

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 7 April 2019
5th Sunday of Lent, Year C.

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

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 celebrations this week, only Optional Memorias.

In the Australian Church:

April 8: Anniversary of the death of Archbishop Little, 2008.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

April 7: International Day of Reflection on the Genocide in Rwanda.

April 7: World Health Day.

April 11: 1963 – St. John XXIII’s encyclical, “Peace on Earth”.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 43:16-21

Philippians 3:8-14

John 8:1-11

There is the option of using Year A readings where the Adult Rite of Initiation is underway towards Easter.

***Lectio:* Read the first reading from the the Prophet Isaiah 43:16-21.**

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 begins properly at verse 14, not 16. It is, as it says, the theme of the new exodus. The New Jerome Biblical Commentary and one other commentary I have prayed with notes that the theme is a favourite theme of Second Isaiah. From 40:1 to 55:13, is known as the Book of Comfort, Second Isaiah. And this small text is loaded with comfort, hope and the message that the most important miracle of all is that “the Lord is doing a new deed”.

It is biblical poetry. The message is all that we could want.

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, the mountains. Just take time. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 125

The response is: THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US;
WE ARE FILLED WITH JOY.

One couldn't find a more suitable response to the text from Isaiah, the first of the Sacred Texts for this Sunday.

Psalm 125 is about sadness and joy; bondage and release; hard work and tears; reaping and songs of joy. It is indeed about a new deed which will bring untold joy to God's people, causing them to "sing my praises".

***Lectio:* Read the Second Mass Reading: Philippians 3:8-14.**

***Meditatio:* Understanding the text so that we can make an informed response.**

A small caption at the beginning of this text could well read: "Get your priorities straight."

The text falls neatly into the long text beginning at 3:1b and finishing at 4:1.

It appears that the understanding of 'knowledge' in this text is about deep personal involvement and experience of God.

The last sentence is interesting for us who are immersed in *Lectio Divina*. It speaks about the prize "to which God calls us upwards to receive in Christ Jesus".

Some background on the prize of the upward call: "At the end of a race, the judge summoned the winner by name and title to ascend to receive the victor's crown. By 'call' here, Paul means God's summons to the Christian, when the eschatological 'race' is complete, to ascend and join Christ in eternal life..." Brendan Byrne, S.J. who is responsible for the commentary on Philippians, is quoting V.C. Pfitzner, "Paul and the Agon Motif".

With this background, read the text again, and then ponder as you work or take time for leisure. Allow God to speak to you in the depths of your heart. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Joel 2:12-13.

WITH ALL YOUR HEART TURN TO ME,
FOR I AM TENDER AND COMPASSIONATE.

***Lectio:* Now read the Gospel text from John 8:1-11.**

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

Most people love this Gospel. The danger is that we can use it as yet another weapon to get our revenge when we have been rashly judged or criticized.

We are confronted, in this text, with the scribes and Pharisees out to trick Jesus by firstly quoting the law, and then asking Jesus: "What have you to say?"

And Jesus turns the Law upside down and leaves the ball in their court.

We need to remember that it is the fifth Sunday of Lent. Next Sunday is Palm Sunday. And as the days progress the Scriptures become more intense.

These people are absolutely desperate to pin something on Jesus so that they can destroy him. That is really what the text is about: A trick question based on Jewish Law.

Stand back and ponder on the text – every aspect of it – over a few days. Listen to the Holy Spirit praying within you. This is the true *oratio* of *Lectio Divina*. Allow your spirit to rest and be still. Finally, make your response to the text and keep it in your prayer journal, and in your heart. 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. Working from the four senses of scripture which medieval writers used, I am looking at the fourth sense which is “the human soul”. I am Israel, the person the Lord is addressing through the Prophet Isaiah. The Lord says: “ See (look!). I am doing a new deed, even now it comes to light; can you not see it? Yes, I am making a road in the wilderness, paths in the wilds.” The Lord’s new road is being cut through the wilderness of my life – all the wanderings, the foolish mistakes, the times I haven’t answered the door when the Lord has knocked. And yet, the Lord wants to do something new in my life by overlooking the negative and looking clearly ahead to the path God is cutting through the nettles and wild bushes. I recall too the words of the Psalm: “You Lord, are a lamp for my steps and a light for my path.” I recall another text where Jesus addresses me through those he left behind on earth: “Behold I am with you always, yes, to the end of time.” How I need to hear this again, as I, like so many of us, are disheartened at the state of the Catholic Church in our country, and at the aggressive violence which seems to have a good grip on the human family.
2. I am responding to the first sentence of this text: “I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Knowing Christ Jesus my Lord means responsibility on my part – being who I am all the time, not just one day a week, or on Sundays. I was outside Millers in Albion Park about two months ago. A young woman, no more than 40 came up to me crying. She said: “Sister, will you pray for me. My husband has just left me after 18 years of marriage. And I have three children. One is only 10 years old.” So I prayed over this lovely young woman, as she cried her tears of grief. There was no discussion, very few words, just sacred ground where the two of us met God.
3. My response to this Gospel text is to go back to the Desert Fathers and their wisdom: “There was on a certain day and at a certain hour, a meeting of elders about a brother who had sinned. The elders spoke, all except one. The “one” kept silence. Later, he got up and went outside; he took a sack, filled it with sand and carried it on his shoulder. He put a little sand also into a small bag which he carried in front of him. When the elders asked him what this meant, he replied: ‘In this sack which contains much sand, are my sins which

are many; I have put them behind me so as not to be troubled about them..and see here are the little sins of my brother which are in front of me, and I spend my time judging them. This is not right. I ought rather to carry my sins in front of me and concern myself with them, begging God to forgive me for these sins.’ The elders stood up and said, “Truly, this is the way of salvation.” And Jesus said: “Be merciful as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.” Pope Francis says: “What these texts make clear is the absolute priority of going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters as one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and as the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God’s completely free gift.”. Am I spiritually strong? Not if I harbour unforgiveness, revenge and judgment.

*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.*

