

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 20 September 2020
25th 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:

- 21: St. Matthew (Feast)
- 23: St. Pius of Pietrelcina, (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:

- 23: Sale – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, 1915.
- 26: Darwin – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Charles Gauci, 2018.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

- 21: International Day of Peace.
- 23: (1959) – Launch of Australian Consumers Association.
- 26: International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons
- 26: World Maritime Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

- Isaiah 55:6-9
- Phil. 1:20-24
- Matthew 20:1-16

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 55, verses 6-9.**

As always, it is best to read the Word of God slowly. Be aware of the Holy Spirit placing unction on the message of this text. When your heart responds to a word 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.**

The Jerome Biblical Commentary gives us more that we need in the way of explanation. (21:48-49). So, I am sifting through the long explanation, and choosing to comment on the verses we are given Isaiah 55:6-9.

Verse 6: Seek the Lord. This is a phrase which normally invites people to the sanctuary, but in this case, it exhorts them to find the Lord elsewhere.

Verses 8-9: God is transcendent and hidden yet near enough to be burdened by human sin. Some support texts are: 43:1-7; 45:15; 43:24.

Lectio Divina is a way of life – allow God’s word to travel with you. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 144

The response is: THE LORD IS NEAR TO ALL WHO CALL HIM.

Psalm 144 is a psalm in praise of God's grandeur. In Hebrew it is an alphabetical psalm. "Let me speak the praise of the Lord. Let all humankind bless his holy name."

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading, from **Philippians 1:20-24, and 27.**

Meditatio: A brief explanation to help us understand this text.

"Christ may be glorified" is a text about power, but not earthly power. It is the power of the Risen Lord, "operative through the Spirit, and that will be so effective as to demand public acknowledgment." (NJBC 48:15).

The text is simple in its message. It is better for Paul to stay alive. In this way he can continue his mission of preaching and teaching.

The last verse seems to be tagged on to the rest. It is not related to the first part of the text: verses 20-24.

"Avoid everything in your everyday lives that would be unworthy of the gospel of Christ."

Ponder on the text for a day or two, and then make your response. The Holy Spirit will lead you in this. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Acts 16:14.

OPEN OUR HEARTS, O LORD,
TO LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF YOUR SON.

Lectio: Now read the Gospel text from **Matthew 20:1-16.**

Then, pause and re-read it.

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

This we know: it is the Parable of the Labourers in the vineyard.

Once again, we need to revise the definition of a parable: *It is one thing to communicate to others conclusions and admonitions based on one's profound spiritual experience, ...It is quite another thing to try to communicate that experience itself, or better, to assist people to find their own ultimate encounter. This is what the parables of Jesus seek to do: to help others into their own experience of the Reign of God and to draw from that experience their own way of life.* (John Crossan, "In Parables", 52; *The Mystery of Christ*", Fr. Thomas Keating, 106).

Make your response in the days ahead. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 3*.

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. I am responding to the following words in the commentary: “But in this case it invites them to find the Lord elsewhere.” Normally it would invite people to the sanctuary for worship. How apt it is in the pandemic. We have to monitor the habit of a lifetime – going to our parish church, and worshipping with our friends, and having that welcome cup of tea afterwards. So, let us think about finding the Lord elsewhere. This is difficult too in the pandemic, because we can’t get out and into the shopping centres. Something I have been doing, is watching the news, and praying for those who are ill, even holding my arms up and carrying the ill and the dying, and families imprisoned in their apartments or flats, and slowly going crazy. And I pray for those who are making decisions involving our population. Our Premiers are on the Cross – that’s for sure. They have to insist on lockdown. If they don’t, they will be criticised for too many deaths. If they do, they will be unpopular (or worse), and exposed to the angst of those in lockdown. There are other ways of finding the Lord elsewhere: our gardens; landscaping; embroidery and crochet, knitting and dressmaking; mowing the lawn. There are those films I’ve been wanting to watch. And most of all, a time of peace, longer hours for *Lectio Divina*, and fidelity to the Liturgy of the Hours. We can accept this time as a gift from God, to help us slow down. We can spend time talking with husband, wife, partner, children. If we have our job still, we are blessed. If our hours have been decreased, we are still blessed.
2. “Avoid anything in your everyday lives, that would be unworthy of the gospel of Christ.” This is truly very difficult. I am sure I’m not the only one who would find this hard. So, how do we make it do-able? Long hours of *Lectio Divina* will help. Claiming the gift of peace which Jesus gave us will help. Some wisdom from the Desert Fathers might help us: “Abba Poemen said to Abba Joseph, ‘Tell me how to become a monk.’ He said, ‘If you want to find rest here below, and hereafter, in all circumstances say, who am I? and do not judge anyone.’” Fr. Keating has some wisdom for life:” Showing mercy is the best investment one can make. Failures and losses may be God’s way of getting us into a better situation.” (The Mystery of Christ, by Fr. Thomas Keating, page 102). In other words, look for the presence of God in all our lives: people, events, business, career, professions. God is everywhere. Living like this, we will be worthy of the gospel of Christ.
3. I am responding to the complaints of those who had come early, well before the last and late-comers, and received the same wage! I am responding to this as my encounter with the reign of God. A good part of my younger life has been calculating and comparing, and “it’s not-fair-ing”. Me and four siblings could not accept our father’s preference for one son over another, and that other was the one who stood by him, after our mother’s death. This kind of pain tends to become part of who you are and linger on as you progress through life. This week, I am challenged to look at the part of me that still says, “It’s not fair. I’m the one who did all the work”. If you have watched “Fr. Brown” on the television or on your own DVD machine, you may notice that Mrs. McCarthy, the parish secretary, is always boasting about her scones as compared to the scones or cakes of other women. She is a prime example of one who hasn’t encountered the reign of God, because she’s too puffed up with her own importance. She is the Parish Secretary after all! She doesn’t

understand that Fr. Brown is there for all those who need him. It takes her a long time to accept that others are also welcome at the dinner table. It is not until she is pushed to the limit with the thought of losing Fr. Brown, that she reaches out to the ever-present tramp, who is unwashed and smells of whisky. He was a munitions expert in WWII and makes a bomb to blast the front of the cave, so that Fr. Brown and the Inspector can get out. Caves are interesting places. A lot of serious thinking takes place – perhaps the thought of not getting out or knowing that one is trapped there brings out honesty and forgiveness. Back to me: Yes, I am easily one who can say: ‘How dare they receive the same wage. I have been working all day with an aching back and ageing knees, surely I deserve more.’ One of the worst cases I ever witnessed of “It’s not fair...!” was at International Airport in Amsterdam. Three middle-aged women were having it out with the bookings officer. Their flight had been changed. They kept the rest of us waiting as they fought it out: It’s not fair. I’m a frequent flyer. I deserve better service” (I am important). But the trouble is, for Christians, that the Reign of God doesn’t see it that way. “The last will be first and the first last.” It was really hard to listen to those women, without interfering. The bookings officer behind the desk had nothing to do with the change of flight. Whether we are in a queue for petrol, for a flight, for those dreaded Boxing Day sales, or, as we saw back in September/October, cars in queue trying to go from NSW into Queensland. Christians must set an example of peaceful patience.

*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.*



Image – Susan Daily ibvm