

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 8 December 2019
Second Sunday of Advent, Year A

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Two

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:

Nov. 9: Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.

Nov 13: St. Lucy (Memorial)

Nov 14: St. John of the Cross (Memorial).

In the Australian Church:

Nov 9: Port Pirie– Patronal Feast Archdiocese of Perth, Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (2009).

Nov. 12: Armidale – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, 1919.

November: Hobart– Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Eric D’Arcy, 2005.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

Nov. 9: International Day of Commemoration of the victims of the crime of Genocide.

Nov. 10: Human Rights Day; 26:

Nov. 11: International Mountain Day

Nov. 12: Founding of the Sisters of Mercy by Catherine McAuley.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 11: 1-10

Romans 15:40-9

Matthew 3:1-12.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah: 11:1-10.**

Be aware of the way you handle your bible. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep awareness. This text is given to all of us on this particular day in the Church’s Liturgical Year, for our formation as Christians. It is not information we need, but formation.

***Meditatio:* Some notes on the background of this text will help us to both understand it, and make a response to it.**

There are a few words which warrant an explanation:

Metaphorically speaking, the loincloths are part of the text, because the loins were understood as the seat of generative power. (Hebrews 5:10).

“Integrity is the loincloth around his waist around, faithfulness the belt around his hips”.

Isaiah 11:1-10 is by its nature prophetic.

Prophets knew that the Lord's spirit was a divine force which was given to individuals to enable them to fill missions otherwise beyond them. (NJBC 15;25).

In case we've forgotten our biblical history, Jesse is the father of David. Jesse features in the opening line of the text: a Shoot springs from the stock of Jesse, a scion thrusts from its root: the 'him' of the future will be the Son of God.

Read the text again a couple of times. Stay with it. Ponder on it for a day or more. However, if you are aware of the Holy Spirit calling forth your response to the text, note it down. When the Holy Spirit prays within you or pours unction on a text and calls you forth, this is the true "prayer" (*oratio*) of *Lectio Divina*. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 71

**The response is: JUSTICE SHALL FLOURISH IN HIS TIME;
AND FULLNESS OF PEACE FOREVER.**

Psalm 71 is about a kingdom of peace.

It outlines the king Messiah as Israel would hope him to be. It is important that we don't hear of a weapon of destruction mentioned, but only the weapons of integrity and sympathy.

***Lectio:* Read the second text, from the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans: 15:4-9.**

***Meditatio:* Brief background to the text or brief explanation of the text, so that we can understand it and respond.**

The first part of this text is about the organization of worship: do this, do that.

It's an interesting text, from the point of view that it doesn't ramble on with too many words, and images and concepts which leave us saying: "What does all this mean?"

Paul says that "everything that was written long ago in the scriptures was meant to teach us something about hope..." Then there is a brief reference to darkness and light, good and bad, those who live by their convictions and those who don't. Those of us who don't give up and are sure of the Lord's help can be sure of the Lord's help in this matter of tolerance. We can be "tolerant with each other, following the example of Christ Jesus, so that in mind and voice you may give glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

God will help us to be tolerant with each other, but do we want to leave our comfort zones. Would we rather remain comfortable? It has its benefits.

Take time to ponder on this reading. This is done as we go on with each day's work, or rest, or travelling to work on the train and bus. We don't need perfect conditions. *Lectio Divina* is a way of life. Once it becomes so, then we can ponder anywhere. Write your response to the text. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from Luke 3:4,6.

**PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE STRAIGHT HIS PATHS:
ALL PEOPLE SHALL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.**

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 3:1-12.

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. Stand back from it and ponder.

Meditatio: Some background to help us understand the text and respond to it.

In this Gospel text, Matthew sums up the preaching of John the Baptist. The experts in biblical studies remind us that John the Baptist was a Jewish preacher of repentance who came from a priestly Essene background.

It seems that John and Jesus were thought to be related, not by blood, but by their “prophetic preaching, religious seriousness, practice of ministry of Baptism, and expectation of the end of time in the near future.” (Cf. NJBC 42:17) and all of this got them into trouble! A Carthusian Monk, in his book “From Advent to Pentecost”, says that John is the clear glass which allows the light to pass through without distorting it. That is John’s poverty and his greatness...but John is not the final word which appears on the infinitely more mysterious face of love.” The same author quotes St. Augustine:

I listen, it is he who speaks (3:29)

I am enlightened; he is the light (1:6-9)

I am the ear, he is the Word. (3”29).

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.

1. My response is to the verse: “Integrity is the loincloth round his waist, faithfulness the belt about his hips. This is a different kind of clothing from that we read about in Genesis. Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. After this they hid from God because they were naked, and God asked them: Who told you that you are naked? Do some of us still hide because our vulnerabilities are exposed? The person who is the center of this text from First Isaiah, is the future king. There is a loin cloth and there is a belt which will be worn by this future king. The loin cloth covered what was known to be the seat of generative (procreative) power. Metaphorically, the loins were girded in readiness for active service for the Lord. (Stop and read Luke 12:25. Ephesians 6:14 is about bracing up (girding) oneself to maintain perfect sincerity in my Christian journey. 1 Peter 1:13 is about girding the loins of the mind. It is all about preparation, rehearsal, action and then begin again: prepare, rehearse and act. The girding of mind is the biggest challenge. Sr. Stan of Dublin quotes Paulo Coelho, as saying “We are not human beings on a spiritual journey, we are spiritual beings on a human journey.” (Day by Day, a treasury of meditations on mindfulness to comfort and inspire). St. Bernard of Clairvaux has some wisdom for us, from his “On the Song of Songs”: *When you are feeling strong, do not be complacent, but call to God with the prophet and say: ‘When my strength fails me, do not abandon me. [Ps70:9.]*

2. I almost can't stand texts which tell me to be tolerant of others. On a bad day, there is only one story that helps. You probably know it too. It is about a certain Abbot going into the woods to seek advice from a Hermit. The Abbot was having trouble with his monks. They were for the most part non-tolerant of one another, bored, lazy. The hermit spoke a few words to the Abbot. He said: "Go back and tell them the Messiah is among them." So, the Abbot went back and called a meeting and spoke the words of the hermit.: THE MESSIAH IS AMONG YOU. In less than 24 hours, the place was a place of light instead of darkness. May we keep this story in mind as we approach the great day: Mystery of the Incarnation, the feast that brings the Messiah into our midst.

3. I am responding to the words of St. Augustine, and praying that I too can be a listener, an enlightened one, and one who hears the Word of God and responds to it in my heart.: *I listen, it is He who speaks (3:29): I am enlightened; He is the Light (1:6-9) I am the ear, he is the Word. (3"29).*

*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.*

