

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 27 January 2019**

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

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

Before moving into prayer with the Sacred Scriptures, let us look at the week ahead in the Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy

January 28: St. Thomas Aquinas (Memorial)

January 31: St. John Bosco (Memorial)

February 2: The Presentation of the Lord. This is a feast in parishes throughout Australia. It is a Solemnity for Jamberoo Abbey, since the title of our Abbey is The Abbey of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple.

In the Australian Church

No anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar

January 27: International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust.

World Leprosy Day.

February 1: Beginning of Interfaith Harmony Week.

February 2: World Day for Consecrated Life.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10

1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21.

***Lectio:* Read the first reading from the Book of Nehemiah 8:2-6 and 8-10.**

As always, it is best to read the Word of God 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.**

The Book of Nehemiah is one of the history books of the Old Testament. The other history books are: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles, Ezra and Esther.

Nehemiah was associated with the return of the exiled people to Jerusalem. It is believed he returned from exile in Babylon in circa. 533. Nehemiah was a post-exilic governor of Judah, and the main character in the book of Nehemiah. As a post-exilic reformer, his work involved a building programme and a religious programme. For

Nehemiah, “external conformity to the will of God was not enough. The rebuilding of the city walls had to be matched by the reforming of lifestyle.” (Cf. *The Complete Who’s Who in the Bible – An exhaustive listing of all the characters in the Bible*, edited by Paul Gardiner). The story in this text is magnificent. Ezra the scribe, on the first day of the seventh month, on the square before the Water Gate, in the presence of the men and women, and children old enough to understand, read from the book from early morning until noon. The response of the people is glorious: they stood up as a gesture of deep reverence as Christians today stand when the Gospel of Jesus is being proclaimed. Then Ezra blessed the Lord. The people raised their hands and answered, “Amen! Amen!” They then bowed down face to the ground and prostrated themselves before the Lord. Ezra read from the Law of God, translating and giving the sense, so that the people understood what was read. This is what so many of us do today, when bringing the Gospel of Jesus to those whose ears are open to listen. The people were all in tears as they listened to the words of the Law. Tears of repentance, and tears of reverence before the Word of God. Finally, there is a reference to a meal, and to giving to those who have nothing prepared for the meal on the day which is sacred to the Lord. The final message is something we need to hear daily: *Do not be sad: the joy of the Lord is your stronghold.*

After much pondering, take time to respond to the text. You may want to ponder for a day or more, as you work, walk, garden...sit and watch the ocean, the lake, the river. Just take time. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 18

The response is: YOUR WORDS LORD ARE SPIRIT AND LIFE.

Psalm 18 is a Psalm in praise of God as creator and law-giver. The theme is the Word of God. The last block of the Psalm is a trusted prayer for many of us. The Christology of the Psalm is clear. Jesus gave a new commandment, only one commandment: *Love one another as I have loved you.* This is the Law that “revives the soul” and “gives wisdom to the simple”. This is the commandment that is “right”, that “gladdens the heart”, that “is clear”, that “gives light to the eyes”, a Light that darkness cannot overcome, as we read in the Prologue to John’s Gospel. Pray with the Psalm throughout the week, marking the words, phrases or lines which speak to you and call forth prayer from your heart.

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading, 1 Corinthians 12:12-30.

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

This long text is a statement: The body needs many members. (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). The many members all share a common existence. The Spirit is within the Church. Just as the human body needs different members, so the Church needs a diversity of spiritual gifts, and each one makes a specific contribution.

At verse 21, the perspective changes slightly. Now the point is that members need each other..

Verse 27: Collectively the Corinthians are the body, but individually they are its members. Verse 28: This verse brings into relief the word of God. The first three

gifts are cut off from the others because they are numbered and personalized and they constitute the fundamental three-fold ministry of the word by which the Church is founded and built up. (Summarised by the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 49:60. This Commentary was written by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P.)

Ponder on the text for a day or two, and then make your response. The Holy Spirit will lead you in this.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is adapted from Luke 4:18.

THE LORD SENT ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR AND FREEDOM TO PRISONERS.

***Lectio:* Now read the Gospel text from Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21.**

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

Luke 1:1-4, is a Preface to Luke's Gospel, and he is the only Evangelist who introduces his work this way. The question many of us may ask is: Who is Theophilus? Robert Karris, ofm, suggests that Theophilus may have been Luke's patron, and also may represent a wider audience which needs upbuilding in faith. (NJBC 43:11)

The text then leaves chapter one and launches into chapter 4, verses 14-21.

Verses 14 and 15 focus on the Galilean ministry of Jesus. Jesus is presented a teacher.

Verses 14-21 are part of 4:16-30, God's Promises being fulfilled in Jesus for all humankind.

It may help us to know that Jesus in the synagogue on the Sabbath Day is the "first of six incidents dealing with Jesus' activity on the Sabbath." If you have a concordance, it could enrich *Lectio Divina* to pray with the other five texts.

Jesus finds the passage from Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6. This text is not on a Synagogue Scroll. It is used by Luke to present the Christological meaning. The text is placed upon Jesus, proclaiming to all that this is the Messiah, and this will be the work of the Messiah. Already Luke is telling his community that people matter, - the sick, the hungry, the poor and the prisoners. This is what Jesus is all about. (I have summarised a little of this from the New Jerome Biblical Commentary 43:57&58).

Make your response in the days ahead. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 3*.

EVANGELIZATIO – this is one's lived response to the texts given us by the Church each Sunday. It is about the evangelization of the "self", and pins me down to be who I am: A Christian who prays with the Word of God, and responds to the call of the Word of God in my everyday life.

1. My response is to the whole of this text. However, I need to focus on the most powerful of the messages that have come to me. The most powerful is the response of the assembly to the reading of the Word of God, and the explanation of the Word of God. All the ritual that is evident in this text may be, in some cases, what we have lost over the years. Raising one's hands in praise of God, proclaiming "Amen! Amen!", bowing down, prostration before

the Lord. It is about the recognition of the divine presence as it comes through the proclamation of the Word of God. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the Book of the Gospels is known to be placed over the head of one who is sick, while the prayer for healing takes place. Or, just the placing of the Book of the Gospels without the prayer. Such is the power of the Word of God. St. John Cassian, as we well know, instructs us thus: We are to till the soil of the heart daily with the plough of the Gospel. Imagine for a few seconds, a plough of olden days, with its sharp ends, clawing at the ground, preparing furrows for the planting of seeds. A plough raises the soil ready for planting. For the Christian, this is the work of God, through God's Son, with the protective hovering of the Holy Spirit.

2. I am called to respond to the notion of community built up by the various God-given gifts. In my own community, there are gardeners, those who proclaim the Word with conviction, those who are gifted in chanting the psalms and hymns, those whose gift is hospitality (in the Benedictine tradition), those who keep the house clean, those who cook and those who care for the sick. And as community, we need every person with her gift. In a Book entitled "The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus", (1924), the author said "Jesus picked up twelve men from the bottom ranks of business and forged them into an organization that conquered the world." The "forging" is the bringing together all the members of the body, and enabling them to function as a generator of new life. It is about a variety of persons and gifts exploding into a fire of harmony.
3. January 27 is World Leprosy Day, and the International Day in Memory of Victims of the Holocaust. Surely it is no coincidence then, that in today's Gospel, Jesus proclaims his mission to free captives, give sight to the blind, and set the downtrodden free. This week, I will seek out someone I know who is "downtrodden" and love that person into freedom. This I will do with kind words and kind deeds, with empathy and deep reverence.

*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.*