

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 15 September is the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Four

Before beginning *Lectio Divina*, let us look at the week ahead in Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

Sept. 16: Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian (Memorial).

Sept. 20: Sts. Andrew Kim Taegon, Paul Chong and Companions, (Memorial),

September 21: St. Matthew (Feast)

In the Australian Church:

Sept. 16: Melkite Eparchy: Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev Robert Rabbat (2001)

In the Social Justice Calendar:

Sept. 15: International Day of Democracy

Sept. 16: International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer.

Sept. 18: Death of UN Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjöld (1961).

Sept. 21: International Day of Peace and World Alzheimer's Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Exodus 32:7-11 & 13-14

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Luke 15:1-32.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Book of Exodus, chapter 32:7-11 and 13-14.**

Read it aloud. 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.**

The Lord informs Moses of the people's violation of the fundamental commandment not to worship other gods (20:2-6), and of his intention to destroy them and make a new people from the family of Moses. Moses, being the true servant of his people and of God, persuades God to renounce his plan by appealing to the Lord's *noblesse oblige*. (*Noblesse oblige* used in this context trusts that the Lord, in his mightiness will do the honourable and generous thing towards those less privileged). What will the Egyptians say and what about the promise, - the promise to their ancestors, that their descendants will possess the land forever? (Summarized from the New Jerome Biblical Commentary 3:69)

Take time to ponder on this reading. Only after reflecting will you be in touch with the response that the Holy Spirit is calling forth from you.

I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 50

The response is: I WILL RISE AND GO TO MY FATHER. (Luke 15:18)

Psalm 50 is a prayer of repentance. A number of images in this Psalm will remind us of today's gospel, the return of the prodigal.

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading: 1 Timothy 1: 2-17.

Meditatio: A little background on the text, so we can best respond to it.

Perhaps it is best to start at the end of the text. It is the last sentence which sums up the essence of this letter, written by Paul to Timothy. Paul concludes his witness with the words: "To the eternal king, the undying, invisible and only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen." Paul calls God an "only God".

We can go quickly in our minds back to the first reading from the Book of Exodus and the people's violation "of the fundamental commandment not to worship other gods" (Commentary NJBC 3:69). Apart from this grand finale, the text before that is a "look at me!" text. Paul wants Timothy and in turn, the Christian communities under Timothy's direction to "Look at me". You couldn't get a better example than to listen to my story. "I myself am the greatest of sinners. I blasphemed. I injured and discredited the faith. Mercy was shown to me. I became a believer. The grace of Our Lord filled me with faith. I myself was the greatest of sinners. And if mercy has been shown to me, it is because Jesus Christ meant to make me the greatest evidence of his inexhaustible patience for all the other people who would later have to trust in him to come to eternal life."

Read the text a few times and reflect on it. Make your response in the days ahead.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is Colossians 2 Corinthians 5.19.

**GOD WAS IN CHRIST, TO RECONCILE THE WORLD TO HIMSELF;
AND THE GOOD NEWS OF RECONCILIATION HE HAS ENTRUSTED TO US.**

Lectio: The Gospel is from Luke 15:1-32. :

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

This long text is about God's mercy for sinners. Luke "champions the theme that God breaks through all human restrictions of how God should act toward sinners. God's mercy, indeed, is as foolish as a shepherd who abandons 99 sheep to save one, as a woman who turns her house upside down to recover a paltry sum, and as a Jewish father who joyfully welcomes home his wastrel son who has become a

Gentile.” (NJBC 43:146). Another cultural aspect of this text may be new to some of us. “The father’s forgiveness of his son who had become a Gentile is acted out: there is a ceremonial robe, a signet ring; shoes, which betoken the status of free people. Meat, which is rarely eaten marks this as a special occasion. (43:147).

Listen for the message you are to hear in this Gospel text, and be still as you receive the visitation of God into your life through God’s Sacred Word.

When you feel called to do so, make your response to the text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 3*.

EVANGELIZATIO. **Evangelizatio is about the evangelization of the “self”. It is that part of Lectio Divina where we make our lived response to the text. First of all, we pray with the text, take time to ponder and understand the text, be still with the text and listen to the response we are being called to make.**

1. My response is to the “calf of molten metal” – They made themselves a calf of molten metal and worshipped it in place of the one true God. To make a calf of molten metal is not an overnight task. They would have taken a long, long time to do this. And it is the effort in the manufacturing of such a “thing” that speaks volumes. As I see it, the manufacturing of false gods is mostly driven by advertising. I want that, I don’t need it. I want that. I must have this. Very soon, I have a house full of things I don’t need. And these things have shifted my focus from God and the Sacred Scriptures to a preoccupation with ‘things’. St. Maximus the Confessor says that “Nothing is bad in itself. Nothing that God has created is bad. Food is not bad, gluttony is; glory is not bad, but vainglory is. Matthew’s Gospel (we celebrate St. Mathew this week, on 21 September) 15:8-9 gives another truth. “This people honours me with their lips but their hearts are far from me, and in vain do they worship me. St. Isidore said: “The greater our love for the things we possess, the greater our pain when we lose them.” (Defensor Grammaticus – this work is an anthology of patristic texts, predominantly ascetic. The completed work is known as the “Book of Sparkling Sayings” which had an enormous influence all through the Middle Ages. It is said to have come from Ligugé in France and was written post-600 A.D.).
2. My response is to witness – the witness that Paul proclaimed. “Witness” is probably the key to Christian life, and sadly, it is not included in our Liturgies. It is a powerful means of evangelization. Paul sees himself as “exhibit A”. Would not the occasional “witness” bring a touch of reality to our Liturgy? It would surely proclaim to all present that God is love, God is merciful, and that the Son of God is our Saviour. If I am a true Christian, it is evident in all of my words and actions. This means no gossip, no negativity, renewed generosity, kind actions and so on. So, rather than lament the absence of witness in our liturgy, we have to let our lives be that witness.
3. My response to this text is to recall that I have a friend who is quite over it! She can barely listen to it. Henri Nouwen wrote “The Return of the Prodigal”, and then we had the posters and the cards and all manner of artistic representations of such a story. So, the challenge is to find something “fresh”

in this story. No doubt many of us can relate to situations in our families where we have “an elder son” or daughter, and a brother or a sister who is a prodigal. The story is about a prodigal or a “black sheep” as we sometimes call him or her. But it is also about the loving father or mother, friend or mentor and of course, our loving God. May we open to the freshness of this age-old story, and perhaps ponder God’s love for us through the prism of our own lives for we can all have a bit of the “elder child” and the “prodigal” in us at the same time!

*Lectio Divina is prayer with the Sacred Scriptures.
We read, we seek to understand with the help of a commentary,
we ponder, we take time for stillness and we respond.
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
Take the Mother of God as your model,
the one who pondered the Word of God in her heart
and brought forth the Word made Flesh, our Saviour Jesus Christ.*