

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 9 December 2018
2nd Sunday of Advent, Year C.

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:

December 13: St. Lucy – Memorial

December 14: St. John of the Cross – Memorial.

In The Social Justice Calendar:

December 9: International Anti-Corruption Day.

December 9: International Day of the Commemoration and Dignity of Victims of the Crime of Genocide.

December 10: Human Rights Day. 70th Anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations declaration of human rights. (1948).

In the Australian Church:

December 12: Armidale – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral. (1919)

Hobart – Anniversary of the death of Archbishop D’Arcy, 2005

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Baruch 5:1-9

Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11

Luke 3:1-6.

***Lectio*: Read the first reading from Baruch 5:1-9.**

Read it aloud. Read it slowly. Be aware of the Holy Spirit placing unction on the message of this text. When your heart responds to a word or a line, or a phrase, this is the Holy Spirit touching your heart and calling forth your response.

***Meditatio*: A little background to the text will help us understand it and make a response to it.**

Who was Baruch? He is most probably the son of Neriah and Jeremiah’s secretary. The name means “blessed”. The text is a magnificent exhortation by Baruch, to the Jews in exile. The symbolic use of spiritual clothing makes the imagery more transparent. Take off this. Put on that.

Israel is portrayed as a woman who is told to take off her dress of sorrow and distress. It’s over! Put on the beauty of the glory of God forever. Wrap the cloak of the integrity of God around you. Put the diadem of the glory of the Eternal on your head. A new name accompanies new clothing: “Peace through integrity honour through devotedness...”

Then follows the command to arise and look eastwards. In the sacred scriptures East symbolizes the coming of the sun, of God, and eventually of the Son of God.

The Magi saw the star in the East. The star heralded the birth of a new king.

There are over 148 references to “east” in the scriptures – Old and New Testaments.

Following the image of “east”, there is the reassembling of children from west and east, and the Advent images we are used to:

The flattening of each high mountain, filling in of valleys, making the ground level, “so that Israel can walk in safety under the glory of God.” Even the provision of shade trees and fragrant trees will accompany the people.

“God will guide Israel in joy (an Advent theme), by the light of “his glory” (an Advent/Christmastide theme).

The escort will not be armed foreign soldiers, but the mercy and integrity of God.

I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 125

The response is: THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US;
WE ARE FILLED WITH JOY.

Psalm 125 is the Psalm of exile. “They go out, they go out full of tears. They come back full of song.”

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading: **Philippians 1:3-6 and 8-11.**

Meditatio: A little background on the text, so we can best respond to it.

This text has taken two parts of the introduction to Paul’s letter to the Philippians. The entire introduction is 1:1-11. While it is focused on the Second Coming of Christ, it is important that we also note that Paul prays for the Christians of Philippi; that he prays with joy; that he remembers how they helped him spread the Good News from the time they heard it right up to the time when he is writing this letter. Paul is a grateful man, and this is his expression of thanksgiving.

There is also a powerful prayer within the text: “My prayer is that your love for each other may increase more and more and never stop improving your knowledge and deepening your perception so that you can always recognize what is best.”

Read the text a few times and reflect on it.

Make your response in the days ahead. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is Luke 3:4-6.

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE STRAIGHT HIS PATHS:
ALL PEOPLE SHALL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.

Lectio: Read the Gospel from **Luke 3: 1-6.**

Read the Gospel aloud and listen to your own voice.

Be aware of the unction placed on parts or all of the text – this is the Holy Spirit speaking within you and touching your hearts – calling forth the most beautiful and faith-filled response to these words of the Sacred Scriptures.

***Meditatio*: Some background to the text which will help us respond.**

The Gospel text has John the Baptist as focus. An historical statement pointing to the particular time in history begins the text. Then the cry of John the Baptist shouts forth, echoing the images of valleys and mountains and straightened roads – no trees for shade – not needed in this case. Surely every Christian knows this text, even if it is through the hundred or more musical compositions which have captured it – from Handel’s Messiah, down to Andrew Lloyd Webber. What it means for each of us who pray with it – there lies the challenge! Fr. Karl Rahner has some wisdom to offer on this text, and he doesn’t hold back: “...Christianity is so human and so historical that it is too human, that is, not of the senses, non-historical. But the Word was made flesh. The word of the Lord went forth to John in the fifteenth year of the emperor Tiberius. And so it remained. Christianity is an historical and a very concrete and sturdy religion, a stumbling block to the proud who really – at least in religious matters – do not wish to be human beings, but it is grace and truth for those who with humble hearts are willing to be human beings in space and time even when they are adoring the God of eternity and infinity. (p. 25, “The Great Church Year” – homily for the Second Sunday of Advent, Year C).

Listen for the message you are to hear in this Gospel text, and be still, as you receive the visitation of God into your life through God’s Sacred Word. When you feel called to do so, make your response to the text. I share mine in Evangelizatio.3.

EVANGELIZATIO. Evangelizatio is about the evangelization of the “self”. It is that part of Lectio Divina where we make our lived response to the text. First of all, we pray with the text, take time to ponder and understand the text, be still with the text and listen to the response we are being called to make.

1. Living in the “now” in Australia, I hear this text for those who remain in off-shore detention, in no man’s land (can’t be led back to the beauty of their own land, aren’t accepted in this land). I hear it for the millions of refugees in exile world-wide. I hear it for the Syrian children starving to death, exiled by a prolonged and senseless war. All this leads me to deeper prayer for my brothers and sisters in the human family: “Merciful Lord, have mercy. Set them free. Take off their dress of sorrow and distress, wrap your cloak around them, flatten mountains, especially the mountains of political power, fill in the valleys and make paths for them to walk to freedom. Provide the shade they need from the relentless heat of violence”.
2. I am responding to Paul’s gratitude, and am moved to thank all of you who have joined me for Lectio Divina over the last 28 years. I don’t know that I’ve ever said thank you except at the end of each year, in my “signing off” letter accompanying the leaflet which some of you receive by mail. So – thank you for helping me pray, for sharing prayer with me, for sharing your own responses to the texts each week. I see it as a good thing to show gratitude. Many of us are members of prayer groups – could we thank these friends for sharing Lectio Divina with us, for standing in solidarity with us, in good times and in bad, in life and in death? Could we thank them for praying for us when we didn’t have the strength to pray? Why not set out this coming

week to acknowledge our appreciation to one, two, or more friends who have been our prayer companions over time.

3. I am responding to the image of the “mountains and hills” which need to be levelled in order for Jesus to come into my life again this Christmas. I know what one such mountain is: anger at the way one of my family was treated in the past. I intend turning that anger into good by keeping in contact with this sister, on a regular basis. I can’t turn back the clock, but I can start from “now”. We can always start from now to pour ointment on the wounds of siblings and friends.

*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.*

