

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 8 September 2019
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Three

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:

13: St. John Chrysostom (Memorial)

14: The Exaltation of the Holy Cross. (Feast).

The Abbey is privileged to hold in trust a relic of the True Cross. Most Abbeys around the world have this privilege. Our relic (a tiny splinter) is attached to the Cross we use on Good Friday.

Unfortunately, “Our Lady of Sorrows”, celebrated on Sept. 15, can’t take the place of the 23rd Sunday (also 15th). So, we miss Our Lady of Sorrows this year.

In the Australian Church:

12: Maitland Newcastle: Dedication of the Cathedral (1941).

14: Military Ordinariate of Australia: Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Geoffrey Mayne, 2003.

Port Pirie: Episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. Gregory O’Kelly , S.J. 2006.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

September 8: Child Protection Sunday

10: World Suicide Prevention Day.

11: 2001 Terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., killing up to 3000 people

12: Death of anti-apartheid activist Stever Biko

13 Adoption by the UN of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Wisdom 9:13-18

Philemon 9-10 and 12-17

Luke 14:25-33.

***Lectio*: Read the First Reading from the Book of Wisdom, ch 9, verses 13-18.**

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: A little background to the text, so that we understand it and can make an informed response to it. Wisdom 9:1-18 is Solomon's long prayer for wisdom. The whole text is divided into three parts: 1-6; 7-12; 13-18.

In the third part, which is given to us for prayer, Solomon "reflects that no human knows God's counsel because our understanding is feeble." We are subject to physical weakness. With difficulty we understand what is on earth let alone what is in heaven. Unless God gives wisdom, we will not know God's counsel, as history shows." (New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 33:29).

Take time to reflect on this text with its challenge. When the Lord calls us to do anything in his name, he will be there beside us.

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 89:3-6, 12-14, 17

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

Psalm 89 is a pondering on the brevity of life. It is the prayer of someone who is wise. One who is not wise will build bigger and bigger barns to hold more and more grain (as the Gospel tells us). Jesus says to the man: "You fool, tonight I require your soul." Perhaps we might be challenged (in the spirit of this Psalm), to off-load some of the stuff we have accumulated over the years.

Lectio: Read from the Letter of Paul to Philemon: Verses 9-10 and 12-17.

PAUSE. Read it 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...

Meditatio: Understanding the text, so we can make an informed response to it.

First of all, a little history: "Philemon was a young and well-to-do, respected Christian of a town in the Lycus Valley of Asia Minor, probably Colossae. Paul greets him, along with Apphia (probably Philemon's wife and Archippus (their son?)), and the Church that meets in their home. Philemon was apparently converted by Paul, and possibly in Ephesus." (NJBC 52:2)

The purpose of this letter is that the slave Onesimus had run away, having caused his master a lot of damage. The run-away slave ends up where Paul is, in prison. Paul somehow managed to convert Onesimus and really wanted to keep him to help with the spread of the Gospel

However, Paul found out that Onesimus is Philemon's slave and Philemon has the right to him. Paul sends him back to Philemon. Paul asks Philemon to take him back, not as a slave but as a beloved brother in the Lord. This is the challenge for Philemon, and for all of us in our relationships with those we want to punish.

Take time over the text before making your response to it in the days ahead.

I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Psalm 118:135.
LET YOUR FACE SHINE ON YOUR SERVANT,
AND TEACH ME YOUR LAWS.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from Luke 14:25-33.**

***Meditatio:* A little background to the text, so that we may gain an understanding, and make an informed response.**

This text from Luke 14 is about the demands of discipleship. The first part of the text uses the word “hate”, so that one can understand the seriousness of the call to follow Jesus. The word used for “hate” in the Greek New Testament is translated as (to regard with less affection, less love (or different love). And these meanings are there to remind us of the commitments we make to Jesus. These commitments are irrevocable, and at times will cost us heavily. One aspect of allegiance to Christ, and also part of Luke’s Gospel, is to love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, give and it will be given to you, forgive and you will be forgiven. And it takes a lifetime to reach some of these goals.

The second part of the text is about having the equipment to complete a task. Don’t plunge in and then find that you can’t complete the project. “Jesus’ followers must not recoil from any sacrifice required of them to see their following of him through to the end, even if this means the sacrifice of all their possessions.”(NJBC 43:145). We are not called to hate anyone, but to follow Jesus even when it is difficult. We may have to choose between pastoral commitments and the birthday of a father or mother. This is what the text means. It does not mean that we become fundamentalists, and leave one of our children to die, rather than miss a pastoral commitment.

This text requires some serious reflection. Take time every day. It is a challenging text. As Christians we need to get our priorities in order. 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. One line of the text speaks to me with certain force. This of course, is the force of the Holy Spirit. The text is: “The reasonings of mortals are unsure and our intentions are unstable.” These are very powerful words, and all too true a lot of the time. As the end of the text ensures us, “we will be saved by wisdom.” That is the answer to life. If we pray for wisdom, our reasonings will be filled with grace, and our intentions will be transparent. A quotation that continues to speak to me is one by William Cowper. It fits this weekend’s reading from Wisdom: “Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much. Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.” (Words penned by Cowper is 1785). Two of my favourite people are Dag Hammerskjold (d. 1961) and Robert Frost (from my university days). Dag Hammerskjold said: “Life only [makes] demands, from the strength you possess. Only one feat is possible - not to have run away.” ”And Robert Frost (died 1963) adds: “The best way out

is always through.” I have both these quotations in my journal Someone gave me “Wisdom for Life” A Helen Exley Gift Book. I recommend it to all of us who are on the journey home to where we really belong.

2. The Letter to Philemon is a beautiful piece of writing. A run-a-way slave, a [Paul] disciple who somehow teaches him about Jesus and what Jesus did for all humankind; the desire to keep the slave for himself (Paul); then to do the honourable thing in returning him to Philemon. However, Paul returns him to Philemon, in a different state, than he was when he met Paul. He is returned as a disciple of Jesus, and is, because of the Gospel, no longer a slave but a brother. Josiah Wedgwood, speaks for Onesimus when he proclaims the motto adopted by Anti-Slavery Society in the 18th century: “Am I not a man and a brother?” Am I not a woman and a sister?
3. My response: There are two parables in this Gospel for the 23rd Sunday. Both of them ask us to weigh up the cost of commitment to Christianity. What is required (first parable), and what is required (second parable). If one professes to follow Christ, it is all or not at all. Have we got what it takes? We need to ask this question of ourselves, and answer it honestly. Geoffrey Household (1900-1998) said in 1939 (in *Rogue Male*), “It is easy to make people confess the lies they tell to themselves; it’s far harder to make them confess the truth.” Do I tell lies to myself, pretending that I am Christian and behaving in a non-Christian way? Is it a case of “I can do it, but I can’t be it?” Esther de Waal says of the Rule of Benedict that it “does not give me certainty. It does not give me easy answers. But it gives me a focus...It is forming me so that I can respond to each new situation, each new stance.” This can be said of the Gospel of Jesus, and in particular today’s text from Luke. The Gospel hurts as it forms us, and makes us more and more equipped to be the “Christian” we profess to be. There are no half measures when it comes to our commitment to Jesus. And the focus Jesus provides, forms us, even if it means being thrown back on to the potter’s wheel.

*Lectio Divina is Holy Reading -
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.*