

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 16 August 2020
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
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:

20: St. Bernard (Memorial)

21: St. Pius X (Memorial)

22: The Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary. (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:

16: Lismore – Anniversary of the Dedication of the cathedral, 1919

20: Darwin – Anniversary of the Dedication of the cathedral (1972)

21: Cairns – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. James Foley (1992)

22: Military Ordinariate of Australia – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Max Davis (2003)

In the Social Justice Calendar:

16: 1975 – Return of the Wave Hill Station, N. T. to the Gurindji People

17: 1971 – Swearing in of Senator Neville Bonner, as the first Aboriginal Australian to hold a seat in Federal Parliament.

18: (1975), Tiwi Land Council was established.

19: World Humanitarian Day.

21: Election of the first women members of the Australian Parliament – Enid Lyons (House of Representatives), and Dorothy Tangney (Senate)\

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 56:1, and 6-7;

Romans 11:13-15 and 29-32;

Matthew 15:21-28.

Lectio: Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, Ch. 56, verse 1, and v's 6-7.

Be aware of the way you handle your bible. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep awareness. This text is given to all of us on this particular day in the Church's Liturgical Year, for our formation as Christians. It is not information we need, but formation.

Meditatio: Some notes on the background of this text will help us to both understand and make a response to it.

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.” The text is problematic. It addresses the acceptance of foreigners who have attached themselves to the Lord –

this is a problem for the Israelites. One could say that the conditions listed by the Lord may even have challenged the Israelites who had become complacent.

“Thus says the Lord: have a care for justice, and act with integrity, for soon my salvation will come and my integrity be manifest.” Time is of the essence, it seems. And justice and integrity are easier said than done. Yet, these are the conditions on which God’s choice rests, the conditions on which one will be brought to the Lord’s holy mountain.

Then comes the terrible challenge: foreigners too are capable of loving the name of the Lord, serving him, observing the Sabbath, and clinging to the covenant [of the Lord]. These are the conditions on which God’s choice rests, the conditions on which one will be brought to the Lord’s holy mountain. And not only will these faithful people be brought to the Lord’s holy mountain, but they will be made joyful “in my house of prayer.” The holocausts and sacrifices of foreigners will be accepted on the Lord’s altar. The Lord’s house “will be called a house of prayer for all people”.

Read the text again a couple of times. Stay with it. Ponder on it for a day or more. However, if you are aware of the Holy Spirit calling forth your response to the text, note it down. When the Holy Spirit prays within you or pours unction on a text and calls you forth, this is the true “prayer” (*oratio*) of *Lectio Divina*. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 66

The response is: O GOD, LET ALL THE NATIONS PRAISE YOU.

Psalm 66 is a harvest song. It is a harvest song with a profound richness: “There is an astonishing universality here that reminds us of the third section of Isaiah. The thin coating we call the soil covers the whole earth; it binds all nations together in a common interest; from this they all get their living. But the triumph of a good harvest...should make one think of places where the harvest fails: God is the same God there, and humans no less his image.” (This introduction can be found in the Grail Psalter, 1963).

Lectio: Read the second text, from the Letter to the Romans: 11:13-15 & 29-32.

Meditatio: Brief background to the text or brief explanation of the text, so that we can understand it and respond.

On a first reading this text, one can’t mistake Paul’s intention of making the Jews (Paul’s own people) jealous. His intention is to save some of his own people. In last Sunday’s text from Romans, Paul made the dramatic statement that he would even be cut off from Christ, if it meant that his own people, the Israelites would be saved. This week he is pursuing the same dramatic style, confronting the same problem.

The Gentiles are not to be presumptuous or haughty because they have accepted Christ. They have no right to look down on Israel. “God never takes back his gift or revokes his choice.”

Any more than this simple background will lead us into complications, which are more suitable if writing a paper on this text. In *Lectio Divina*, prayer is our goal. (This short summary is from NJBC 58:108 -110).

