

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 2 February 2020
Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple
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:

February 5: St. Agatha

February 6: St. Paul Miki and companions

In the Australian Church:

February 4: Canberra-Goulburn- Anniversary of the Dedication of the cathedral -1973

February 8: Broome- Episcopal Ordination of Most Rev. Christopher Saunders - 1996

In the Social Justice Calendar:

February 3: World Cancer Day

February: Signing of the Cape York Peninsula Heads of Agreement

February 6: International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation.

February 8: St. Josephine Bakhita & World Day of Prayer against Human Trafficking

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Malachi 3:1-4

Hebrews 2:14-18

Luke 2:22-40

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the prophet Malachi, chapter 3, verses 1-4.**

Read it slowly. Be aware of the Holy Spirit placing unction on the message of this text. When your heart responds to a word or a line, or a phrase, this is the Holy Spirit touching your heart and calling forth your response.

***Meditatio:* A little background to the text will help us understand it and make a response to it.**

Malachi is the last of the Old Testament prophets. His message to the people of Israel is: Repent. It has been the message of every other prophet of the Old Testament, no matter how the message was presented. For example, Hosea uses the imagery of God as the lover of humankind, and humankind as an unfaithful wife. His message to the people is: "I will lead her (you) out into the wilderness and speak to her heart." We all love the imagery, but are we really jubilant when we are challenged to repent? In the text we are given on this day, Malachi is the messenger, and the prophecy is: "And the Lord you are seeking will suddenly enter his temple; and the angel of the covenant whom you are longing for, yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts." Then

comes the description of the Lord: "...he is like the refiner's fire and the fuller's alkali." Have we ever stopped to take in the real meaning of this? Fire was used then as a purifying agent or to make a piece of metal or iron soft, so one could work with it. It would have been a requisite for an iron monger. A fuller by trade is a clothcarder or a cloth dresser. A carding comb is used when cloth is prickly and needs a carding comb to remove the prickles and make it smooth. Mark 9:3 says: "And his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them." The Lord's garment doesn't require a carding comb. (Vine's Expository Dictionary). Alkali is a water-soluble chemical that reacts with acids to form salts and has pH above 7. It turns red litmus paper into blue. It is also described as a soluble mineral salt, found in some dry soils and natural waters at levels harmful to agriculture. So, we are dealing with something other than a walk in the park on a Sunday afternoon. We could say: "God means business." God is going to remove all the prickles, or turn up the heat, so that we are challenged out of our comfort zones. Are we ready for this treatment?

Read the text again and spend time with it as you go about your work and leisure. If you have the time in your week, take your reflection to a seat where you can watch the ocean, the lake, the river, the mountains. Just take time. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio 1*.

The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23

The response is: WHO IS THIS KING OF GLORY? IT IS THE LORD!

Psalm 23 is a psalm of expectation. The Lord is coming. Make way for the King. The words "king of glory" are used six times, if we count the response.

***Lectio:* Read the Second Mass Reading: Hebrews 2:14-18.**

***Meditatio:* Understanding the text so that we can make an informed response.**

Hebrews 2:14-18 begins with: "Since all the children share the same blood and flesh, Jesus too shared equally in it..."

In the biblical sense, "flesh means human nature considered in its weakness and frailty, and as such it is contrasted with "spirit" and God.

Some texts to further this understanding: Psalms 56:5; 78:39; Isaiah 31:3; 2 Chronicles 32:8. Verse 18 is of immense importance to us: "The temptations (testings) of Jesus, which have qualified him to help those undergoing temptation, were not only the prospect of the sufferings of his passion but the temptations experienced throughout his life. Gospel tradition indicates that fidelity to his mission was a principal object of temptation." (New Jerome Biblical Commentary 60:18).

With this background, read the text again, and then ponder as you work or take time for leisure. Allow God to speak to you in the depths of your heart. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Luke 2:32:

**THIS IS THE LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE NATIONS,
AND THE GLORY OF YOUR PEOPLE ISRAEL.**

Lectio: Now read the Gospel text from Luke 2:22-40.

Meditatio: Some background to the text which will help us respond.

The characters in this story are: Joseph, Mary, Jesus, Simeon, and Anna, a prophetess. The reason for the journey is a religious one. The Law of the Lord required it. The destination of the journey was the Temple of the Lord. The Law of the Lord required that “Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

The next section of this text introduces Simeon and Anna. Both of these elderly people are gifted in faith, keeping a vigil for the arrival of Jesus.

Bishop Peter Ingham (when Bishop of Wollongong), used to come each year for Mass on this Solemnity, because it is our Title Day, and our Foundation Day. In a homily one year, he described Anna as the person who goes on praying when the religious institution is crumbling around her, and that there will always be Christians who do this.

Stand back and ponder on the text – every aspect of it – over a few days. Listen to the Holy Spirit praying within you. This is the true *oratio* of *Lectio Divina*. Allow your spirit to rest and be still. Finally, make your response to the text and keep it in your prayer journal, and in your heart.

EVANGELIZATIO – this is one’s lived response to the texts given us by the Church each Sunday. It is about the evangelization of the “self” and pins me down to be who I am: A Christian who prays with the Word of God and responds to the call of the Word of God in my everyday life.

1. My response to the serious way in which the Lord combs out the prickles, from my life, while journeying from one year to another, keeping the ceremony before me, and thus being strengthened to walk on. And then there as the flames of purification. Fire burns away dross. The bushfires of Australia since November 2019 have destroyed. The fire of purification is similar to the doctor (of the 20th century), purifying a needle before injecting it, or purifying surgical implements. My grandmother used to purify a sewing needle before taking a tiny splinter out of one of my fingers. The more we are purified by the Divine Fire, the more we come to be the people we are destined to be – those made in the image and likeness of God, and who need a fuller’s comb, and a flame of purification.
2. The Holy Spirit is calling me to the last part of the commentary: “Gospel tradition indicates that fidelity to his mission was a principal object of temptation.” I once told my spiritual director that there are many days I don’t feel like getting up and starting again, that I dream of a cottage by the sea, with my dogs. So, I relate to this most important understanding: “Fidelity to Jesus’ mission was a principal object of temptation [for him]. Whatever be our calling, fidelity to that calling is what counts in this life. It’s about the journey, not the ceremony, whether it be commitment in marriage or pastoral ministry, or the priesthood, or a person in religious life or in a monastery. The ceremony is great, but the road on which we journey is not straight. It winds here and there and is occasionally bogged down in mud on the side of the

road. The car stalls. And so, we go back to the ceremony, return in spirit to the day we made that commitment. I remember looking through the photographs of my parents' wedding. I wonder did my mother realize that for the first twenty years of her marriage, she would be pregnant with another baby. Did she understand that for most of the year, every year, she would be packing school lunches for us, and trying to think up interesting fillings, such as dates and walnuts – always something new for the children she loved. Did she count on the fact that my little sister (aged 3) would fall out of a tree and break her collarbone and that she would have to sleep beside her in a makeshift bed at the Mater Children's Hospital in Brisbane?

3. My favourite character in this story is Anna. Anna was once married. After only seven years, her husband died. Anna was then a widow, and "thereafter devoted herself to serving the Lord day and night in the Temple." (Paul Gardiner, Ed. Listing of all characters in the Bible). Many churches have these holy characters as part of their family – those who arrive early before Mass to pray quietly, those who go early to church to pray one of the Hours, or to pray with the Sacred Texts (Lectio Divina). Anna was rewarded for her service by the fact that she was in the Temple on the day when the child Jesus was presented by his parents. What an amazing grace for a woman whose name means "Grace"

*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.*



The Presentation in the Temple by Fra Angelico