

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Tuesday 25 December 2018,
Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord.
The Liturgy of the Hours is Festal this week.**

If you use *Universalis*, or any Office Book, the direction is clear. The week following Christmas is the Octave of Christmas.

We have a choice of four Masses on Christmas Day: Vigil/Midnight/Dawn/Day.
Since Midnight Mass is celebrated at the Abbey, I am sharing prayer with the readings for Midnight Mass.

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

In the Liturgy:

December 26: St. Stephen (Feast)

December 27: St. John the Evangelist (Feast)

December 28: The Holy Innocents (Feast). These are the male children slaughtered by Herod, in order to make sure none of them was the Messiah.

December 29 is the fifth day in the Octave of Christmas.

In the Australian Church:

December 26: SANDHURST – death of Bishop Joseph Grech, (2010)

In the Social Justice Calendar:

December 26: South Asia devastated by tsunami, killing 200,000 to 300,000 people. (2004)

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 9:1-7

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14.

***Lectio*: Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 9:1-7.**

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.**

We are face to face with darkness and light.

Darkness is the reality. Light is the promise of relief.

Darkness is expressed as: deep shadow, the yoke weighing on shoulders, the rod of oppression, the footgear of battle, cloaks rolled in blood.

The Light is announced as: A child born for us; a son given to us; dominion (not the rod of oppression) is laid upon his shoulders.

Among the names by which the child shall be known, is "Prince of Peace".

His reign will be characterized by a peace that has no end; and by justice and integrity.

Lastly, there is a reference to the jealous love of God, a God jealous on behalf of his people, a God who wants freedom and peace for his own, not oppression, darkness or misery.

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 95

The Response is: TODAY IS BORN OUR SAVIOUR, CHRIST THE LORD.

Psalm 95 is a prayer proclaiming the universal reign of the one true God. We proclaim the glory of the Creator on behalf of all creation: the heavens, the sea, the land, the trees. All creation shouts for joy "at the presence of the Lord, for he comes to rule the earth."

Lectio: Read the second text from Titus 2:11-14.

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). 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."

This short text should not be dismissed as an after-thought to the New Testament Letters. In that very useful exhaustive listing of all the characters in the Old and New Testament Books, Titus is listed as "one of the major ministry companions of Paul." In fact, "he was so trusted an aide that Paul left him in Crete and wrote a letter of instruction to him about how to structure the Church with meaningful leadership so that it could get back up on its feet. The Letter of Paul to Titus, because of its focus, contains "some of the most detailed instruction ...about elders (1:5-9), the role of older men (2:2), the role of older women (2:3), young women (2:4-5), young men (2:6-8), and slaves (2:9-10). (Cf, page 652, of the Exhaustive listing of all Biblical persons). We are praying with Titus 2:11-14, but it is enriching to pray also with some of the texts of detailed instruction noted here.

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.

Lectio: The Gospel Verse is from Luke 2:10-11.

GOOD NEWS AND GREAT JOY TO ALL THE WORLD;
TODAY IS BORN OUR SAVIOUR, CHRIST THE LORD.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 2:1-14

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:

As if Luke is setting the historical stage for the Infancy narratives, he begins with Caesar Augustus, who was the Roman Emperor at the time. Israel was under Roman power. Quirinius was Governor of Syria.

Every Jew had to go to “his own town to be registered.” This was not an option. And so Joseph of Nazareth had to travel “up to Judaea, heading for Bethlehem with his “betrothed” who was heavily pregnant. Joseph was of “David’s house and line.” It was while at Bethlehem that the “time came for her to have her child.”

The second part of the text is about shepherds. Robert Karris, commenting on Luke 2:1-20 (NJBC), presents this section of Luke’s Gospel as “the epitome of Lucan artistry. He [Luke], takes the traditions that Mary and Joseph stem from Nazareth, and that Jesus is born in Bethlehem. He ties these events to the figures of Herod the Great, Caesar Augustus, and Quirinius, under whom the census took place. And around and through these traditions and figures, he weaves eight of his themes to fashion an exquisite tapestry.” The themes listed are food, grace, joy, lowliness, peace, salvation, and universalism..

The shepherds represent the lowly. The followers of Jesus will be the lowly, as opposed to the self-sufficient. Verse 10 presents the theme of joy.

Verse 14 speaks of deeds of peace and not worldly weapons.

The Lucan theme of God’s grace towards human beings brings out another dimension of the Davidic birth. It will enrich our *Lectio Divina* if we read the Gospel text again, and note where the themes occur. As we read, may we listen to the Holy Spirit playing like a harpist on the fibres of our heart, to bring forth the melody of our 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. This whole text speaks to me of my sisters and brothers in the human family who dwell in the “deep shadow” of detention centers, in the darkness of domestic violence, the hell of mental illness, and the desperation of loneliness or elder abuse. It is my responsibility to proclaim that Christ has come with light, liberty and justice. Mental illness is on one side of my family, so I write a lot of cards and emails to these my own relatives. I have a friend whose mother was the victim of elder abuse as recently as October this year. I have a sister who lived the nightmare of domestic violence. And, so it is Christmas once again. Many years ago, John Lennon gave us that poignant song “Happy Christmas, war is over...” Even the Three Tenors recorded it and brought the power of it to many hearts. “War is over, if you want it...” And here we come face to face with the wars within us. There is no war without provocation, threats, amassing of weapons. But can I go into another Christmas, resolving to speak only of peace, to carry out only acts of service, to forgive, to embrace lovingly, those who have hurt me? With the grace of

