

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)**  
**PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES**  
**Sunday 15 December 2019**  
**Third Sunday of Advent, Year A**

**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:**

There are no memorials, feasts or solemnities this week, apart from what we know as the “Greater Advent Ferias”. These begin on 17 December and take an “O” Antiphon each day: 17: O Wisdom of God the most high; 18: O Ruler (Leader) of ancient Israel; 19: O Flower of Jesse’s stem; 20: O Key of David; 21: O Radiant Dawn; 22: O King of the Nations; 23: O Emmanuel

**In the Australian Church:**

No Anniversaries to note this week.

**In the Social Justice Calendar:**

Dec. 18: International Migrants’ Day.

December 18: In 1894, South Australian Parliament was the first in Australia to give women the right to vote.

December 20: International Human Solidarity Day.

December 21: 1991 –Dissolution of the USSR and the founding of Independent States including Russia.

1993: Passage of Native Title Bill by the Australian Senate.

**LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS**

**The readings are:**

Isaiah 35:1-6

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 35, verses 1-6.**

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

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

On a first reading of this text, our DNA goes crazy: Yes, this is our God, this is what God does, and this is why I am a daughter or son, or child of God.

Courage, do not be afraid!

On the whole we are afraid because of insecurity. The blind, the deaf, the lame, those who can’t speak! No speech therapists, no cochlear implants, no knee or hip replacements! Can we get our minds around the insecurity of all these people. They needed divine healing, and they will eventually be given it by the Son of God.

“Look, your God is coming, He is coming to save you.” And when the Son of God comes, he will teach his disciples: “When you have a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.” Sr. Joan Chittister says we need to rearrange our invitation lists when it comes to inviting people to our banquets.

Here we are on the third Sunday of Advent, and off to a good start surrounded by vulnerable and needy people who heard the healing predictions: “Look your God is coming. He is coming to save you.”

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 145

**The response is:** LORD, COME AND SAVE US.

Psalm 145 is a Psalm in praise of God’s fidelity. It responds to the first text from Isaiah, as it mentions the vulnerable people in the world. They are described as: the oppressed, the hungry, the prisoners, the blind, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. Today, nothing has changed. These are still the vulnerable people of the world, - although there is much more help available. While a widow was vulnerable in a patriarchal society, a society ruled by men, I see that men are often not given space to grieve the loss of their wife, partner or spouse, - however people describe the one they love. Widowers fall to pieces more often than not. They need comfort, solidarity and the space to grieve, not the more common attitude that they are men, they are strong and they shouldn’t be seen to show grief or tears.

**Lectio:** Read the second text from the Letter of James, chapter 5, verses 7-10.

**Meditatio:** This part of *Lectio Divina*, is about explaining the text and reflecting as we hear the explanation (like the monks of the early centuries). Be aware, that we can easily read too quickly, or be distracted.

Blessed Columba Marmion says that in *Lectio Divina*: “We read under the eye of God until the heart is touched and leaps into flame.”

This text from James is the idyllic description of a farmer’s work and his patience before climate change awareness. Farmers – indeed anyone – can no longer depend on spring and autumn rains. The precious fruit of the ground may be scorched as it puts the first green shoot above the soil. Crop-planting has changed in order to meet the needs of earth’s billions of people. Crops are grown in large hothouses. Many of us grow vegetables and fruit in our own gardens, should the space be adequate. And yes, we do wait for the growing, and we water, and fertilize, ever hopeful for the fresh fruit and vegies.

After James is finished with the farming, he becomes the same old James - very stern, with dire warnings: you have to be patient; you must not lose heart; the Lord’s coming will be soon. Don’t make complaints against one another, so as not to be brought to judgment yourselves.

And for your example, take the prophets and their teaching, and all who spoke to you in the Lord’s name. This is the real two-edged sword of the sacred scriptures.

Read the text again, ponder on it. What phrases, what sentences are to change your life? I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

**The Gospel Verse is Third Isaiah, 61:1.**

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME;  
HE SENT ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

***Lectio*: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 11:2-11.**

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.

Matthew is concerned with the revelation of Jesus as Messiah. He does this with a portrayal of the life and ministry of Jesus – a portrayal which places Jesus at the end of Old Testament prophesy. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are alike. We already know this. Because of the “alike” they are called “synoptic” Gospels. The word “synoptic” means to “see with” or “to see alike”. This word is not often explained to us. It is used in all our studies but very often the word is not explained. The Gospel takes us back to the first text of this Sunday, to the oppressed people who need a Saviour. These people are spelt out clearly by Jesus who sends John’s disciples away with a message: “Go back and tell John what you see and hear: the blind see again and the lame walk. Lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear. The dead are raised to life, and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor.”

As we read, may we listen to the Holy Spirit praying in us and calling forth our response. I share mine 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. The Word of God is life-changing for me, when I respond to it in a practical way.**

1. I love this prophetic text. It has been formative over and over in my life. As I share my response I picture at the moment the images of those who have lost their homes (their security) to bush fires. And I see at the same time, those who are on the ground with meals, and comfort - the Salvation Army, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Smith Family. So many who care are there cooking and tending, and bringing medical supplies. I thank you dear Lord, for their generosity and solidarity. Whether it be the vulnerable ones of the Old Testament, or the vulnerable ones of the New Testament, I am called to respond to this prophecy personally, and in particular to the images of insecurity and lack of safety, and invite all who are hurting, into the banquet of my heart.
2. I don’t like James. He is too direct for me. However, we are given the sacred scriptures for our formation as Christians, so a challenge doesn’t go astray. What I am responding to is: “Stop making complaints against one another.” I once taught a class of teenage girls – Year 9. I was their class teacher, so I ran

a complaints' bureau. It exhausted me, because there was no way to fix their problems, so that they could live peacefully together during school hours. There were never straight answers. The only one was the Gospel. And teenage girls weren't really given to such advice. Their problems couldn't really be solved. I hope that they are still not complaining about others, because it is very Australian to complain. In fact, people of all nations are trained to build into their lives the courage to complain. We complain in restaurants when the dinner just delivered, is lukewarm or too hot. We complain that those building closer to the beach are blocking our view, of the ocean, or that trees can't be cut down to get a better view (the council won't permit it). We need to think seriously about what James has to say, because the five billion or more people living in refugee camps, can't complain about the food, the bedding, the lack of medical supplies. It seems that those of us who have too much, complain. Those who have little don't complain.

3. I am responding to the words of Jesus: "Go back and tell John what you hear and see: the blind see again and the lame walk. Lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear and the dead are raised to life." I ask myself: which of these is me? And I share honestly that sometimes I am blind to the good of others, and quick to name their faults. I am deaf to the communication of others, and so I need the healing of Jesus to hear the goodness of others. I have the Good News proclaimed to me, and yet my excuses are mammoth. No, this is not for me, this is for her. I'm fine, thank you – nothing wrong with me!

*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.*

