

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 13 January 2019
Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, Year C.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week One

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

In the Liturgy:

January 17: St. Anthony and Egypt, Memorial

In the Australian Church:

No anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

January 15: 1842 – birth of St. Mary MacKillop in Fitzroy, Victoria.

1929 – Birth of Martin Luther King Jr in Atlanta, USA.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The Readings are:

Isaiah 40:1-5 and 9-11

Titus 2:11-14 and 3:4-7

Luke 3:15-16 and 21-22.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah 40:1-5 and 9-11.**

Be aware of the way you handle your bible. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep reverence. This text is given to all of us on this Sunday, for our formation as Christians. If you are praying with this text at home, you may want to light a candle as a symbol of the fire of God's Word, and its power to speak to your heart

***Meditatio:* Some Background on the text, so that we can understand it more profoundly, and make our response to it.**

This text is the beginning of the Book of Comfort (Isaiah 40:1-55:13). The opening lines of this Book combine "(a) the scene of God's heavenly council (read 1 Kings 22:19-23 and Isaiah 6); (b) the literary style of prophetic commissioning as in Isaiah 6 or Jeremiah 1; (c) the religious motif of the new exodus; (d) preparations for the Babylonian New Year; the messenger genre and the motif of God as shepherd in vv. 9-11. (Read similar texts in Jeremiah 31:10 and Ezekiel 34)".

A few extra important notes are necessary. Jerusalem here is not the holy city, but a chosen people in exile. The heart as used in this text: the heart was considered in biblical anthropology, to be the organ of reasoning. God is attempting to convince Israel of his concern. To have "received double punishment for all her sins does not so much imply an excess of divine anger, as it proclaims a completion of the purifying process of sorrow. (cf. Jer. 16:18)

This summary has been taken from the New Jerome Biblical commentary 21:9

With this background, read the text again very slowly, marking some of the words, phrases, sentences and their textual meaning. Ponder for a while. Maybe a day or more! Make your response.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 103

The response is: OH, BLESS THE LORD, MY SOUL.

Psalm 103 is a prayer of worship. God's boundless care of creation is the theme. In fact it is an account of creation, expressed poetically.

Lectio: Read the second text from the Letter to Titus, ch. 2, v's 11-14 & 3:4-7.

Meditatio: A little background to the text, so that we can make an informed response to it.

There are 13 Letters written by Paul. The first nine of Paul's letters were written to groups of believers (early churches). The last four were written to three individuals: Timothy (2), Titus and Philemon. 1 and 2 Timothy and the letter to Titus were written after Paul was freed from the imprisonment noted in Acts 28. He was later imprisoned again, and killed for preaching about Jesus. Second Timothy was written during this later imprisonment.

Following on from Ephesians (on the Solemnity of the Epiphany), we again come across the "all" – "God's grace...has made salvation possible for the whole human race." And: "When the kindness and love of God our savior for humankind were revealed..." The text is all about God: God's grace, and what it has done, God's kindness and love, God's compassion, God's work of cleansing, God's work of renewing us by the power of the Holy Spirit, "generously poured over us through Jesus Christ our Saviour." Yes, it is all about God.

For our part, we are advised to "give up all that doesn't lead to God, and [to give up] our worldly ambitions; live good and religious lives here in this world; be attentive to all that God has done for us. (I have added this one! I'm sure St. Paul won't mind).

Stand back from the reading and go about your work for a while. Maybe a day or two. Be alert to the grace of God. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist on the strings of the harp. The Holy Spirit will bring forth the most beautiful response to this reading. You will be surprised by the Spirit.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

Lectio: The Gospel Verse is from Luke 3:16.

JOHN SAID: HE WHO IS TO COME IS MIGHTIER THAN I;
HE WILL BAPTIZE YOU WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND WITH FIRE.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 3:15-16 and 21-22.

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.**

This text begins with “expectancy” – “A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John” needed to clarify the matter. The text includes the work of the forerunner of Christ, the declaration of the forerunner of Christ, and the presence of the Holy Trinity: The Father’s voice, the Holy Spirit like a dove descending on Jesus, and Jesus at prayer. Jesus at prayer is a sober reminder. If Jesus was at prayer, or went away to a lonely place to pray, how much more do we, his followers, need to do the same?

Read the Gospel text again slowly. Stand back from the text and the commentary and go about your days quietly ruminating. Ruminating is an essential part of *Lectio Divina*. Often when we sit to have a cup of coffee, work in the garden, work inside the house, or during a lunch break at work in the city, insights will come, and we will receive the grace to respond to the text in our living. 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. My response is to verses 9-11, the image of a tender shepherd: “He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast, and leading to their rest the mother ewes.” Jesus will be the future Messiah-shepherd. The Gospel of John, chapter 10 calls him the Good Shepherd. The Messiah-shepherd will feed his human flock, gather the vulnerable in his arms, and then hold them against his breast. And finally lead them in a new exodus, “from beginning to beginning, by beginnings that always surpass each other and never end.” (St Gregory of Nyssa). It is quoted in “From Advent to Pentecost” by a Carthusian Monk, page 57. We are not long into a new calendar year, and a new beginning. For me, true wisdom is to begin anew every morning. One day at a time. More than ever before, Christians need to grasp on to hope, and begin again each morning. Peter Matheson, Emeritus Professor of Knox Theological College, Dunedin, asks: “What keeps us going in dark times? What energizes us when the struggle seems hard and hopeless, when those who call the shots, trample on the poor and the voiceless...when church leaders disappoint us?” (quoted from his article in Tui Moto, InterIslands, issue 229, August 2018). The answer to the questions he asks is “hope”. Here at the abbey, Mother Mary and I share a male King Parrot, who likes the seed we put out for him. He sits on the outside door handle every morning and every afternoon. He speaks gently to me in bird language, telling me that he has arrived, and would appreciate some more seeds. He eats out of our hands when we have time to stop and feed him. Otherwise he has his own bowl, away from the crowd. He is a symbol of the Divine Presence for me, and a powerful reminder that it’s time to begin again – a new exodus, empowered by hope.

2. I am responding rather reluctantly to the exhortation “to give up everything that does not lead to God...” I have to do some honest soul-searching. What in my life, does not lead me to God? Negative thoughts are a good start. Then, the occasional bit of negative gossip. A tendency to carry the weight of the world on my shoulders is in there somewhere. A lack of trust in God’s providence is also an occasional event. These and much more are the things that do not lead me to God. I think looking at our addictions is also a good start. My main addiction is to housework, and I often find myself beginning to clean during *Lectio* time, or quiet time. I settle down with the Scriptures and then I might notice some dust and up I get to clean it away. Then of course, one thing leads to another, and my *Lectio* time is gone. This is my fetish. It is not about God. I need to be very aware of its intrusion into my prayer time.

3. My response is to enter into the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, while at prayer this week. How is this done? It sounds almost presumptuous. Thomas Merton says: “Souls are like wax waiting for a seal. By themselves they have no special identity. Their destiny is to be softened and prepared in this life, by God’s will, to receive, at their death, the seal of their own degree of likeness to God in Christ.” And a familiar few words from St. Irenaeus: “The glory of God is humanity fully alive, and the destiny of humanity is the vision of God.” The will of God is nothing other than that we become fully alive in him while on earth.

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.

Lectio Divina is a way of life not a method of prayer.



The Baptism of the Lord by He Qi