

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 22 December 2019
Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A
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:

24 December: Evening Prayer of Christmas

25 December: The Nativity of the Lord, Solemnity with an Octave.

26 December: St. Stephen, first martyr.

27 December: St. John the Evangelist

28 December: The Holy Innocents. These were the male children slaughtered under the orders of Herod.

Although these feasts take place during the Octave of Christmas, there are Christmas elements retained in the Liturgy of the Hours. You will notice this in your breviary, or online breviary.

In the Australian Church:

December 28: SANDHURST – Anniversary of the death of Bishop Joseph Grech.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

December 23, 1901: Enactment of the Immigration Restriction Act (White Australia Policy).

December 23, 1996: Wik High Court Decision.

December 26, 2004: Devastating tsunami in South Asia, claiming the lives of up to 300,000 People

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 7:10-14

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-24.

***Lectio:* Read the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah, Ch. 7, verses 10-14.**

Read the sacred text slowly and prayerfully, really listening as you read aloud. This is about our on-going conversion.

***Meditatio:* Understanding the text so that we can immerse ourselves in it, and make our response to it.**

This text from first Isaiah contains the promise of Emmanuel.

The name “Ahaz” means ‘the Lord has possessed’. 2 Kings 16:2 relates that “Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God.

Instead he took his part in introducing Assyrian worship of the Astra Deities into the Jerusalem Temple. (Paul Gardner, Ed., “The complete who’s who of the Bible”) 7:1-9 is the prophet’s encounter with Ahaz.

For every King or ruler of the Old Testament, there is also a prophet to confront him, challenge him, speak the truth to him. Ahaz, because of his betrayal, is certainly not in a position to ask for a sign. The nature of the “sign” does not mean a miraculous sign, a miracle. It is a prophecy, confirmation of the prophet’s promise. The sign tells of a mother and her child, a woman and her son. And this takes us to the Solemnity of the Nativity of Jesus, Christmas.

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.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23

The response is: LET THE LORD ENTER; HE IS THE KING OF GLORY.

Psalm 23 is about the God of the universe, entering into his dwelling-place. It is also a prophetic text in the questions to us. “Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? Those with clean hands and pure heart, who desire not worthless things...” This is a psalm which we can take for some serious reflection, and give our honest answer. The mountain and the holy place refer to the Temple in Jerusalem. What of the temple of God within each of us? Is it suitably clean and pure, a place where God is pleased to dwell?

Lectio: Read the second text from Romans 1:1-7

Meditatio: Some background to the text so that we understand it better and can then make our response.

This is a model for preachers. Greet the listeners, state what you are going to say in the homily, and expand on that by way of a fuller introduction. In this case, it is a letter, not a homily, a letter written by Paul to the church of Rome. The theme of Romans is that everyone is a sinner, and therefore everyone needs the gift of salvation. God sent his Son Jesus to be the Saviour of the world and the Saviour of each one of us. It is almost Christmas, and preparations are underway in parishes, on the streets – feeding the homeless, in shopping malls with their “giving trees”, and in the hearts of all believers. The message is clear, that it is the season of goodwill – doing good for others. A most interesting and very perceptive few words are found in this reading. I don’t think they appear anywhere else in the New Testament: “...the obedience of faith”. This is where it is for Christians. There are other organizations where obedience is expected: The armed forces. Major trials after WW2, heard that perpetrators of the most vile treatment of the Jews, were only acting under orders. Paul is telling the Romans, that “through [Christ] we have received grace and our apostolic mission to preach the obedience of faith...” This kind of obedience is not about a person, but about our faith in God.

Read the text again and allow the Holy Spirit to work on your heart. Listen to the Holy Spirit praying within you and prompting you to respond to words, phrases, sentences which call you forth and challenge you. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from Matt, 1:23.

A VIRGIN WILL GIVE BIRTH TO A SON;
HIS NAME WILL BE EMMANUEL, GOD IS WITH US.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from Matthew 1:18-24.**

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:* What is it about?**

This Gospel text is the fulfillment of the prophecy we read in the first text from Isaiah. It is about the birth of Emmanuel, which name means “God-is-with-us”. The text also portrays the courage of Joseph. Do we ever give enough praise for St. Joseph?

Fr. Karl Rahner helps us to understand the life of this man who “spoke so little that his words did not have to be transmitted for posterity.” The reality of Joseph was a “hard life of one insignificant carpenter in a tiny village in one corner of the world. For the poor, this meant paying taxes and standing in line.” Then it meant becoming a refugee, fleeing from his homeland with his wife and child to the safety of Egypt. Matthew’s Gospel calls him a “man of honour”, and that he certainly was.

Read the Gospel text a number of times during the week. Sit with the text for many “quiet” times. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing like a harpist on the fibres of your heart, to bring forth the melody of your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 3.

***EVANGELIZATIO:* My lived response to the texts with which the Church gives me each Sunday for my formation as a Christian. 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 prophet challenging the ruler. In these times, our times, there is a call for transparency. There is also a call for supervision. People given responsibility in the Catholic Church or any Church community, must be supervised. Someone giving spiritual direction, must also be supervised. Lack of supervision will bring disaster. Lack of transparency will result in moral disaster, as we have seen with the results of the Royal Commission. In the Old Testament a king was supervised by the Prophet of the times. So, now, it is down to me. I must be accountable to my abbess and community. Those of us who are married or in a relationship, must be accountable to the other person. Lack of accountability on an international scale has resulted in anarchy. Anarchy allows every person to do it her way or his way. The result is usually “chaos”. Prophets in the Old Testament were those who spoke on behalf of God, God’s mouthpiece. Sr. Joan Chittister speaks to us in the 21st Century of “truth-telling prophets”, men and women who have spoken the truth to us in love. This week, I will spend some quiet time remembering those who have been the “truth-telling prophets” in my journey so far.

2. My response to this reading is very challenging. St. Paul is not teaching blind obedience. He is teaching the obedience of faith. Blind obedience achieves very little, and in the end, destroys others. Once again we could use the Nazi regime. But unfortunately, this kind of obedience was once present in Religious communities of women and men, and present in marriages up to the 1950s, and 1960s. Women often gave blind obedience to their husbands in order to keep the peace. “Obedience of faith” is a life-giving obedience. One obeys in faith yes, but also in love. And that is the rock, the solid foundation of one’s obedience. Faith in God, love of God and of family and friends. These are the foundations of the “obedience of faith” which Paul is teaching in the Letter to the Romans.
3. I am responding to the real situation of Joseph, Mary and Jesus as a family that saw poverty and refugee status. Christopher Lamb, who writes in “The Tablet” and is a commentator for the BBC on Vatican and religious affairs, has some challenging words for us in his article “Poverty is not inevitable”. This time he is writing, not in “The Tablet”, but in “Tui Motu InterIslands, October, 2019: “In this papacy, the periphery has become the centre, and Francis’s visit [to three African Nations] saw him come face-to-face with the emerging Church...On board the plane to Mozambique, Francis told reporters it was an ‘honour’ to be attacked by groups of wealthy, conservative Catholics from the U.S. The forgotten, the powerless and the disadvantaged have become the protectors of his papacy.” (Tui Motu InterIslands, New Zealand’s Independent Catholic Magazine).

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.

