

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 9 February 2020
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 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:

Feb 10: St. Scholastica, Sister of St. Benedict.
Feb. 11: Our Lady of Lourdes and World Day of the Sick.

In the Australian Church:

Feb. 9 (Armidale, N.S.W) Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Michael Kennedy, 2012.
Feb. 10 (Geraldton & Perth) – Anniversary of the death of Arch- bishop William Joseph Foley, 1991.
Feb. 13: Syro-Malabar Eparchy – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Bosco Puthur, 2010.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

Feb. 11 – Safer Internet Day
Feb. 11 – World Day of Prayer for the Sick.
Feb. 11 – International Day of Women and Girls in Science.
Feb. 12 –Commencement of the Freedom Ride in Australia (1965)
Feb. 12 – Murder of Sr. Dorothy Stang in Brazil (2005)
Feb. 13 – Apology to the Stolen Generations by the Australian Government.
Feb. 13 – Death of Faith Bandler AC, activist for Indigenous and South Sea Islander rights.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 5:7-10
1 Corinthians 2:1-5
Matthew 5:13-16.

***Lectio*: Read the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 5:7-10.**

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*: Some informed background so that we can honour the text in its original meaning.**

While this is not a complicated text, a little background is helpful for *Lectio Divina*. Jensen and Irwin, scholars who have opened out this text, have the following very strong portrayal of those who have attained riches at the expense of the poor: “Heavy sarcasm describes the luxurious isolation that the rich attain through the creeping latifundism of 8th century Judah and Israel. [This

process] at the expense of the poor, changed an egalitarian society of small landowners into a highly stratified* one (*layer upon layer, with the poor at the bottom and the rich at the top). The process may have been made legal in 10: 1-4, but it was damnable, and the prophet attests to the Lord's oath that the ill-gotten goods taken would never be enjoyed. The word "latifundism" refers to the secret hoarding of riches. Today, we would say that there is no transparency."

With this background, read the text again, take it on board, slow down, and take a long time to ponder on it. Build into each day some quiet time. Be still before the Lord. After pondering over many hours (days), you will want to make your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 111

The response is: A LIGHT ARISES IN THE DARKNESS FOR THE UPRIGHT.

Psalm 111 is a psalm about the generous and upright person. As a response to the text from Isaiah, it speaks of one who takes the poor into one's home and heart, a person of integrity, and one whose light will rise in the darkness.

Lectio: Read the Second text from 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Meditatio: The text is about the power of Paul's preaching. Looking closely at the text, we may find a link between this text and the first text from Isaiah. In this text from Paul, there are itinerant philosophers who made their living from the credulity of the simple. This could be compared with the rich of the first text, those who became rich at the expense of the poor.

In this First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes it clear that the testimony "given by God, or the secret revealed by God is Christ, whom Paul refused to adorn with rhetorical artifices or clever arguments." (NJBib. Commentary 49:17). This is a pitfall for writers of the spiritual life: those who write to cater for the emotions of the reader. These writers often avoid the real challenge of the Gospel of Jesus.

PAUSE. Read the text again.it again. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist, in order to bring forth the most authentic melody of your response...
I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from John 8:12.

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, SAYS THE LORD:
WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME WILL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 5:13-16.

Pause and ponder.

Meditatio: Some background to the text so that we can better respond to it.

Matthew has borrowed texts from the Jesus tradition (Mark 9:50; Mark 4:21; Luke 8:16; Luke 11:33; Luke 14: 34-35) Take some time now to read those texts

A worthwhile exercise is to draw a line down the centre of an A4 sheet of paper.

Put the texts from Mark and Luke on the left side, and the comparative texts from the Gospel on the right side of the page.

The metaphors used by Jesus are:

SALT and LIGHT.

The description of the fate of the salt uses imagery for divine judgment.

With the confidence of faith, the disciples are not to shrink from their mission to the world.

LIGHT (vs. 15). We are presented with Light imagery, light which presupposes a one room Palestinian house, a common clay oil lamp, and a meal shovel. (A meal shovel is a kitchen implement to pick up what the cook has ground). There were no bench-top machines to grind food and keep it together in the grinder until a cook is ready for it. No electricity! Work was carried out more slowly, keeping in mind the fact that it was relevant to the times.

