

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 1 December 2019

First Sunday of Advent, Year A

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:

December 3: St. Francis Xavier (Memorial)

December 7: St. Ambrose (Mem.)

In the Social Justice Calendar:

Dec 1: World Aids Day

Dec. 2: International Day for the Abolition of Slavery.

Dec. 3: International Day for Persons with Disabilities.

1854: Battle of the Eureka Stockade

Dec. 5: World Soil Day

2013 – Death of Nelson Mandela

Dec. 7: International Civil Aviation Day.

In the Australian Church:

Dec.3: Geraldton – Patronal Feast, Solemnity.

Dec. 4: Brisbane – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, 1969

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 2:1-5

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:37-44

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 2, verses 1-5.**

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 text is from First Isaiah. Isaiah is one of the major prophets of the Old Testament, along with Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Isaiah 9:6 is the main foundation: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” It is no doubt, a verse we know well. The meaning of prophet, as used in the Old Testament is: “one who speaks on behalf of God”. In the Hebrew language, it translates as “God’s mouthpiece”. The message of First Isaiah is about the deliverance which will come when Christ comes. In this sense, he is a Messianic Prophet.

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*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 121

The response is: LET US GO REJOICING TO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD.

Psalm 121 is a pilgrimage song. There is a beautiful commentary in our abbey Psalters, (The Grail Psalter of 1962): “The joy of the pilgrim is the joy of one who reaches his/her goal at last – Jerusalem, elected home of God, venerable in the tradition of Israel. Here is a deep sense of homecoming and of pride in that home. We of the world-wide ‘Israel of God’ have no city to house us all; we are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading, from the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans, chapter 13, verses 11-14.

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

This letter develops three themes:

1. Everyone is a sinner and needs God’s salvation. Those who trust Christ as Saviour, have their sins forgiven.
2. Israel turned away from Jesus, the Son of God who was sent to us to save us. God will still be faithful to his promises.
3. Because we are children of God [the family of God], we should live lives pleasing to God.

Paul urges the church of Rome to live “decently, as people do in the daytime - no drunken orgies, no promiscuity or licentiousness, no wrangling or jealousy. Let your armour be the Lord Jesus Christ.”

I share my response to this text in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is Psalm 84:8.

LORD, SHOW US YOUR MERCY AND LOVE,
AND GRANT US YOUR SALVATION.

Lectio: Read the Gospel from Matthew 24:37-44.

Meditatio: Some background to the text which will help us respond. The message of the text is blatantly clear – we can’t ignore it or claim that we don’t understand. “Stay awake! We do not know the day or the hour when the Lord will call us. This can mean first of all, the hour of death. But more importantly, it points to the “coming of Christ” into every hour or every day, through the people I meet, the events which influence me, or disturb me. Sometimes God shakes us and says : “Get up and get going – a new day has dawned.” “Stand ready” is the way Matthew expresses it.

So, we are in the realm of “vigil”, “vigilance”. The practical application of this text leads us to a new way of living. We begin to live in a permanent state of awareness.

