

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 21 July 2019

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 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:

July 22: St. Mary Magdalen (Feast)

July 25: St. James (Feast)

July 26: Sts. Joachim and Anne (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:

July 21: Brisbane – Anniversary of the death of Archbishop Francis Rush (2001)

In the Social Justice Calendar:

July 26: Schools' Tree day

July 26: 1833 – Approval of the Emancipation Bill, abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Genesis 18:1-10

Colossians 1:24-28

Luke 10:38-42

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Book of Genesis, chapter 18, verses 1-10.**

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.**

Abraham, Sarah and the three guests.

To understand this slightly strange story, we are to note “the fluidity of actors...as a means of describing both the nearness and the mysterious elusiveness of God...” Then, there is “...the initial contrast between the dozing Abraham and the purposefully journeying men, and then Abraham’s frantic preparations and their commanding silence...” When the guests later have a grand meal, they break their silence and dominate the scene by a question about Sarah. This would have been out of character in a patriarchal society. The characters are three men and Abraham. Sarah is the only woman. One of the three men promises to return next year and by then Sarah will have a son. A son is the right ordering for a Patriarchal society – not a daughter.

Verse 1: tells us that it is the Lord who appears to Abraham through the three men. (Notes summarized from 16:28 – NJBC).

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.

The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 14

The response is: THE JUST WILL LIVE IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD.

Psalm 14 is about the moral code of a good person, and is still as relevant for Christian living today. To the question: “Lord, who shall dwell on your holy mountain?” the answer is long and demanding:

Those who walk without fault, act with justice, speak truth from the heart, do not slander with the tongue, do no wrong to their brothers and sisters, who cast no slur on their neighbours... This list would be a help every night when we look back on how we have lived the day.

Lectio: Read the second text from Colossians 1:24-28.

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 text from Colossians is best divided into two parts.

1. Verses 24-25 deal with Paul’s hardships. We are advised not to understand that Christ’s work was somehow insufficient. The suggestion is that the afflictions are definitely Paul’s not Christ’s.
2. Verses 26-29: The Mystery revealed and preached. “In contrast to ‘the mysteries,’ i.e., Hellenistic or Jewish syncretistic cults in which knowledge of cosmic or religious secrets was available to a few privileged initiates, ‘the mystery’ here is a universal revelation open to all, the word of God, Christ among you, the glorious hope.”

(New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 54:16 and 17. Commentary by Maurya P. Horgan)

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 Luke 8:15.

HAPPY ARE THEY WHO HAVE KEPT THE WORD WITH A GENEROUS HEART AND YIELD A HARVEST THROUGH PERSEVERANCE.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 10:38-42.

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 can be a problem, depending on how it is interpreted.

It is the story of Mary sitting at the Lord's feet and hanging on every word, and Martha doing all the work.

One of the worst interpretations we ever hear about this gospel is that Martha stands for those who are active religious, missionaries in the Church, and Mary stands for those who are contemplatives. We need to remember that one of the greatest contemplatives of the 20th century was St. Teresa of Calcutta. She knew that no amount of work in the Lord's vineyard was successful without contemplative prayer, and she gave herself to prayer before any work was carried out.

In my own community, up until the 1960s, there were Lay Sisters, those who did all the domestic work. Their feast day was always St. Martha's day, July 29. On that day, the Choir Nuns cooked and cleaned and served the Lay Sisters.

So – what is the Gospel about? I believe it's about “how” Martha goes about her work. Is she resentful? Is she angry? Banging things in the kitchen?

Her attitude to serving comes across as non-free. If she was serving freely, with joy, she may not have made such a comment.

Robert Karris, in his commentary on this text has some practical help and some light-hearted help.

Firstly he says that this Gospel is about discipleship for men and women: “To the fore is Luke's universalism as he depicts Jesus thrice acting contrary to Jewish cultural norms. Jesus is alone with women who are not his relatives; a woman serves him; Jesus is teaching a woman in her own house.” (Cf. NJBC 43:127).

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* 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 attentiveness and readiness of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham, having a siesta, jumps to attention and offers water for washing feet, a rest under the oak tree, organizes a meal for the three men. Sarah is also on the alert and prepares a grand meal for the three men and her husband. Both are alert and attentive to the arrival of the Lord. They don't complain that it is inconvenient, or even outrageous that three strangers would expect a meal. These days we always have something in the freezer and just take it out and pop it into the microwave! The fact we need to be in touch with is that it all took time, time which we of the 21st century can't grasp. The time it took to prepare that meal was time spent in the presence of God. It all began with attentiveness. And so, the message seems to be that if we remain attentive to

the coming of the Lord, the week ahead will be one of service. Are we capable of serving one another? Vincent Van Gogh said: “If you hear a voice within you say ‘You cannot paint’, then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced.” If you hear a voice within you say ‘You cannot serve’, then by all means [go ahead] and serve, and that voice will be silenced. It would be a positive and worthy undertaking if we could go ahead, having silenced the negative voices that oppress us.

2. My response is to the words in the commentary: “...’the mystery’...is a universal revelation open to all...” A universal revelation, not a private and possessive affair. My doctoral class at the Sydney College of Divinity is made up of people from many faiths and religious backgrounds. We all have the same focus: we study for Christ. And Paul says to the Colossians that “the ‘mystery’ is Christ among you.” In my studies so far, I am negatively affected by the sectarianism of the 19th century. And of course, I have developed super-sensitive antennae to sectarianism in any form in our present age: Christians opposed to Muslims, Christians opposed to Jews or Buddhists, or Sufis. I have a photograph of the Dalai Lama in my cell to remind me to be kind and compassionate, as was Jesus. His holiness the Dalai Lama teaches: “If you want to be happy, be compassionate.” Didn’t Jesus also say: “Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate”? Archbishop Desmond Tutu has something to say about compassion: “We know that God’s arithmetic is somewhat odd. When you subtract by giving away, you get more. When you seek to hoard, somehow you lose out.”
3. My response is to Martha, because my “dream job”, as I had to give it for my Apple Ipad identification, is housework. I can’t get enough of it. It enables me to pray as I go, work with my hands as did the Desert mothers and fathers, serve my community and make ordinary places beautiful. I once helped my grandmother clean up her house. There must have been twenty years of Brisbane’s daily Courier Mail, which she thought she might read again. She was beyond dealing with it, because she didn’t have the physical energy nor the inclination. She was in her late 80s. When I had finished, she was much better, even smiling. Is there someone we can help this week, to get out of a mess? A friend with small children? An elderly parent, sister or brother? Cleaning out the linen press, or the kitchen cupboards is a helpful exercise. But, unlike Martha, we need to do it peacefully without resentment. Let’s enjoy it!

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.