

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 24 February 2019
7th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C.

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

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

In the Liturgy: No feasts this week.

In the Australian Church:

February 26: Sale – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Patrick O’Regan, 2015.

March 1: Port Pirie – Anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral, 1953.

March 1: Autumn Ember day in the Australian Church. This means a day of prayer and penance. (The first Friday in autumn).

In the Social Justice Calendar:

March 1:

- Zero Discrimination Day
- Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Day
- 1999: Entry into force of International Treaty to Ban Landmines.
- World Day of Prayer. Theme: *Come, everything is ready*

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23.

1 Corinthians 15:45-49

Luke 6:27-38.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the First Book of Samuel.**

Be aware of the way you handle your bible. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep awareness. This text is given to all of us on this particular day in the Church’s Liturgical Year, for our formation as Christians. It is not information we need, but formation.

***Meditatio:* Some notes on the background of this text will help us to both understand it, and make a response to it.**

What an amazing story! This might be our first response. What does it all mean?

A concise but helpful summary can be found in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary. Campbell and Flanagan are the biblical scholars, and their commentary is much less complicated than some: “Saul pursues David with 3000 men; we know that David’s band numbers 600 at this time. The narrator tells us that David sent out spies, and then, with Abishai, penetrated Saul’s camp. We are not told anything of David’s intentions until he declines to kill Saul, and retires instead with Saul’s spear and his water jar. In the dialogue in the night, David pleads his innocence and his right to stay in the land. In their exchange, Saul and David reach a certain level of reconciliation.” (9:33).

Read the text again a couple of times. Stay with it. Ponder on it for a day or more. However, if you are aware of the Holy Spirit calling forth your response to the text, note it down. When the Holy Spirit prays within you or pours unction on a text and calls you forth, this is the true “prayer” (*oratio*) of *Lectio Divina*. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 102

The response is: THE LORD IS KIND AND MERCIFUL.

102 is a Psalm in praise of God’s love.

Lectio: Read the second text, from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 45-49.

Meditatio: Brief background to the text or brief explanation of the text, so that we can understand it and respond to it.

The message is clear and simple. First there was Adam, and secondly there was Christ. First, there was Adam who was a living soul. Secondly there was Christ who was a living spirit. The first human was earthly; the second was heavenly.

The heavenly Son of God took on our humanity in order to lead us to our true destiny: the vision of God. We are to look upwards, heavenwards.

Take time to ponder on this reading. This is done as we go on with each day’s work, or rest, or travelling to work on the train and bus. We don’t need perfect conditions. *Lectio Divina* is a way of life. Once it becomes so, then we can ponder anywhere. Write your response to the text. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is taken from John 13:34.

I GIVE YOU A NEW COMMANDMENT:
LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 6:27-38.

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.

Some of us may agree that this is the most terrible text in the Gospels. Do we really want to hear it and heed it? If we answer “yes”, then we are in for a bumpy ride.

Jesus said: “I say this to you who are listening.” Am I listening?

“Love your enemies.” Impossible?

“Do good to those who hate you.” Impossible?

“Bless those who curse you and for those who treat you badly.” Impossible?

“To the one who slaps you on the cheek, present the other cheek too.” Ouch!

“To the one who takes your cloak, do not refuse your tunic.”

Give and don't ask for anything to be returned.

Then: "...love your enemies and do good, and lend without any hope of return.”

How dare God be kind to the ungrateful and the wicked!

If all this is not bad enough, Jesus then tells us: “Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Grant pardon and you will be pardoned.”

“Give and there will be gifts for you...immeasurable gifts.”

Yes, it's a Gospel text which is too much to cope with.

There are no shortage of commentaries on this text.

Even the sure and trusted Jerome Biblical Commentary agrees that “the love of enemies is radical”, as is “the imagery of turning the other cheek for another insulting blow, and of stripping oneself naked” when the natural human tendency is “to place self-protection first.”

What is new here (for some of us maybe) is the reciprocity law. According to this law, (ethic), the one who “received some good was obliged to reciprocate.” Other scholars extend this by saying that ingratitude was a “no no” in antiquity. This was the common ethic of Luke's Gentiles. It wasn't optional. Ingratitude was “no no” for the Gentiles.

Read the Gospel text again slowly. Stand back from the text and the commentary and go about your work quietly ruminating. (*Ruminatio* in Latin), is just as important a part of *Lectio Divina* as reading, opening out the text and responding to it. *Ruminatio* goes on day after day. The text is always with us, as we live day by day. 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. The Holy Spirit is calling forth a response from me, to what the commentary calls, “a certain level of reconciliation”. I have known people in my life who have hurt me deeply, and what seems at first, irrevocably. I don't want to be reconciled with them. In reality, reconciliation is a slow process. When people rush to be reconciled, the process of reconciliation is like rainfall on parched earth. It runs along on the top of the earth without penetrating the earth. As I understand it, true reconciliation is a slow process: gentle rain to soften the soil of my heart; then more rain, more softening of the soil, more rain until the soil underneath is soaked. Yes, reconciliation might begin with a phone call, then a birthday card, then a brief visit to the person with whom I am to be reconciled. This is how it is in reality: the grace of God leads me slowly but surely. God doesn't run a “fast food” business.
2. My response is to: “And we who have been modelled on the earthly human, will be modelled on the heavenly man”, [Jesus]. If I am to be modelled on Jesus the heavenly man, what must I do? Or rather, how will God achieve this in me? “By grace”, would be my first answer. And as with my response to the first reading, the grace of God is like gentle rain

upon the soil of my heart. Then it will become more intense, until the soil of my heart is soft enough for the Gospel teachings to take root and produce their fruits. And this is the process of *Lectio Divina*. Is grace and its power like the “greenness veiling the land...the frail beginnings of a new and better life”? (Quote from the writings of Pam Brown, in “Wisdom for Life, by Helen Exley).

3. I am trying to respond to this text, but I am struggling. Eric Linklater, in his book “Juan in Amercia”, 1931, tells the truth most of us feel, I would think. Only the saints would do better: “With a heavy step, Sir Matthew left the room and spent the morning designing mausoleums for his enemies.” On his deathbed, Ramón Maria Narvarez, was asked by a priest if he forgave his enemies. He answered: “I do not have to forgive my enemies. I have had them all shot.” Attributed to W.C. Fields, are the following words: “I am free of all prejudice. I hate everyone equally.” Even Richard Nixon, in 1974, offered the following advice: “Always remember, others may hate you. But those who hate you don’t win unless you hate them, and then you destroy yourself.” It occurs to me that the greatest casualty of institutional religion, is the Gospel of Jesus. The Gospel is clear on loving, giving, forgiving, not judging, on compassion, kindness and tolerance. It is institutional religion that complicates the clear and simple message of Jesus, who used the earth, the trees, the flowers of the field to heal and teach. His compassion is one of the greatest mysteries in the Gospel:

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.*