

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 31 March 2019
4th Sunday of Lent, Year C.

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Four.

Before beginning prayer with the Sacred Texts, let us take a look at the week ahead in Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

No Memorias, Feasts or Solemnities this week.

In the Australian Church:

April 3: Ballarat – anniversary of the death of Bishop Ronald Mulkearns, 2016)

In the Social Justice Calendar:

April 1: World Autism Day.

April 4: International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action.

April 4, 1968: Assassination of Martin Luther King Jr in Memphis, Tennessee.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Joshua 5:9-12

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Luke 15:1-3 and 11-32.

***Lectio:* Read the first reading from the Book of Joshua 5:9-12.**

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 Joshua is the first of the history books of the Old Testament, the first of twelve books. Chapter 5, 9-12 is a vital piece of biblical history and can be compared with earlier texts: The New Jerome Biblical Commentary 7:4 outlines the comparisons as follows:

1. In the wilderness Moses sent out spies to scout out the land. (Numbers 13 and Deuteronomy 1:19-46. From Transjordan, Joshua sends out spies to scout out the land near Jericho.
2. Under the leadership of Moses, the Israelites passed through the Sea of Reeds as on dry ground. Under Joshua's leadership the Israelites cross the Jordan as on dry ground.

3. Before the exodus from Egypt, Moses and the Hebrews celebrated the Passover (Ex. 12) After their entry into the Promised land, Joshua and the Israelites celebrated the Passover (Joshua 5:10-12).

As an historical timeline goes, Joshua predates 1300 B.C.

This text leaves us with a question. We may well ask: How, suddenly, do the Israelites eat the produce of the Promised Land, without cultivating the soil and sowing seeds? The question isn't answered. We are presented with a broader picture – another theophany. The manna ceases. New food for a new land appears to be the message – ahead of settlement and farming.

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. You will know when it is time to respond.

Lectio Divina is a way of life – allow God's word to travel with you.

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

The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 33

The response is: TASTE AND SEE THE GOODNESS OF THE LORD.

Psalm 33 is a Psalm of praise, and, as the commentary in our Psalters notes, “a song for the small martyrdoms of every day... The martyr who made this Psalm a living prayer was St. John Fisher, as he prayed the first two lines of block three, after climbing up the ladder to the scaffold to be martyred under the regime of Henry VIII. 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, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.**

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

The date of this letter is thought to be 55 A.D. 2 Corinthians 5:18-6:10 puts the focus on the ministry of reconciliation. This is very obvious even on a first reading of the text.

Verses 18-19, we are informed by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, is the citing and interpretation of a traditional formula, which mentioned the initiator (God), the agent (Christ), and the means of reconciliation (forgiveness of sins). There are other traditional formulas and creeds which were repeated as part of the liturgy in these Pauline communities. It was a way of remembering, and it still is when we pray the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed. It is a statement of faith on our part, and a way of remembering who we are.

Only when restored to authenticity is humanity at peace with God.

A note on “ambassadors for Christ”: Ambassadors are not merely official representatives, but rather prolong the mission of Christ in a unique way.

Paul makes an appeal, “underlining God's respect for the freedom of his creatures, which is maintained in Paul's own words: “...and the appeal we make in Christ's name is: be reconciled to God.” (Summarized from the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 50:26).

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 15:18.

I WILL RISE AND GO TO MY FATHER AND TELL HIM:

FATHER, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST HEAVEN AND AGAINST YOU.

Lectio: Now read the Gospel text from Luke Luke 15:1-3 and 11-32.

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

There is a problem to begin with. The problem is that we know this text too well. And yet, do we really know it? The best approach to this story is to identify with one of the characters: the father, the elder son, and the prodigal son. Even the servants! This identification will reveal to us who we are, how we think of others, our anger of the resentment (the elder son). We may come face to face with the compassion within us (the father). We may be filled with sorrow about our unforgiveness, our pride, our wayward living, and resolve to return to God.

So, as I read slowly through this text, which character is me?

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. I feel prompted to respond to the food, the new food of the Promised Land. What a long journey characterized by hunger and thirst, the temptation to return to the “flesh pots of Egypt”, the utter frustration of Moses with a stubborn people. Arrival in a new land with new fresh and plentiful food speaks to me of different journeys I have made in my seeking of God. I have longed for other pleasures, my false gods. I have complained to God. God has looked after me. And yet, I have gone on to complain again. Again, God has looked after me. When I came to the monastery, I found the Promised Land. And yet the Promised Land comes to each of us in different guises, or under different circumstances. We don’t have to enter a monastery. What of marriage? I had a great uncle, Alf Moore, who married a Lebanese girl in 1928 in Tamworth. Alf’s family wouldn’t have her in the house because she was a foreigner. This did not stop Alf and his Lebanese bride living their lives as man and wife, people who had found love, and weren’t going to let it go. This is like the Promised Land, or the treasure in the field. Once we find love, we have found God – and we are certainly not going to let it go.
2. I hear Paul’s plea as never before: “And the appeal I make in Christ’s name is, *Be reconciled to God*. God is love. Paul says that: “God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself, not holding our faults against us...” The work of reconciliation calls for a response on my part, and on a daily basis. I hope that my work of responding can be something like the prayer Pope

Francis prayed at a meeting some years ago, a meeting of Jewish, Catholic and Muslim religious leaders: “O Lord, keep alive within us the flame of hope, so that with patience and perseverance we may opt for dialogue and reconciliation. In this way may peace triumph at last, and may the words ‘division’, ‘hatred’ and ‘war’ be banished from the heart of every man and woman. Lord, defuse the violence of our tongues and our hands. Renew our hearts and minds, so that the words which always bring us together will be “brother” or “sister”. Recently, on the 18 March, there was a gathering of Christians and Muslims in Wollongong, people who came together to be in solidarity with the families of the Muslims who were brutally killed in their Mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand. Two of our sisters went to that gathering and experienced the pain and deep anguish of the Muslim community. The words which brought them together were “brother” and “sister”.

3. In answering the question, “Which character am I?” I answer honestly that I am “the eldest son”. There are five “eldest sons” in my family and one “prodigal son”. The “prodigal son” never made it home, but our father looked out for him. In looking out for him, we always felt that our father didn’t give enough attention and praise to the rest of us. It is interesting to hear the stories in my own community about “eldest sons”. So many of my sisters were “eldest sons” – slaving away at home, doing all the right things, behaving like angels, helping with the house work and the mowing and gardens. And it still goes on in community, in the work place, in the office. Some do overtime and stretch themselves and are never thanked or praised. May we be alert this week for “eldest sons”. The “prodigals” stand out more.

*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.*