

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 4 August 2019
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Two

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:

August 6: The Transfiguration of the Lord. (Feast)

August 8: St. Mary of the Cross (Solemnity)

August 10: St. Lawrence (Feast)

In the Australian Church:

August 8: Australia – National Patronal Feast. Brisbane, Parramatta, Port Pirie, Wagga Wagga – Patronal Feast

Social Justice Calendar:

August 4: National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day

Beginning of National Missing Persons Week

August 5: Beginning of Homelessness Week.

August 6: Destruction of Hiroshima by the atomic bomb

August 9: International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

August 9: 1945 – Destruction of Nagasaki by the atomic bomb.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Eccl. 1:2, 2:21-23

Col. 3:1-5, 9-11

Luke 12:13-21

Lectio: Read the first text from the Book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 1, verse 2 and chapter 2, verses 21-23.

Be aware of the way you handle your bible. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep reverence. This text is given to all of us on this Sunday, for our formation as Christians. If you are praying with this text at home, you may want to light a candle as a symbol of the fire of God's word, and its power to speak to your heart.

Meditatio: Some background on the text, so that we can understand it more profoundly, and make our response to it.

Chapter 1:1-6:9 is "Qoheleth's Investigation of Life and His Advice. Who is Qoheleth? Qoheleth "represents the skeptical side of Israelite wisdom. He does not reject the wisdom movement, but he does challenge some of its cherished beliefs." His quarrel is "with any theology that ignores experience and thereby tends to become

unreal. Verse 1, chapter 1 employs the use of a word which has a numerical value of 37, and is used 37 times in the book of Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth). It means “breath” or “vapor” and [therefore] designates what is transient and lacking in substance. (NJBC 31:11)

2:21-23 falls within 2:18-26, and deals with the problem of inheritance. Verses 21-23 present Qoheleth’s conclusions: “Since work is arduous and long-range planning impossible, he concludes that what is good is to find present enjoyment in the modest fruits of modest toil.” (NJBC, 31:16).

With this background, read the text again. Read it slowly, marking some of the words, phrases, sentences and their textual meaning. Ponder for a while. Maybe a day or more! Make your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 89

The response is: IN EVERY AGE O LORD, YOU HAVE BEEN OUR REFUGE.

Psalm 89 is a Psalm which ponders on the brevity of life. It is suggested that this Psalm may have been a Psalm sung in community, or a national song. It is a perfect response to the first reading where Qoheleth is pondering on life. It is worthwhile to ponder on the brevity of life and get our priorities straight.

Lectio: Read the Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians Ch. 3, verses 1-5 and 9-11.

Meditatio: A little background to the text, so that we can make an informed response to it.

The text can be divided as follows:

- A reminder from Paul that the members of the Colossian Church have been “brought back to life with Christ.”
- Because of this truth, they are to keep their “thoughts on heavenly things”, their minds on things which are worthy of a life “hidden with Christ in God.”
- The Colossian Christians are to kill everything that belongs “only to earthly life”, because they have changed – they have been “brought back to life” and are now “hidden with Christ in God.” And more: they have “stripped off” the “old self and “put on a new self”, which will not remain standing or stagnant. Instead, the new self “will progress towards true knowledge the more it is renewed in the image of its creator.
- Because of this new life with Christ in God, there is no room for racial prejudice, or religious prejudice, or those who are free and those who are not free.

THERE IS ONLY CHRIST: HE IS EVERYTHING AND IS IN EVERYTHING.

Read the text again, and be aware of the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist on the strings of the harp. The Holy Spirit will bring forth the most beautiful response to this reading. You will be surprised by the Spirit. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

Lectio: The Gospel Verse is from Matthew 5:3.

HAPPY THE POOR IN SPIRIT; THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS THEIRS.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 12:13-21.

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. Stand back from it and ponder.

Meditatio: Some background to help us understand the text and respond to it.

This is a terrifying text, with a terrifying message! It is about the “deleterious effects possessions can have on disciples” of the Lord. “Deleterious” is not a word we use every day, so what does it mean? We can take our pick from any of the following meanings: toxic, poisonous, detrimental, destructive, ruinous.

We are to note how frequently in verses 17, 18 & 19, the “fool” uses “I” and “my”. The fool’s “egotistical concerns eliminate God and neighbor from sight.” God and neighbor are not on the radar of a fool who amasses riches to avoid ever wanting for anything. There is no need for divine Providence in the case of rich fools. (43:134, NJBC).

Let us pray now to receive the grace to respond to the text in our living. 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.

1. My response is to the word, “vanity”, meaning “breath” or “vapor”. It is something “transient” or “passing” – here and then gone. The challenge is to recognize it as “vanity” or to let it take possession of me. Do I want to spend my life clutching at the passing “vapors”, do something trendy and empty for a day, a week, a month, and then moving on to something else just as trendy and empty? Someone I once knew went from one fleeting vapor to another, trying all kinds of alternative projects which might help her to find peace. There were sixteen stages of her life, sixteen vapors which lasted over ten years. One day I’d had enough of her ravings about the latest vapor and I said: “What about Jesus? How long is it since you have read the Gospels? Do you really want to go on like you are now?” She didn’t walk away from me. She sat looking very serious, and sad. After a long time she said: “You’re right. I need to get back to Jesus.” I took a risk and it could have gone any way. The fact is it went positively. If we can help someone get rid of yet another vapor, that can only make for a more harmonious life and a better world.
2. My response is to Paul’s command: “You must kill everything in you that belongs only to earthly life: fornication, impurity, guilty passion, evil desires and especially greed, which is the same thing as worshipping a false god; and never tell each other lies.” This is quite a demanding list for the Christians of Colossae to work through. For most of us it will take a life time. I believe greed is something which needs to be addressed by every Christian. Once my brother took our father to a restaurant for his

birthday. It was vulgar from the start, with a large advertisement: “All you can eat for \$10.00.” We were surrounded by people filling their mouths with food, - hardly savouring it – rather shoveling it in. My Christian conscience was upset by it, as I pictured hungry, malnourished infants and children in parts of Africa, India and the slums of the Philippines. I just couldn’t do the “all you can eat for \$10.00” thing! There was a book published in 1956 called, “Comfort me with Apples”. It was written by Peter de Vries. In this work, he wrote: “Gluttony is an emotional escape, a sign something is eating us.” There is a clever pun in those few words. We are anxious or distressed so we “comfort-eat”. Something is getting us down, so we eat too much. There was once a program on television about the ups and downs of being 50 and over. Whenever there was a crisis, out came the cheesecake and the ice cream – no matter what hour of the day or night! But, food is only one aspect of greed. There is one just as pronounced and affects us all: consumerism. We can be gross consumers. We buy “stuff”, and we take it home and place it in all the right cupboards or on shelves. After a year, we more than likely find that we haven’t used over half of it. We were just greedy and had to have it. Much to think about!

3. My response is to the fact that I am like the rich man who is surrounded by his securities. I do this on a small scale. Part of my vow of “Conversion of Life”, is that I go to the sister in charge of finances and ask for what I need. From clothing to a printer cartridge, - it’s all there for me. As a member of a monastic community, all my medical expenses are paid for. I have one substantial meal a day with vegetables. I have the opportunity of two other smaller meals. It is easy to become complacent, and to sit back and not to be concerned. I’m not actually building bigger barns, but I am very well off. I must then be acutely aware of the unemployed who wonder where their next meal is coming from, or if they can pay another month’s rent; the homeless who are totally dependent on the goodness of others to look after them; my sister who struggles financially to care for her husband who is ill.

*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.*