

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 5 April 2020

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, Year A.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week One

Today, we commemorate the Lord's entrance into Jerusalem. The ceremony begins with the blessing of palms and the procession. The account of the Lord's Passion is read.

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:

April 9: Holy Thursday, or Thursday of the Lord's Supper.

April 10: Good Friday or 'Friday of the Passion of the Lord.

April 11: Holy Saturday.

No Memorias, Feasts or Solemnities take place in Holy Week, or the Easter Octave.

In the Australian Church:

April 7: Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Francis Little, 2008.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

5 April: Publication of 'Bringing Them Home', the report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families. (1997)

7 April: International day of Reflection on the Genocide in Rwanda. Today is also World Health Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 50:4-9

Read Philippians 2:6-11

Matthew 26:14-27:66

***Lectio:* Read the First text from Isaiah 50:4-9.**

Meditatio: There are three songs of the suffering servant. The word 'song' refers firstly to the individual, who proclaims discipleship, alertness (vigilance) for the coming of the Lord each morning, and the opening of a listening ear, listening with "the ear of the heart" (from the Rule of St. Benedict). In the New Testament, the Son of God, becomes the Christ of the Passion, the suffering servant who will make no resistance, nor turn away from torture; he will offer his back to those who strike him, and his cheeks to those who will tear at his beard, his face to those who will spit on him.

One question may be asked by us: “Why is the Lord so strong in his torture? The answer is not that the Lord was the Son of God. The last verses give us the answer: Trust! A prayer of confidence crowns it: “The Lord comes to my help. I am untouched by the insults. I set my face like flint. I know I shall not be shamed.”

Let us stop here and read the other two Servant Songs: (1) Isaiah 42:1-7, and (2) Isaiah 49:1-6. Both of these texts are from the Book of Comfort (Second Isaiah).

As disciples, we are to imitate the Lord in all things. (those who are not with me are against me. Those who do not gather with me scatter).

Read the text slowly, marking some of the words, phrases, sentences and their textual meaning. Ponder for a while. Maybe a day or more! Make your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

The Responsorial Psalm is the *Psalm Christ prayed on the Cross – Psalm 21*.

The suffering servant wins the deliverance of the nations on earth. “We are in Christ for better or for worse, for suffering and for joy. The feeling of being deserted and the uncertainty that comes with physical pain, or continual illness, must be lived through faith, a faith that gives no light but only strength to go on doing what we know we must do. (Grail Psalter, 1973 edition) “Faith is the bird that sings while the dawn is still dark.” (Tagore)

Lectio: Read the second test for Today’s Mass, **Philippians 2:6-11**.

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

This text is a hymn which was used in assemblies of the very early period of Christianity. Paul is using it here to make his point. The hymn is in two parts:

1. Christ emptied himself on the cross
2. Because of Christ’s humility, and endurance of torture, he was raised to new life and into the glory of heaven.

Read the text again, and be aware of the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist on the strings of the harp. The Holy Spirit will bring forth the most beautiful response to this reading. You will be surprised by the Spirit. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Acclamation

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory!

Christ became obedient for us even to death dying on the cross.

Therefore God raised him on high and gave him a name above all other names.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory!

Lectio: Now let us read the Gospel for Palm Sunday, Matthew 26:14-27:66

Meditatio: Read parts of the Gospel, and reflect. Try to find a quiet place. Mark or highlight parts of the text which you haven't noticed in past years. Every time we read the Sacred Scriptures they are new. Take on one or two of the characters in the story and reflect on the drama from their perspective.

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. I am responding to the fact that this is the third song of the 'suffering servant', and I understand, that because of the incarnation, Christ is the one suffering. He dwells within the sick and suffering, those who at this time, are dying from the coronavirus. In the text there is one person. Across the world at this time, there are thousands, even a million people who have died or are dying now – in this 21st century. Let us imagine an elderly person in Italy, who lives alone and has no family, or whose family is estranged from her. She contracts the coronavirus, and becomes dangerously ill, she chokes and tries to cry out for help. She doesn't know what's wrong. She experiences all the symptoms of this virus we can't yet conquer. She dies alone, without human comfort. This is an example which can be seen in Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Australia, America, France, the UK and almost every country of the world at present. Let us pray for just one person this week who may be in these circumstances. May the energy of our prayer go forth across the world and reach the dying man, woman or child who is alone.
2. I am responding to the fact that this is a hymn used in liturgical assemblies of Paul's "churches". When we attended the Latin Mass of the 1950s and 1960s, the hymns for the most part were in English. They were prayerful and faith-filled, hopeful and full of the zeal of the Gospel. On 27 July, 1856, the first Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, wrote a letter on "Congregational Singing". It was read to the Congregation on the date just mentioned. Part of this historic letter may help us to remain stable: "A collection of admirable hymns, which many of you already know, has been made with the express design of furthering amongst us this most useful devotional practice. [We sing hymns] as an expression of the hope, of the thankfulness, of the penitence, of the desires, of the intercession, of the sorrows, or the exultation of the inmost heart of a Christian before the throne of Almighty God. It is but another form of prayer, and a form which of all others is calculated to excite and maintain the grand union of mind and heart in all holy things..." The Hymnal which the Archbishop is referring to is the Dolman Hymnal. He said towards the end of his letter: "Get the books, read carefully and study the hymns; they are well worth it. You will find them to be the most exquisite voice of all you hold dear ..." Two sisters in my community can remember the fervor of singing with their parents on Holy Name Sunday. It is difficult in these times to use hymns which speak to all ages in our congregations. Many parishes sing

different hymns from one Sunday Mass to the next – at a very early Mass where the over 60s attend, the hymns are different (or should be) from the hymns sung at the Vigil Mass on Saturday evening, where there are a lot of families, and young people. If there is only one Mass in a Parish, then a variety of hymns nourish different age groups is usually the policy. And of course, we don't have to miss out on hymns which speak to our hearts, because we can buy CDs or download a huge variety of hymns or sacred music. Most of us in the present time of self-isolation will not be attending our churches for probably many months so this might be a good time to re-visit some of our favourite hymns during your own prayer. There are many links to Sunday Mass or services being offered online. Our own Bishop of Wollongong, Brian Mascord, is streaming the Mass he celebrates each Sunday and Fr Frank Brennan is streaming a Mass from Newman College in Melbourne. There are many others so look them up and hopefully, you will find one that has music and hymns as a bonus!

3. My response to the account of the passion of Christ, is to stand with Mary at the foot of the Cross. Ronald Rolheiser points out that the word “stand” means taking up a position of strength: “In essence what Mary was doing under the cross was this: She couldn't stop the crucifixion...but she could stop some of the hatred, bitterness, jealousy, heartlessness, and anger that caused it and surrounded it. And she helped stop bitterness by refusing to give it back in kind, by transforming rather than transmitting it, by swallowing hard and (literally) eating bitterness rather than giving it back, as everyone else was doing.” (“The Passion and the Cross”, by Ronald Rolheiser.

*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.*

*Lectio Divina is a way of life
not a method of prayer.*