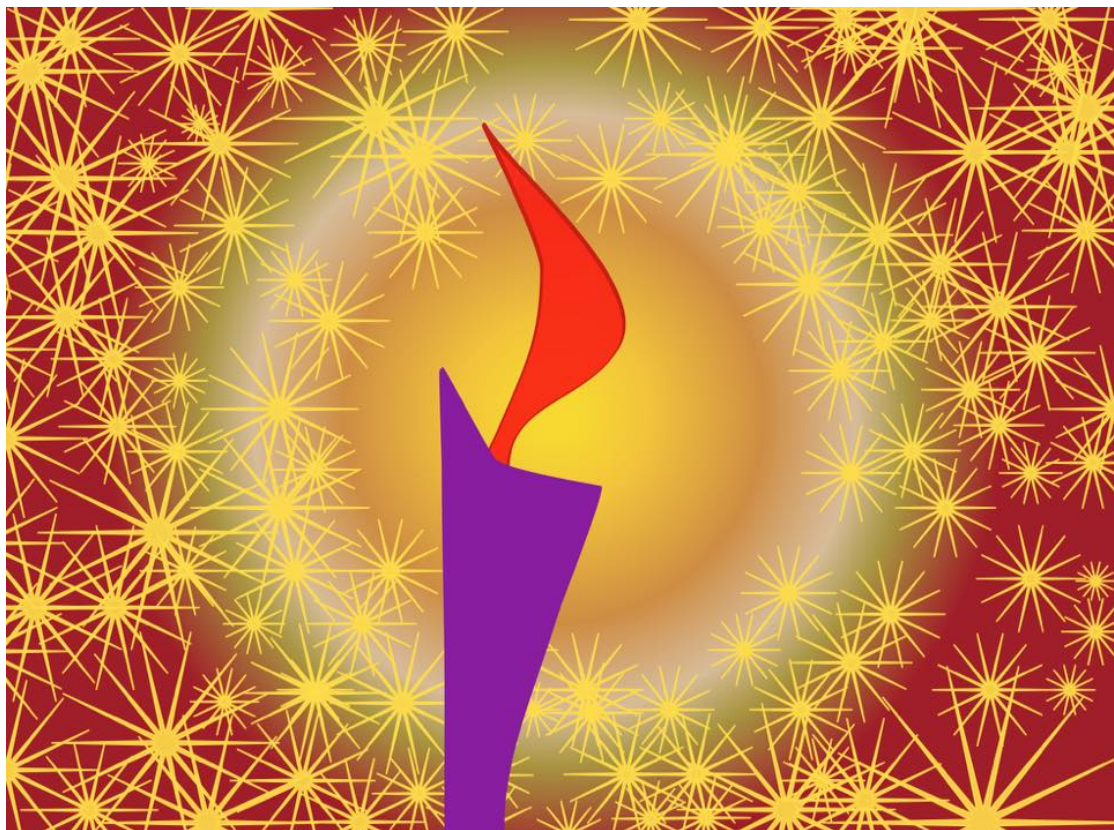
Listen for the message you are to hear in this Gospel text, and be still, as you receive the visitation of God into your life through God’s Sacred Word. When you feel called to do so, make your response to the text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 3.

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. In this idyllic picture of a scriptural utopia, my sceptical side takes over: “[Christ Jesus] will wield authority over the nations and adjudicate between many peoples; these will hammer their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift sword against nation, there will be no more training for war.” If only! What we hear through the media is a very different story. The image that haunts me is the one from Syria – a youngish woman carrying a child, trying to escape from those who know only war, and have little respect for other human beings. The young woman is crying, and the baby is crying. The mother is desperate. Mahatma Gandhi said in a speech (1922) “I wanted to avoid violence. Non-violence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed.” The anniversary of Nelson Mandela’s death is on 5 December. Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela fought without weapons – their weapon was non-violence, expressed in different ways.
2. My first response to this text, is to note that the third of the themes is topical for our churches and other institutions across Australia and the rest of the world. We are calling for transparency, both in religious institutions and in State and Federal Government. The banks and corporate giants are also to be transparent in their annual revenue. Secrets and lies have prevailed for too long. “We are as sick as we are secret.” No more darkness (dark and evil activities) behind closed doors; no more deals behind peoples’ backs. This is a text which is powerful just at this time in the history of the world. This coming week, may we not lose the opportunity to turn on the light on our own secrets and lies, before we point the finger at others.
3. My response is to the call for “vigilance”. I tried to live this text in a practical way when I was in my 20s. Then I slipped away from the challenge at different stages of my life. It is hard to be aware all the time, that Christ is in every moment. One of my practical responses and one which is easy, is to smile at those I pass in the shopping centre. I particularly make a point of seeing the cleaners of toilets and walkways, and bidding “hello”. One of my sisters used to do this work, in a shopping mall in Brisbane. She needed the money to support her children, and this was the only work available at that time. Then there are the red lights at the traffic intersection. I am aware of those in the car beside me. They too, deserve the courtesy of a smile. Then there are people rounding up shopping trolleys and pushing up to 20 trolleys at a time, to bring them back to Woolworths and Coles. In Albion Park, there is

one man who does this work. One of our sisters took some honey to him. He studies by night and does the trolley work by day. And finally, as a response, I need to be vigilant about words and actions, so that when the Lord really comes to me to call me home, I am ready.

*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.*



O come, O come Emmanuel!