

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 14 April 2019

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord , Year C.

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

Today marks the beginning of Holy Week – the Great Week which beckons to Christians everywhere to walk more closely with Jesus in the closing week of his earthly life.

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:

There are no memorias, feasts or solemnities permitted from Palm Sunday until after the Second Sunday (octave day) of Easter.

The evening Mass of the Lord's supper on Holy Thursday, begins the Sacred Paschal Triduum. The three days of the Triduum are Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. The Sacred Paschal Triduum concludes with the Hour of Compline on Easter Sunday evening.

In the Australian Church:

No anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

April 15: 1991 – Signing of the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Royal Commission Final Report.

April 18: World Heritage Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The Gospel reading for the blessing of palms & entrance procession is Luke 19:28-40.

The Mass readings are:

Isaiah 50:4-7

Philippians 2:6-11

Luke 22:14-23:56 (Luke's account of the Passion and death of Jesus)

***Lectio*: Read the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah 50:4-7.**

Read it in a reverent way. The Word of God is sacred. Let us give ourselves to the sacred text, and open our hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit calling us forth to respond. Be aware of the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart as you read. This is the true "oratio" (prayer) of *Lectio Divina*.

***Meditatio*: Some informed background so that we can honour the text in its original meaning.**

Biblical scholars note that this text is "textually disturbed and variously translated." (NJBC 21:38). Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. in consultation and discussion with other biblical experts proposes that the text translates best as: "The Lord God has given me

a disciple's tongue, that I may know how to sustain the weary." And like prophets before him, the Isaiah of this text is maltreated and ignored.

While the text is known to us as the third song of the suffering servant, it also projects us to the New Testament with its account of the passion of Jesus:

"For my part, I made no resistance, neither did I turn away. I offered my back to those who struck me, my cheek to those who tore at my beard; I did not cover my face against insult and spittle." The last four lines of the text speak powerfully of Jesus' dying on a cross and his act of faith: "Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit."

With this background, read the text again, and take a long time to ponder on the overall message. Build into each day some quiet time. Be still before the Lord. After pondering over many hours (days), you will want to make your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 21

The response is: MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME?

Psalm 21 is the psalm of the suffering servant. This is the Psalm Jesus prayed on the cross. While the Psalm begins with a desperate cry from the depths of despair, it ends on a note of faith.

Lectio: Read the Second text from Paul's letter to the Philippians, 2:6-11.

Meditatio: Understanding the text in order to make an informed response to it.

This, as we know well by now, was a hymn used in the liturgies of the early church. A hymn, chanted or sung, or recited over and over is eventually written on the hearts of those who pray with it. This hymn speaks of the two-fold mystery: the passion and death of Jesus, and then the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. It is simple, and at the same time profound as a teaching tool. One could compare this hymn with another hymn of the Old Testament: the hymn or eulogy which was recited at different times in the life of God's people, and which reminded them that they were freed from the slavery of Egypt and brought to the promised land. The message was: DON'T FORGET IT! And the message here in Philippians is: DON'T FORGET IT! Once we forget what Jesus has done for us, we are beginning to wander away.

PAUSE. Read the text again. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist, in order to bring forth the most authentic melody of your response...

I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from Philippians 2:8-9.

CHRIST BECAME OBEDIENT FOR US, EVEN TO DEATH, DYING ON THE CROSS.

THEREFORE GOD RAISED HIM ON HIGH AND GAVE HIM A NAME ABOVE ALL OTHER NAMES.

The two-fold mystery: Jesus died for us and rose again. But as well as the obvious, we must not miss the emphasis on the NAME of Jesus. A “name which is above all other names.” It is the prayer of the Hesychast, and the mantra of millions of Christians.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 22:14-23:56.

Pause and ponder.

Meditatio: Some background to the text so that we can better respond to it.

Luke begins with the Passover meal. And it is here, at this meal that “a dispute arose ...between them about which of them would be reckoned the greatest.” What a terrible sorrow for Jesus. All the time Jesus was with them, one would think this kind of behaviour would have been bashed out of them. But no, right to the end, it is there. And Jesus says: “The greatest among you must behave as if he were the youngest, the leader as if he were the one who serves. For who is the greater: the one at table or the one who serves? The one at table, surely? Yet here I am among you as one who serves!” May we all hear the message. Jesus, the Son of God, was among us as one who served.

Stand back from this narrative and ponder. Either read some each day, or read until something leaps out, and stay with that. Go to a quiet corner of your garden or a nature reserve, or your own home, or a Church which is open for prayer. Hear the words: BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD. Allow the Holy Spirit to play on the fibres of your heart like a harpist in order to bring forth the most beautiful melody of your response to God. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 3.

***Evangelizatio* is my LIVED RESPONSE to the sacred scriptures given to me each week by the Church for my formation as a Christian. If I don't respond, they are merely texts on a page. When I do respond, they are my life.**

1. My response is to the suffering of the servant. Recently I spoke with a victim of sexual abuse. He told me that he had lost faith, left the institutional church, but hadn't turned away from Jesus. He said that the pain of many years had been for him, like the road to the cross. He identified with Jesus in his suffering. He told me he had been mocked and profaned and then discarded. He told me that his favourite day in the year was Good Friday. He wasn't able to rejoice much at Easter. He has a “set” face – like flint! Very hard to reach. He is still broken, after 35 years. He told me I could share his story with you. I know you will reverence this sharing. It may help you to reach out to a victim of sexual abuse by one or more members of any church or government institution. One of my brothers works with a man who, as a child, was orphaned and sent from England to Australia, at a time when children were more or less gotten rid of, because the system couldn't cope. In his government institution in Australia, he was referred to by the bullies, as the little “pommy”. He had various obscene experiences: from sexual abuse, to trying to drown him in a toilet bowl, to being whipped – and all of this, not by adults in charge, but by the bully boys, much older than he was, who had come through the

same system and were hardened to it all. Whoever we are, and wherever we are, may we resolve only to respect one another, and build a world of harmony.

2. I respond to this text easily, because it is in the monastic liturgy many times through the year. I have always trusted in the name of Jesus as a prayer in itself. Fingering rosary beads, while saying the name of Jesus, rests my spirit and gives me deep calm. I find it particularly helpful when I am tempted to give in. Pope Francis says: “Prayer! Never forget prayer. Never! Pray on the bus, on the road...pray in the silence of our heart.” Even in sickness, when we can’t pray the “Hail Mary...” on our beads, we can pray the name of Jesus.
3. In this account of the passion and death of Jesus, I respond first of all to the “servant” teaching. Jesus is at table as one who serves. In that magnificent book, *The Passion and the Cross*, Ronald Rolheiser says: “Real love is not simply a matter of giving ourselves over in service and duty...it’s a question of giving ourselves over without being resentful.” And further on, “Nobody, easily and naturally, gives himself or herself over to the deeper demands of love, duty and service. Transformation through prayer is needed to bring us there.” (page 15). And so back to Pope Francis: “Prayer! Never forget prayer.” Only through prayer will we be able to serve as Jesus served.

*Lectio Divina is Holy Reading,
that is,
reading of the Sacred Scriptures
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
It is about reading (and listening), reflecting,
praying in tune with the Holy Spirit within me,
resting in God,
and responding in the way I live.*

