

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 6 September 2020
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A.

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Three

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:

8 September: Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the Australian Church:

7: Wilcannia-Forbes: Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (1960).

8: Broome – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (1963).

12: Maitland-Newcastle: Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (1941)

In the Social Justice Calendar:

1: Season of Creation begins.

7: National Threatened Species Day.

7: 1936 – Death in Hobart Zoo of the last Tasmanian tiger in captivity.

8: International Literacy Day

10: World Suicide Prevention Day.

11: 2001 – 9/11- Terrorist attacks on New York and Washington DC, killing nearly 3000 people.

12: Battle of One Tree Hill near Toowoomba, Qld, between Aboriginal landowners and European settlers.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Ezekiel 33:7-9

Romans 13:8-10

Matthew 18:15-20.

***Lectio:* Read the First text from Ezekiel 33:7-9.**

***Meditatio:* Some background to understand the text and make a response.**

In the book of the Prophet Ezekiel, 33:1-39:29 are oracles of restoration.

33:1-9 introduces us to the Prophet as Watchman. In an age when only the spoken word was the means of communication, being a Watchman over the people of Israel, was a most terrible responsibility. Since there were no security cameras no cctv footage, no electricity, and therefore no electric lights, a Watchman over a city had a task that no one would want.

Paul Gardner notes that “a strong contrast is drawn between the faithlessness of Israel, and the destruction which it incurred versus the faithfulness of the Lord, and the

restoration that he will bring.” (Gardner, Who’s Who of the Bible, 148. Jerome Biblical Commentary, 20:81)

Ezekiel was to preach the word of God, hard though it be, because God had appointed him as sentry to the house of Israel: “When you hear a word from my mouth, warn them in my name.” The Lord goes on to explain that: “If I say to a wicked man: ‘Wicked wretch, you are to die’, and you do not speak the warning to the wicked man to renounce his ways, then he will die for his sin, but I will hold you responsible for his death.”

Read the text again and maybe a third time. Read it slowly, marking some of the words, phrases, sentences which may cause you to stop and recognize that the Holy Spirit is calling you to this word, this phrase, this sentence, to the whole situation. Ponder for a while. Maybe a day or more! Make your response.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm

The response is: O THAT TODAY YOU WOULD LISTEN TO HIS VOICE!
HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS.

Psalm 94 is a call to praise and worship. It is one of the psalms used for the invitatory antiphon at the Hour of Vigils (The Office of Readings.).

***Lectio:* Read Romans 13:8-10.**

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

Avoid getting into debt except the debt of mutual love. Love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbour. Love your neighbour as yourself. “This text is about the obligation of charity that sums up the whole Mosaic law in the new dispensation. Owe no one anything, except mutual love. In this all the obligations of the Christian life find their summation. Verse 10 needs an explanation. ‘Love is the fulfillment of the law.’ Here, Paul is enunciating his own basic principle, which is: ‘If Christ is the goal of the Law (10:4), then love which motivated his whole existence and soteriological activity (8:35), can be said to be the law’s fulfillment. It becomes the norm for Christian conduct, and, when properly applied, achieves all that the law stood for.” (NJBC. 51:120)

In verse 9, there are some familiar phrases: Exodus 20:13-17; Deut. 5:17-21.

Take the text and pray with it. If a word, or a phrase summons your attention, that is the Holy Spirit calling you to respond. Try to be open and listen with the ear of your heart. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from 2 Corinthians, 5:19

GOD WAS IN CHRIST, TO RECONCILE THE WORLD TO HIMSELF,
AND THE GOOD NEWS OF RECONCILIATION HE HAS ENTRUSTED TO US.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text for this Sunday: Matthew 18:15-20.

Meditatio: Some background to the text to help us respond with understanding.

Matthew 18:15-20 is a series of trial procedures: On the basis of a brief admonition to fraternal correction, Matthew constructs in 15-17 an entire three-stage trial procedure. In verses 18-20, he provides divine backing for these judicial decisions. He moves from law to theology.

Stop now and read the Gospel again, noting some of this background. Verse 17 means the total community, not just the church.

The disciple leaders are given the same power as Peter, to bind and loose, but not the power of the keys.

Part of this text has always (for me), been understood as two or three people gathered for prayer. The explanation in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary notes that two or three can gather for prayer, study or decision-making. This understanding would fit well with the beginning of the text – meeting a brother/sister who has done something wrong. How to go about this? How to place God at the center of your meeting? I have summarized this short explanation from the NJBC 42:115.

Read the Gospel again take quiet time allowing the Spirit to speak to your heart. I share my response 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. My response is to “sentry” or “watchman”. To be a “sentry” is to be a “watcher”. In one sense it was easier to watch and guard people than it is today with all our technology. Firstly, we are accountable to God who guards us always. To be aware of this is to be responsible for our words and actions. Secondly, we are accountable to husbands, wives, partners, employers. We can’t opt out of this kind of accountability. If we are the employer, we supervise our employees, so that they are clear about their work and don’t waste time. As parents or grandparents, we are responsible for children’s safety. And then there is another kind of watching which is a gift to us from the Hesychast tradition and Desert tradition which tells us to place a sentinel at the door of the heart, to monitor the thoughts that enter there. The sentinel will only admit positive thoughts. Negative thoughts are rejected. This is hard work – so hard that we can be exhausted from it. But one day it will be norm, and we won’t have to exhaust ourselves, asking: Is this thought life-giving or death-dealing? Where has it come from? We can comfortably slam the door in the face of a negative thought. We don’t want it. We choose to be a positive person.
2. My response is to: “Love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbour.” I know that God is love. God is not religion or institutionalism. God is love, and the person who finds love, finds God. The person who has found love is then responsible for passing on the great treasure. Leo Tolstoy said in his novel War and Peace, that “Love is God, and when I die it means that I, a particle of love, shall return to the general

and eternal source.” This is another way of saying, that when I die, I will arrive at my true home – I will be with God. Another few words about love are expressed in the Book of Ruth, 1:16-17 – “Entreat me not to leave you, or to return from following after you, for: wherever you go, I will go, and where you live so shall I live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.”

3. I am responding to the procedure for correction of another. The problem with this procedure is that it is too hard, - we wriggle out of it and slither away. Sometimes it is harder than hard to accept. I’ve learned not to take seriously a person who says: “You can tell me anything! If I’m not doing things correctly, then tell me.” Correction is a reality and we have to do it or receive it sometime. We can deliver it with a sledgehammer approach, or with gentle kindness. We would all prefer the gentle kindness approach, so why don’t we ditch the sledgehammer?

*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.*