Take time to ponder on this reading. This is done as we go on with each day's work, or rest, - it may be that we are working from home, and this is the ideal situation. When the virus disappears if ever, we will go back to public transport. *Lectio Divina* is a way of life. Once it becomes so, then we can ponder anywhere. Write your response to the text. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Matthew 4:23.

JESUS PREACHED THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM
AND HEALED ALL WHO WERE SICK.

***Lectio*: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 15:21-28.**

Read it slowly and reflectively, and maybe a second time. Try to read aloud rather than with the mind. Listen to the text as you read. Stand back from it and ponder.

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

This is a terrible story of a poor woman's humility! Which of us hasn't felt sorry for her? Matthew is focused on how the life and ministry of Jesus shows him to be the Messiah, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. And so, this Gospel is often called the Gospel to the Jews. If this is so, then a story such as found in 15:21-28 would fit in with Matthew's purpose. Mark has the same story in 7:24-30.

Matthew's concentration is on the dialogue. In Matthew's gospel, the woman is a Canaanite woman. The woman "is doubly marginal; a woman alone is a man's world; a Gentile and hence unclean, a menstruant from the cradle... [To her plea], Jesus answered her not a word. Jesus' strange silence is answered in the next verse: Jesus did not wish to exceed his divine mission. He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This statement reflects the normal policy of the historical Jesus, his mission is to gather all Israel for the end-time events.

Then we hear the dialogue about house dogs. Matthew retains this harsh saying from Mark, but without the softening "Let the children first be fed." This softening refers to the salvation-historical perspective: first the Jews, then the Gentiles (cf. Rom 1:16). These notes have been summarized from the NJBC 42:100. As part of our response, why not read some of the other texts when Jesus relates to women?

Read this Gospel text again. Make your response in the days ahead. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 3*.

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 know God is challenging me by the call: "Have a care for justice. Act with integrity." While we are living through another wave of Covid-19, a great number of people forget about integrity and justice. Integrity is about living honestly. Justice is respect, fairness, care, and has many applications. There is social justice, whereby we treat people with fairness and acceptance, affording them basic human rights. There is ecological justice – reverence for the earth, and this includes the forests, waterways, native fauna and flora. Clause 40 of the Magna Carta reads: "...to no one

will we deny or delay right or justice.” A story from the “Sayings of the Desert Fathers” may speak to our hearts. *A monk asked an Abba: ‘There are two brothers. One of them leads a life of solitude six days a week, and does much penance, while the other one is dedicated to the sick. Which of the two is behaving in the way that is more acceptable to “God?” The abba answered him: ‘The brother who is always making a retreat, would never attain the heights that the one who serves the sick has reached...’* Integrity, justice, service.

2. My response is to: *God never takes back his gifts or revokes his choice.* Be this as it may, it is difficult to see why God would choose so & so, to be on the parish council, to be a catechist, or an instructor of catechists. Pope Francis asks us: “What prejudices do you have? If we are to share our lives with others, and generously give of ourselves, we also have to realize that every person is worthy of our giving. Not for their physical appearance, their abilities, their language, their way of thinking, or for any satisfaction that we might receive, but rather because they are God’s handiwork. *God never takes back his gifts or revokes his choice* of all of us who are called Christian, followers of Christ. The reflection following the reading asks: “What prejudices do you have? Take some time to really think about this. Our prejudices sometimes prevent us from making acts of mercy towards those most in need. Don’t let prejudice stop you.” (A Year of Mercy with Pope Francis, Daily Reflections, page 232).
3. Every time I read this Gospel; I am blinded by my emotional response – that Jesus could speak to a woman like this. She knelt at his feet and begged for help. Jesus replied: “it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the houndedogs.” Her answer is saintly: “Ah yes sir; but even the house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from the master’s table.”

*Lectio Divina is prayer with the Sacred Scriptures.
We read, we seek to understand with the help of a commentary,
we ponder, we take time for stillness and we respond.
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
Take the Mother of God as your model,
the one who pondered the Word of God in her heart
and brought forth the Word made Flesh, our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

