

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 3 March 2019
8th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Four

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

In the Liturgy this week:

March 6: Ash Wednesday

In the Australian Church:

March 6: Ukrainian Eparchy – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Peter Stusiuk, CSSR

In the Social Justice Calendar:

March 3: World Wildlife Day.

Project Compassion Sunday.

Clean up Australia Day.

March 5: International Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1970)

March 6: Beginning of Project Compassion.

March 8: International Women's Day

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Sirach 27:4-7

1 Corinthians 15:54-58

Luke 6:39-45.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Book of Sirach, chapter 27: 4-7.**

Read slowly and prayerfully, really listening to the text as you read aloud. This is about our on-going formation as Christians.

***Meditatio:* Understanding the text so that we can immerse ourselves in it, and make our response to it.**

This is a frightening text from the Wisdom Literature about the spoken word.

An interesting biographical portrait may help in understanding this text and others from the Book of Sirach: “There is little doubt that the entire book was composed by one author, Ben Sira, who lived during the second and third centuries B.C. Ben Sira was a native of Jerusalem. He devoted his life to the study of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings (mostly Wisdom Literature). He was a highly respected scribe and teacher. He ran an academy for young Jewish men. He travelled extensively, collecting wisdom sayings from other cultures and used them, providing he could adapt them easily to Jewish heritage and tradition.” (New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 32:2..

Sirach 26:28-27:21, spells out the dangers to integrity and friendship. “Speech is the principal criterion for evaluating a person.” (32:49). That in itself is enough for us to ponder on for a lifetime.

Take time to ponder on this text in the days ahead as you go about your work, rest, recreation. Allow the Holy Spirit to work on the fibres of your heart, and bring forth the melody of your response to this text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 91

The response is: LORD, IT IS GOOD TO GIVE THANKS TO YOU.

Psalm 91 is the song of a happy person.

Lectio: Read the second text from 1 Corinthians 15:54-58.

Meditatio:

This part of *Lectio Divina*, is about explaining the text and reflecting as we hear the explanation (like the monks of the early centuries). Be aware, that we can easily read too quickly, or be distracted.

About *LECTIO DIVINA*, Blessed Columba Marmion says: “We read under the eye of God until the heart is touched and leaps into flame.”

This is the climax of the first letter to the Corinthians. In verse 56, sin, death and law, so much part of the Letter to the Romans, also feature here at the end of 1 Corinthians.

In verse 57 of the text we are given, Paul stresses that our victory over death is due to Jesus Christ.

Verse 58 is the grand climax. The exhortation to the Corinthians is to hold fast to their faith, to be steadfast and immovable. This is the message we need to hear today, and is just as relevant in our own times, when our Churches are being tested at the very roots. (These notes have been summarized from the NJBC, 49:75).

Read the text again, ponder on it. What phrases, what sentences are to change your life? I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

Lectio: The Gospel Verse is from Philippians 2:15-16.

SHINE ON THE WORLD LIKE BRIGHT STARS;
YOU ARE OFFERING IT THE WORD OF LIFE.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 6:39-45.

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.

Meditatio: This Gospel needs no commentary. It stands alone as one of those “in your face” texts. There is no getting away from it. It is for each one of us.

It is clear and to the point. We would do well to read it five or six times, and take it to heart.

As we read, may we listen to the Holy Spirit playing like a harpist on the fibres of our heart, to bring forth the melody of our response.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio* No. 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. The Word of God is life-changing for me, when I respond to it in a practical way.

1. My response is to the words: “Speech is the principal criterion for evaluating a person.” Aldous Huxley had something to say about words: “Thanks to words, we have been able to rise above the brutes, and thanks to words, we have often sunk to the level of the demons.” (1956, “Adonis and the Alphabet”). The brutes being animals, I would rather communicate with the animals, than listen to my defects which appear in my talk, be tested by my conversation, or betrayed by words which witness my inner negativity. My dogs bark as a warning that someone is at the door – someone who is a stranger. The Desert Fathers taught that we should place a sentinel at the door of our hearts, before thoughts would be able to enter: “Whose side are you on?” the Sentinel would ask, “God’s side or the devil’s side. Native American wisdom says that “In the beginning of all things, wisdom and knowledge were with the animals, because Tirawa the One Above, did not speak directly to human beings. He sent certain animals to tell humans that he showed himself through the beasts, and from them, and from the stars and the sun and moon, should humans learn.” And of course, my dogs wag their tails and not their tongues. May we keep in mind that this Sunday is World Wildlife Day. What does our Native Fauna reveal about God our Creator.
2. I am tempted not to respond to this reading, because it reminds me of too many assignments I have done of Romans or 1 and 2 Corinthians. So, my response may seem a little simplistic. I don’t know why I have to wait until “this perishable nature has put on imperishability”, or “this mortal nature has put on immortality,” in order that the words of scripture will come true: “Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?” As a Christian I already believe that Jesus conquered death. It has been taught to me in my years of both primary and secondary school. Paul had to deal with difficulties which were testing the faith of the Corinthian community, and the primitive teachings of the apostle – I understand this. But as a cradle Catholic, and a struggling Christian, there is no doubt in my mind, that when I attend a funeral either in the abbey or in the local area, that death has been conquered. There is no death, only resurrection. This is what Jesus not only taught in words, but with the raising of Lazarus, and the son of the widow of Nain. His passion, death and resurrection gave us life, not death. Pope Francis, at a General Audience, on Nov. 27, 2013, said: “If we look at the most painful moments of our lives, when we have lost a loved one...we realize that even amid the tragedy of loss, even when torn by separation, the conviction arises in the heart that everything cannot be over, that the good given and received has not

been pointless. There is a powerful instinct within us which tells us that our lives do not end with death.”

3. As I respond to this terrible text, spoken by Jesus, I call to mind Sr. Joan Chittister’s description of perfect and desirable: “There is a difference between the perfect and the desirable. Perfect is a plastic imitation of the real, a counterfeit attempt to reproduce someone else’s definition of life or standards. The desirable, is an attempt to make the imperfect just a little better.” In the light of these words, I will try to be the “sound tree that produces sound fruit”. That’s all I can manage – and of course it is a huge undertaking.

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.