

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 17 February 2019
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Two

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:

22: Chair of St. Peter. (Feast)

23: St. Polycarp (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:

February 22: Lismore: Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Gregory Homeming (2017).

Wollongong: Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Brian Mascord (2018).

In The Social Justice Calendar:

February 17: Murder of Iranian Asylum Seeker, Reza Barati, on Manus Island (2014).

February 20: World Day of Social Justice.

February 21: International Mother Language Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Jeremiah 17:5-8

1 Corinthians 15:12, and 16-20

Luke 6:17 and 20-26.

***Lectio:* Read the first reading from the Prophet Jeremiah 17:5-8.**

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.**

This text is part of Jeremiah's prophecy before the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah 1-38 covers this time. Jeremiah 17:5-8 is a desperate call for the people to repent. They worship false gods and they are immoral. If they repent they will not be taken to their exile (known familiarly as "the Babylonian Captivity." The fall of Jerusalem occurred in 586 B.C.

Jeremiah's ministry continued through and after the fall of Jerusalem.

A curse and a blessing are the two foundations of the text we are given for prayer.

The immoral person is depicted with images of parched places which are uninhabited – a salt land, a dry scrub in the wastelands.

A blessing then, is compared with a curse.

The one who is blessed, trusts the Lord, hopes in the Lord, is close to water (the water of life), and therefore bears life and stays alive and fruitful. The blessed person is grounded in the Lord.

Take time to ponder on this reading. Only after reflecting will you be in touch with the response that the Holy Spirit is calling forth from you.

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

The Responsorial Psalm:

The response is: HAPPY ARE THEY WHO HOPE IN THE LORD.

These would be the blessed ones and fit easily into Jeremiah's description of those who are blessed. Psalm 1 is a psalm about the two ways of living: the way of the blessed, and the way of the cursed. This psalm "is a study in black and white as a prelude to the whole Psalter. The virtuous are blessed, and the wicked are cursed. This tension is in all of us", so it is worthwhile to look at the personal dimension of the Psalm. "We may never reach the extremes either of virtue or of vice, but we are at every moment making for one or the other, and it is salutary to remind ourselves what is the end of each road – blessing or curse, for or against God." Even St. Paul had difficulty: "Though the will to do what is good is in me, the performance is not." And the old familiar gem: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is not." (Summarized from the Jamberoo Abbey Psalters).

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:12 & 16-20.

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

This argumentative text depicts one of the main themes of the first letter to the Church of Corinth: hope in the resurrection. Some Corinthians were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead – this text (15:12 & 16-20) is Paul's response. The date of this letter is circa. 55 A.D. The other two issues in the Corinthian Church were: division and immorality.

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 6:23.

REJOICE AND BE GLAD, YOUR REWARD IS GREAT IN HEAVEN.

Lectio: The Gospel is from Luke 6:17 & 20-26.

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 is Luke's version of the Beatitudes. It is a counterpart of Matthew's sermon on the mount. The NJBC notes that "Through Jesus' sermon, Luke preaches to his Gentile Christians, some of whom are well-to-do, about their place in the reconstituted Israel and about the nature of the God whose kingdom Jesus enacted." (43:88).

Fr. Thomas Keating, who died late last year, is remembered by some of us, not as a master of centering prayer, but as a master of the spiritual experience of the Church's Liturgy. His book, "The Mystery of Christ" contains depth insight into the Beatitudes. (pp. 102-106). Of the peacemakers, he writes: "The beatitude of the peacemakers reveals that the peacemaker is one who has established peace within self: "Peace is not naïve simplicity, but the perfect harmony of immense complexity." (p. 104).

Verses 24-26 are the "alas" verses. The text from Jeremiah begins with the curse on the one who puts trust in humanity, relies on things of the flesh, and puts trust in these rather than in God.

The "alas" verses, or "the woes" as the commentary calls them, are addressed to would-be disciples. They are challenged by the facts that wealth, stomachs filled with select food-stuffs, carefree times, and being held in high esteem by the right people are ephemeral when compared with following Jesus and his kingdom message. (Cf. NJBC 43:90). 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. I am responding to the fact that Jeremiah has to address the issue of the people worshipping false idols. This is difficult to understand in today's era. Often other words are used and we lose the "false idols" language. We speak of addictions, especially addiction to gambling or to pornography. We say that people who live with these addictions are "sick" people. All of these addictions are replacements for God, or for the Christian way. And yes, people in the grip of addictions are sick in some way. Let us not condemn them. My own cousin collapsed and died from an asthma attack in the kitchen of his family home, while his parents were having yet another heated argument at the breakfast table, over how much money the boy's father had lost the night before at Jupiter's Casino. This was a Catholic family. The man knew better but was addicted to nightly gambling, a false god, and didn't want any help to kick the habit. The world is full of false gods and of people who worship them. But, the text from Jeremiah is for me, not the rest of humankind. It is about my false gods. What are they? Is shopping one of them? Am I surrounded by stuff I don't need? Does hoarding make me feel secure? Is my house full of things I might need some day? This could be seen as a lack of trust in the Providence of God. Fear, insecurity, anxiety – these can often (not always), lead to purchasing more and more stuff, and trusting less and less in God. There is a lot to think about and pray about.
2. In response to this text, I am calling to mind the insights of Br. John Venard, who sums up the power of the resurrection, when he writes about the resurrection journey: "Jesus rose from the dead so that his spirit could remain in the world as the 'God among us', the 'God within us', making us 'temples

of God'. Now I see Christians as...evangelists going out to further God's work in creation. What a vocation!" ("Finally, the Battler's God", p. 17.)

3. For me, I identify with those few words in the commentary: "...and being held in high esteem by the right people..." I found the Australia Day Honours most inspiring – the local people who were selected for honours because they did things for other people. I doubt that they had in mind an Australia Day Honour when they went out daily or weekly, to help their neighbours, or to help those who were experiencing the same problems they were – as in the case of the girl who was bullied and took her own life. May all those local neighbourhood people be truly blessed.

*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.*