

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 2 August 2020
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 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:

3 August: St. Dominic, Memorial.
4 August: St. John Vianney, Memorial
6 August: Transfiguration of the Lord.
8 August: St. Mary of the Cross, Solemnity.

In the Australian Church:

3 August: Canberra-Goulburn, Sydney -Anniversary of Cardinal Edward Clancy 2014
8 August: Australia – national patronal Feast. Brisbane, Parramatta, Port Pirie, Wagga Wagga- Patronal Feast.
8 August: Darwin – anniversary of the death of the most rev. Edmund John Patrick Collins – 2014.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

4 August: 1965 – first Indochinese refugees allowed to settle in Australia.
4 August: National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day.
6 August: 1945 – Destruction of Hiroshima by the atomic bomb.
7 August: Fair Trade Fortnight begins.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 55:1-3
Romans 8:35
37-39; Matthew 14:13-21

***Lectio:* Read the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 55, verses 1-3.**

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:* A little background to the text, so that we understand it and can make an informed response.**

This text (55:1-3), is from Second (Deutero) Isaiah and forms part of 55:1-13, which is the conclusion to the Book of Comfort (Second Isaiah).

Verses 1 and 2 invite the poor to a joyful banquet and in doing this adopt a theme which is present in some of the Wisdom literature.

The invitation cannot be missed:
Come to the water all you who thirst.
Though you have no money, come.
Buy corn without money and eat.
And wine, and milk (no need to pay).
Why spend your money on what is not bread?
Why spend your wages on what fails to satisfy?
Pay attention, come to me;
Listen and your soul will live.
With you I make an everlasting covenant...
(Summarized by the NJBC, 21-48)

Read the text again and ponder. In the days ahead you may feel called to a number of responses. This is the Holy Spirit at work within us. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 144

The response is: THE HAND OF THE LORD FEEDS US;
HE ANSWERS ALL OUR NEEDS.

Psalm 144 is a Psalm in praise of God's grandeur. In Hebrew it is an alphabetical psalm. We need to keep saying the response until it is part of our very breathing.

Lectio: Read the Second text from the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans, Ch. 8, verse 35, and 37-39.

PAUSE. Read 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...

Meditatio: Understanding the text, so that we can make an informed response. *Nothing can come between us and the love of Christ.* We may be troubled, worried, persecuted, naked, hungry, threatened or attacked. This means that nothing can separate us from the love that Christ has for us. "None of the changes or troubles of life can make the true Christian forget the love of Christ made known to human beings in his death and resurrection."

Verse 39 is interesting: *Neither height nor depths.* These "are probably terms of ancient astrology designating the greatest proximity or remoteness of a star from the zenith, by which its influence was measured. Even such astrological forces cannot separate Christians from this divine love. The love of Christ manifested in the Christ-event is thus the unshakable basis of Christian life and hope. (This summary is from the NJBC).

Take time over the text before making your response to it in the days ahead.
I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Matthew 4:4.

NO ONE LIVES ON BREAD ALONE,
BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from Matthew 14:13-21**

***Meditatio:* A little background to the text, so that we may gain an understanding, and make an informed response.**

This is a story we have been told since we were small children: the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. But perhaps what precedes the miracle is something not to be missed. Jesus had lost John the Baptist, his forerunner. It was a brutal death, and it is very clear that Jesus was grieving, and needing that lonely place to be – a personal space in which to grieve. The last thing he needed were crowds following him and waiting on his every word. Then the miracle.

The disciples want the crowds sent to the nearest town, but Jesus does not see the need. In case we have forgotten the use of numbers and their meaning in the sacred scriptures, the number seven means fullness or completion. Five loaves and two fish make seven and therefore are all that is needed to feed the crowds of men, women and children. I have read other more spiritual interpretations, such as twelve baskets full of food left over – this symbolized that the followers of Jesus will never be hungry, there will always be plenty.

Then – Jesus raised his eyes to heaven, said the blessing and broke the loaves for distribution. Blessed, broke and gave – this is the Jewish ritual. It is also the ritual which took place at the Last Supper and it is our ritual, the ritual of the Eucharist.

Take time every day for *Lectio Divina*: a line or word, or more. 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. This text is addressed to the poor, - is it the spiritually poor or the materially poor? Those who have no work, and are struggling to pay rent? Those who can't afford food – wondering how they will feed their children, in this time of pandemic? Reading this text from the Book of Comfort, may not be helpful to any of them. The answer lies in financial help for all those who are struggling at this time. The other means of help is something being done by a parish on the South Coast of New South Wales. It started in the fire season last December/January and kept on once Covid-19 got a grip on the world. It is just one parish, with a big heart. They have a plan for making contact with the elderly and those who live alone, or who have children, and can't get out to the shops. Requests come into the parish office and an army of generous people volunteer to ring the numbers they have been given, and offer solace, or a trip to the shops, or, keeping social distancing in mind, calling for someone who lives alone and simply taking them for a drive around the neighbourhood. We know that calls to Lifeline, Beyond Blue, charities and agencies helping refugees and asylum seekers have been on the increase since people have been forced to stay home in a tiny flat with small children, or to miss their outings with friends. The kind of work this parish is doing is something that can be of assistance to many isolated people and those in need.

We tend to think that everybody is linked to email and the internet, but they are not. In these times, they may not have the money to go online and chat to friends. NBN has not reached everyone. Those in the country may not have yet been included.

2. Jean Vanier, in his book, “We Need Each Other”, tells a story of a retreat he gave in Lithuania. It is about a mother who gave birth to a disabled daughter. At the birth of the child, the woman was greatly wounded, and it seemed to her that she was cursed. As the daughter grew up, they had to take public transport and the woman was most distressed by the looks of others when they saw her daughter. One day the mother went into a church and found a group of people praying, singing, and dancing. There were many with disabilities, so she joined the little group which was a “Faith and Light Community”. From that moment, the curse became a benediction.
3. I am responding to what I understand about the crowds of people who followed Jesus – people who were searching for what was lacking in their lives, just as it is lacking today in our lives. Apart from the pandemic we are living through, we have the ever-present search for God. Sr. Joan Chittister calls it the God-search, “the pulse that drives us from one thing to another in life and gives us the wisdom to choose between them.” These are very wise words. I once had a friend who is now deceased, so she won’t mind my talking about her. She was once in religious life and left that for what she thought were greener pastures. She did literally flit from one interest to another, thinking all the time and this is surely what she was looking for. The tragedy was that she never did find what she was looking for. I suggested that she drop all the flitting from one thing to another and opt for Jesus, and the Gospel of Jesus. However, it was all too late. Sr. Joan also adds: “God is not an occasional find in life – God is what carries me through life. God is what calls me to live for more than the present, to live despite the past, to live into the heart of the universe.” (Our Holy Yearnings, pages 35-36).

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

