

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 4 October 2020
27th 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 and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

7 October: Our Lady of the Rosary.

In the Australian Catholic Church:

07: Armidale – Patronal feast.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

04: Usually St. Francis of Assisi, and World Pets Day. Also, Animal welfare day.

This day also marks the end of the Season of Creation. The Liturgy is of the Sunday.

05: World Teachers Day.

09: World Post Day

10: World Mental Health Day

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 5:1-7

Philippians 4:6-9

Matthew 21:33-43

***Lectio:* Read the First Reading from Isaiah 5:1-7**

Meditatio:

Before opening out this text, we need to get into touch with the reality of “expectations”. It is about God’s expectations for the House of Israel. Expectations are not all negative. As a positive phenomenon they give people something to strive for.

This terribly explicit text is from first Isaiah.

The singer, the friend, the gardener did all the right things: cleared the soil, rid the soil of rocks, and aired the soil before planting.

Preparations having been made; the vineyard was planted.

Then there is the issue of expectations.

God expected more of his chosen people – sweet grapes instead of sour grapes.

The last six lines spell out that the vineyard is the House of Israel. Because of their disloyalty, God will lay it waste – undug, unpruned, completely abandoned.

What God found is spelt out in the last two lines. God expected justice, but found bloodshed; God expected, integrity, but heard only a cry of distress.

Read the text again and stay with it for a while (no set time). Allow the Word to sit deeply in your heart and ponder over it before making your response. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 79

The response: THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD IS THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL.

Psalm 79 is a plea for the return of God's favour. The return of God's favour would restore the vineyard and yield only sweet grapes. But it is too late for that. The northern kingdom is overrun first. Samaria was overrun in 721 B.C., and "colonised with a mixed population of idolatrous immigrants." (Grail Psalter, 1981)

***Lectio:* Read the Second Text from Philippians 4:6-9**

***Meditatio:* A little background will help us understand the text and make a response.**

This is the second time in the New Testament, that there is teaching on positive thinking. Jesus taught that: "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." Paul teaches: "Fill your minds with everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honour, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise." The letter to the Hebrews proclaims that it is the Word of God which judges the thoughts and motives of our hearts.

With this background, read the text again, and then ponder as you work or take time for leisure. Allow God to speak to you in the depths of your heart. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from John 15:15.

I CALL YOU FRIENDS SAYS THE LORD, BECAUSE I HAVE MADE KNOWN TO YOU EVERYTHING I HAVE LEARNT FROM MY FATHER.

***Lectio:* Take time now to read the Gospel text, Matthew 21:33-43**

St. John Cassian reminds us that we must till the soil of our hearts every day with the plough of the Gospel.

Meditatio:

The story of the vineyard is told here in retrospect. The owner of the vineyard entrusts the vineyard to tenants. When the vintage is ready, and it is time to pick grapes and make wine. The servants sent by God are the prophets of the Old Testament. One by one they met their fate. One by one, their words fell on deaf ears. The last of the prophets was John the Baptist, and we are familiar with the circumstances surrounding his death.

And so:

The tenants seize the servants. They thrash, kill and stone them.

More servants are sent, and they are also killed.

Then the Son of God is sent and meets his fate at the hands of the kind of tenants who lord it over the poor, and the orphans and the widows, while they themselves take liberties where they please.

Stand back and ponder on the text – every aspect of it – over a few days. Listen to the Holy Spirit praying within you. This is the true *oratio* of *Lectio Divina*. Allow your spirit to rest

and be still. Finally, make your response to the text and keep it in your prayer journal, and in your heart. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 3.

***Evangelizatio* – our response to a text, and how it will, or already has, formed us.**

1. My response to this text from first Isaiah, is to look at myself as the vineyard (the house of Israel). God has planted me in rich earth, removed unwanted obstacles, and expected the very best of a vintage. So many times, I have lost faith and gone in a number of directions – mostly away from God. However, in all these “times”, I have not experienced God allowing me to go undug, unpruned, unwatered, overrun with briars and thorns. God has always been a tender shepherd, lingering close to me, and ready to embrace me whenever I can turn around and look at him.
2. My response to the reading from Philippians is to target positive thinking, and the outcomes of this. I can see that one of the anniversaries this week is “World Post Day” (9 October). Email is the way these days. Written letters seem to be fading into the past, unless we receive those dreaded envelopes with the window in the front – an account to be paid! The quality of the email I send is important to me. I choose words which are life-giving, creative, faith-filled, and healing. And I pray for the children bullied online, receiving destructive emails from those whose hearts are mostly filled with spite, hatred, jealousy. May we choose positive messages in all we say and write and do.
3. My response to the Gospel text is to stop and remember every person who has formed me as a Christian, either by word or action. Then I am honestly confronting the times when I didn’t want to hear them speaking to me and coaxing me through another trial period, calling to my spirit of faith, which will win through. The other side of this has been those who don’t know me at all, and yet proceed to give me advice on Christian living. This alienates me from others, and I curl up inside. If we are those who give advice, let us remember that we do so with reverence for the one to whom we speak, and we approach that person as if we were on holy ground. That other person is made in the image and likeness of God. Let us never forget this.

Lectio Divina is a way of life, not a method of prayer. It begins with reading (*Lectio*), and move through *oratio*, the prayer of the Holy Spirit praying within me and leading me to respond to the text I am reading.

Meditatio is that part of *Lectio Divina* and dates from the time of the first monks, in the early centuries of cenobitic communities, there may have been many monks who were illiterate. They would sit around the courtyard cloister, listening to the explanation of the Word of God by one who could read and understood the texts.

Ruminatio is that part of *lectio divina* taught by St. John Cassian, where he describes rumination as being like a cow chewing the cud, as it rests after eating. *Ruminatio* goes on most of the time.

Contemplatio is a gift from God who gives us this time of rest with the scriptures. It is not mediation as we know it today.

Evangelizatio is when our hearts are opened to the power of the Word forming us. All these names in Latin and English are part of the prayer we call “holy reading” or “lectio divina”. Unfortunately, there isn’t someone checking up on us and asking: Have you prayed with the Scriptures today? A reminder - I have to be that person!

*As we conclude the **Season of Creation**,
let us pray this beautiful Canticle from St Francis of Assisi.*

“Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars;
in the heavens you have made them, precious and beautiful.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and clouds and storms,
and all the weather, through which you give your creatures sustenance.

Be praised, My Lord, through Sister Water;
she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you brighten the night.
He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth,
who feeds us and rules us and produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of you;
through those who endure sickness and trial.
Happy those who endure in peace, for they will be crowned.”
~ St. Francis of Assisi

