a number of meanings: broad-mindedness,

open-mindedness, lenience, acceptance, patience, easiness. That is quite a challenge! The Greek N.T. has the word: “forbearance”, meaning more like “endurance”, or “bearing up”. Perhaps it is realistic to take just one of the meanings here and work with that. This whole issue of tolerance or acceptance is “tricky”, to say the very least. When I tell my confessor how intolerant I’ve been, he asks me if I’m getting enough rest. When I am overtired, my reserves are low and I can be very intolerant. When I come back from three weeks’ holiday, I’m broad-minded, accepting, and patient. How can young parents be patient, when they are enduring broken sleep – the baby wakes them a number of times in the night? One woman said to me: “It’s torture!” In addition to living with children who are still in primary school, some parents work two jobs to make money to raise a family. Heroic patience and acceptance, and lenience and open-mindedness – can we as Christians really be all this? This is the daily-ness we are called to, and if possible, we need to watch our energy levels, or we won’t have a chance.

3. I am responding to Fr. Karl Rahner’s commentary on the first part of the Gospel text. For the first time in my life, I have seen a brighter light shed on this text – that John’s answer holds me just where I am, living quite ordinarily. John did not give a list of do’s and don’ts. He simply looked at the life of his questioners and held them just where they were, living quite ordinarily, doing they daily-ness. One of our beautiful senior nuns often says: “If you can’t do the daily-ness, don’t stay. God meets us all in our “every day”, consisting of prayer, work, rest, and communal living.

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.



The Third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday which means rejoice!