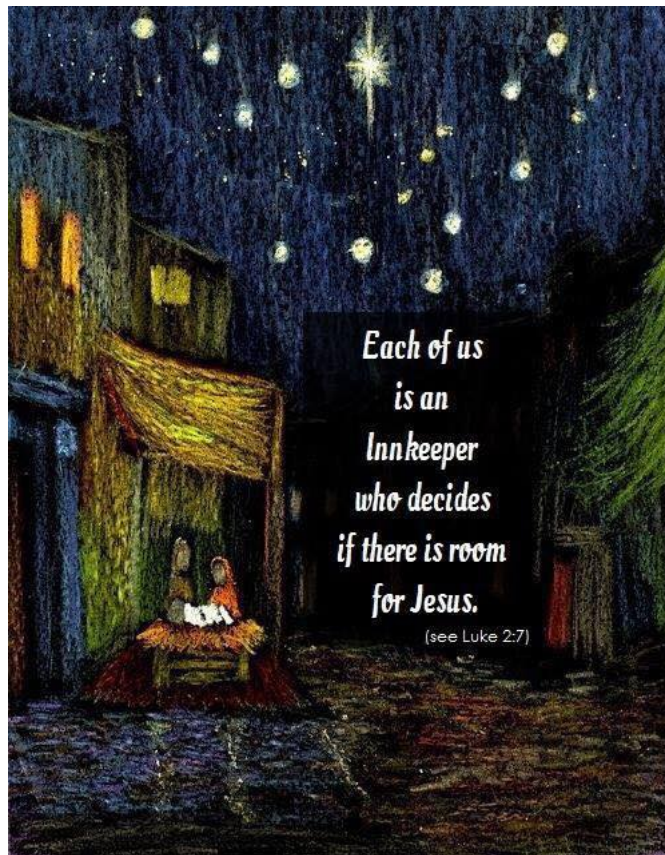
God I can, but not of my own accord. So, I must pray in earnest for a heart which is bathed in the Light of Christ, not the darkness of oppression and misery.

2. My response is to the exhortation: “Give up everything that does not lead to God.” This exhortation of Paul became the subject of a conversation with a friend of sixty years. We agreed that gossip is the most common activity which does not lead to God. We fall into it so easily, and once there, we slip into negative talk about another person. Because of this we may have to avoid certain people and certain occasions which cause us to slip so easily into slander, calumny or detraction. Putting it more brutally, we could say that what we take part in is character assassination. It is right to have this text at Christmas. We kneel before the Nativity scene in our churches, and we go to no end of trouble (if asked) to set up that Nativity scene. But the baby grows up, and is in the face of every believer. This is our downfall. We forget that the person I am assassinating verbally, is made in the image and likeness of God, and is thus the face of the Son of God who took on our humanity. In “The Double Dealer”, written by William Congreve in 1694, one finds the following words: [They] retired to their tea and scandal, according to their ancient custom.” He also said in “The Way of the World, (1700) that “They come together like the Coroner’s inquest, to sit upon the murdered reputations of the week.” It is Christmas, 2018. May we do our best to avoid murdering the reputations of others. May we retire to our Christmas festivities with Jesus, having given up “everything that does not lead to God.”
3. My response is probably unusual. It is to “swaddling clothes”. The word for “swaddling clothes” is also the word for “bandage”. A bandage is something which is meant to protect a wound from infection. A bandage is wrapped reasonably tightly. Similarly, swaddling clothes are wrapped around the newborn to secure him because he is vulnerable. The New Jerome Biblical Commentary refers us to Wisdom, chapter 7, verse 4: *Solomon says: I too, when born, inhaled the common air, and fell upon the kindred earth; wailing, I uttered that first sound common to all. In swaddling clothes and with constant care I was nurtured...*” And the NJB Commentary reinforces that Jesus, like King Solomon, his predecessor on the Davidic throne, wears the trappings of humanity.” Jesus was born to be one of us, to wear the flesh of humanity. May this Christmas remind us once again, that Jesus wore the trappings of humanity in order that Divine Light would overcome the darkness of sin and death. At the end of his earthly life, Jesus would also be wrapped tightly – not in swaddling clothes but in Grave clothes. And the grave clothes were left behind when he rose from the dead on Easter morning.

*Lectio Divina is prayer with the Sacred Scriptures.
We read,
we seek to understand with the help of a commentary,
we ponder,
we take time for stillness
and we respond.
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
Take the Mother of God as your model.*

To all our Oblates and friends...

*May Emmanuel, God-with-us,
bless you and your loved ones
with light, peace and deep JOY
this Christmas
and throughout the
new year.*



*With love and prayer
from
all your sisters
at
Jamberoo Abbey*