

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 5 January 2020
Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, Year C
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:

No Memorias, Feasts or Solemnities this week.

In the Australian Church:

January 8: Chaldean Diocese – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Amel Shamon Nona, (2010).

In the Social Justice Calendar:

January 10: 1946 – Opening of the first United Nations General Assembly with 51 Nations represented.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:2-3 and 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12.

The readings are so rich for this day, that I have prayed only with the text from Isaiah, and the Gospel from Matthew. They are readings that could lead me through a whole year of *Lectio Divina*. However, we only have a week until the Baptism of the Lord.

Before praying with the texts, we need some historical background about this feast.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church tells us that the feast of the Epiphany of the Lord originated in the East where it was celebrated in honour of the Lord's Baptism. From the 4th century onwards, "there is ample evidence for it in the West, when it ranked with Easter and Pentecost as one of the three principal feasts of the Catholic Church. After it was introduced into the Western Church, it became associated with the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles in the person of the Magi.

Something about the three wise men, as they have come to be known to us:

Their names are first mentioned in the 6th century. The New Testament account says nothing of their number, but the three gifts may have been the reason for the number 3. In the Middle Ages they were venerated as saints. The Adoration of the Magi became one of the most popular subjects in art. We can find the first extant painting in the Capella Greca of the Priscilla Catacomb, dating from the Second Century."

The Catacomb of Priscilla is the best preserved early Christian cemetery in Rome. Priscilla was a Roman woman who was martyred for her faith.

Lectio: Read the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 60, verses 1-6. Read it in a reverent way. The Word of God is sacred. Let us give ourselves to the sacred text, and open our hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit calling us forth to respond. Be aware of the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart as you read. This is the true “oratio” (prayer) of *Lectio Divina*.

Meditatio: Understanding the text so that we can make an informed response. This beautiful text is from Third Isaiah, and a poetic text of promise and hope. It is overflowing with imagery of light, glory, rising, dawn. There is an invitation to the people of the Old Testament to lift up their eyes and look around.

The sight as described by the prophet, is one of security, safety, restoration, and order within the family unit. Sons and daughters are treated differently. Daughters are described as being gently carried. Sons seem to be able to walk from afar.

The sight of sons and daughters returning will guarantee “a heart throbbing and full” for Jerusalem, their mother. In addition to the restoration of the family unit, they will receive the riches of the sea and the wealth of the nations.

Lastly, there are the camels in throngs, and dromedaries in Midian and Ephah.

Everyone in Sheba will come bringing gold, and incense.

The text is about a new beginning!

The text points to Jesus the Christ, our Redeemer, our supreme restorer of new life and divine light. From the East the camel trains and dromedaries carried spices, perfumes, gold, incense, silk cloth richly dyed, and other attractive colours, flavours and spices. The closest I can get to imagining all this, is to compare it with walking into “Dusk”, that store in shopping centres. One can smell the scented oils, and incense four shops away, and you then must go in and watch the steam rising from heated oils, or smell the incense. This is the kind of thing that sold easily way back in this time of Old Testament history, by traders bringing their wares on camels.

Read the text again. If you can, highlight the images which call to your spirit to become involved in the unfolding pilgrimage to the divine light. You may want to respond to this text, or wait until you have prayed with it for a couple of days.

I have made my response to this text, and share it in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 2:1-12.

Meditatio: This text is about the MAGI, yes, and the star, and the nativity of the Son of God. Fr. Karl Rahner calls this feast “The blessed journey of the God-seeking person.” In saying this, we are led to see that the journey of the wise men (kings), is the journey of each one of us.

The second major theme is the STAR. “And the star went before them.” (Matthew 2:2). Rahner goes on to say to us: “Let us step forth on the adventurous journey of the heart to God. Let us run!...the Star is there and it shines. Later he addresses the clouds we place in front of the star.

Life's journey is a blessed pilgrimage to the Absolute, with gold (love), incense (yearning), and myrrh (suffering). These are our gifts to the God who gave us life. These will be manifest in the Son of God who bore our sicknesses and carried our sufferings. God is love and Jesus is a manifestation of God's love. He laid down his life for us, and said: "Love one another as I have loved you." Our yearning for God is also one of the gifts we bring him when we kneel before the manger.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

***Evangelizatio* is my LIVED RESPONSE to the sacred scriptures given to me each week by the Church for my formation as a Christian. If I don't respond, they are merely texts on a page. When I do respond, they are my life.**

1. I am responding to the images of light, and the "glory which is rising" on me, on us, on all who seek the light. Jean Vanier shares that: "There are times when we sense the light within us, urging us forth to delight in truth, the truth in our own being, the truth of the word of God, of reality, of people. The light urges us to separate ourselves from anything which is not true, from all that is darkness, from lies or illusion, for we sense that it is the truth which will set us free. (The Modern Spirituality Series, Jean Vanier, Arranged for Daily Reading, page 27). What he shares places an enormous responsibility on me. The light means hard work, and on my part, asking Our Lord for the grace to do the hard work. Lies and illusion are all around me: in politics, the media, advertising. However passionate we may be about these three areas and the darkness they generate, the text is for me. I cannot live a lie, or be swept up in illusory attractions. I only have myself to answer for in this call. I have to face my own darkness. How easy it is to blame others, pointing the finger at their darkness. Acknowledging mine is another matter. If I am to desire the light of God manifest in God's Son, then I must be up front with my darkness – the clouds which I push in front of the star. Finally, Fr. Karl Rahner sums it up: *Epiphany is the feast of the Lord's manifestation, which is still the celebration of the Holy Night that is brighter than our gloomy day, because it is the night that welcomed the eternal light into our darkness.*
2. What speaks to my heart in praying with the Gospel, is the presence of the Star. And on Fr Karl Rahner's advice, I am looking at the clouds I push in front of the star on my way to Bethlehem. But this sounds a bit unreal. I am not going to Bethlehem. I am a pilgrim on a journey to a destination which the Lord has prepared for me. I know that it is a destination where Divine love and Divine light abound. And according to Matthew 2:2, the star goes ahead of me. More than one star appears in the sky. I am looking at the Southern Cross, the constellation associated with Australia. It is a different constellation from that of the Northern Hemisphere. Jean Vanier says that, *When we sense the light within us, we begin to love the universe, this extraordinary universe with the stars and the moon and the sun, the winds, the seasons, the lands, the animals and the people.* The

stars are there yes, but the Southern Cross is ablaze with two mysteries:
stars to guide us, and the cross to remind us.

*Lectio Divina is a way of life.
We read the Scriptures, carry the Scriptures in our hearts,
seek to understand them with the help of a commentary.
We respond to them in our daily life,
and thus they change the way we speak, think, and act.
Our pondering, or ruminating is like that of the Mother of God.
She is our Model in this.*



*Follow the “star of our hearts”!
Happy Epiphany!*