Vs. 15: The disciple lives not only for self but for others

In vs. 16, Matthew “draws his conclusion from the elements he received from tradition. The verse contains a delicate balancing between doing good in the world and not being proud or taking the credit. The life of discipleship described in the rest of the sermon should not lead to arrogance but to the conversion of many to ‘your Father who is in heaven.’”

Lastly, we are told that “it is characteristic of Jesus to address God as Father. It is characteristic of Matthew to surround “Father” with “my/your...in the heavens”, or with “heavenly”.

This brief background is taken from the New Jerome Bib. Comm. 42:25

Stand back from this text. Later, read it again, until something leaps out, and then stay with that. Go to a quiet corner of your garden or a nature reserve, or your own home, or a church which is open for prayer. Hear the words: BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD. Allow the Holy Spirit to play on the fibres of your heart like a harpist in order to bring forth the most beautiful melody of your response to God. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 3.

***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. My response to this text is: “Self-giving love, compassion and service of others, especially the neediest, will be the healing we each need. When we come up against the word “needy”, we may at first imagine people living on the streets, victims of terrorism, ongoing political violence, and lately, victims of bushfire in our country. While all these needs are glaringly before us, there is the basic need of the poor who live on the streets – a warm hand. And there is the need to talk about the grief I am experiencing because I have lost everything in the bushfires. We don't have to travel very far to find the poor, the lonely, the distressed. They are all around us, everywhere, in every city. We saw the amazing amount of clothes and food hampers handed in for bushfire victims, and the wonderful generosity of those sorting through the clothing to make it easier for those in need to choose the right item, with the right size.

2. Paul's message still hasn't been heard in religious institutions, by many a member: "Far from relying on any power of my own...there was only a demonstration of the power of the Spirit." When it comes to prayer, and the proclamation of the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus, only a humble person can pray and proclaim because that person is free of the notion of power. Dr. Anthony Care, in his "Sayings of the Eighties", says something profound, and something we may or may not have experienced: "Apart from the occasional saint, it is difficult for people who have the smallest amount of power to be nice." In a parish where I worked a long time ago, a reader, on the roster for one Mass on a Sunday, told me that he felt so great, standing up there, above everyone else and proclaiming the word. He said he felt "high". What he should have felt is humble. We need to beware of people with a little bit of power. These days we tend to focus on the clergy as using their power in the sexual molestation of minors. While this is a reality, an equal reality is the boss who runs the tuckshop at school, or the teacher who most days sends two naughty children to the principal's office to be reprimanded. And again, there is the matron of a nursing home, lording it over the helpless patients, or the nurses who just treat it as a job. They watch the clock and take off as it strikes the end of their shift. While they are at work, they do it all according to the book, but the book doesn't say: "When you deliver a meal to a patient, please open the containers for those who are elderly and can't manage it." Recently one of our sisters (93) was in a Rehab. hospital, thankfully only for a few days, and this exact thing took place. Then we were asked to come over to the hospital and sit with her during meal times, because she didn't seem to be eating, or drinking!
3. In response to this text, the first words I came across were those in the Glenstal Bible Missal: *To little and poor ones Jesus says, 'you are the salt of the earth, the light of the world!'* They are not there to live in a self-enclosed set-up, they are in the world, and for the world. This is hard for those of us who love the couch in the lounge room! We are called to be at work in the vineyard of the Lord. It doesn't matter what the work is. What does matter is the Gospel spirit we bring to it. Jesus says to us also: You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Our mission is facing outwards to the world (Light). Our mission is fed from the earth of our being, where God dwells. Salt and Light are who we are as we face outwards to our very very broken world. We need to remind ourselves that we cannot be Light for the world, unless we first strengthen our inner person, by prayer.

*Lectio Divina is Holy Reading -
reading of the Sacred Scriptures
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
It is about reading (and listening), reflecting,
praying in tune with the Holy Spirit within me, resting in God,
and responding in the way I live.*