

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 25 October 2020
30th 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:

28: Sts. Simon and Jude (Feast)

In the Australian Church:

27: Melbourne – Anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral. (1897)

In the Social Justice Calendar:

26: 1985 – return of Uluru to the traditional owners. The Anangu people.

26: 2019 – Ban on climbing Uluru comes into force.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Exodus 22:20-26; Psalm 17:

1 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Gospel Acclamation: John 14:23;

Gospel Matthew 22:34-40.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from Exodus 22:20-26.**

Read it aloud. Read it slowly. Be aware of the Holy Spirit placing unction on the message of this text. When your heart responds to a word or a line, 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.**

Exodus 22:18-23:19 is a series of “commands about various social and cultic matters.” A few notes on the text:

Verse 20: Violators of the first commandment are to be proscribed (not utterly destroyed) i.e. set apart from the community.

21-24: Resident aliens were people living more or less permanently in a community other than their own. They were classed with widows, and the fatherless, as needing protection.

Read the texts which support this fact:

Deut. 24:19-22; Jeremiah 7:6; Ezekiel 22:7. Chapter 19 paints a vivid portrait of the prophet.

Read the text again and sit with it or ponder on it as you go about your day (s).

I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 17

The response is: I LOVE YOU LORD, MY STRENGTH.

Psalm 17 is David's gratitude for victory. It is a long psalm of 51 verses. We do not go out to battle against our enemies with sword and shield as did David, or with landmines, missiles, agent orange or COVID-19. We go into battle against the enemies which "have intangible arrows". We need the shield of God and all the warlike but spiritual apparatus that Paul asks for: 'the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God' (Eph. 6:16 foll).

***Lectio:* Read the Second Mass Reading from 1 Thess. 1:5-10.**

***Meditatio:* A little background on the text, so we can best respond to it.**

1 Thessalonians 1:3;13 takes the theme of thanksgiving. The first thanksgiving period is the reception of the Gospel: 1:2 -2:12.

Verse 5: Paul emphasizes that the power of the Gospel lies not in the force of his own rhetoric, but in the power of the Spirit of God. (NJBC 46:15).

Verses 6-8: The faith of the Thessalonian Christian is expressed in their having become imitators of apostles and the Lord ((1 Corinthians 11:1).

Verses 9-10 bring us to the conclusion of this text Here, Paul notes that the conversion of the Thessalonian Christians was a part of the Good News announced in Macedonia and Achaia: the spread of the Gospel is part of the Gospel message. The Good News is spread by the witness of the apostles, and the witness of other Christians (a brief summary from the NJBC 46:16). There is a longer commentary in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary., but it is very analytical and I'm not sure if we need that much information.

So, recapping, - let's just note that the beginning of the text is about thanksgiving for the reception of the Gospel, and that the power of the Gospel is born of the power of the Spirit of God. Finally, the Good News is spread by witness: witness of the apostles, witness of other Christians.

The Gospel Verse is from John 14:23

ALL WHO LOVE ME, WILL KEEP MY WORDS,
AND MY FATHER WILL LOVE THEM AND WILL COME TO THEM.

***Lectio:* The Gospel is Matthew 22:34-40.**

Read this text before looking at the background. Stay with it for some time.

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

The tricksters appear again this week, trying to catch out the Son of God. He is, as would be expected, ready for their questions and aware of their purpose.

The greatest line of this text is: "On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also."

Tricksters are everywhere, especially in the 21st century. It is sad for Catholics, that because of the scandal of child abuse, we are not free to approach a child, or take a hug from someone else's child without the consent of the parent or parents standing

by. This is the safeguard that has been put in place to prevent the scandal happening again.

Jesus is all about love, that in the first and second commandment one can find the whole Law, and the teaching of the Prophets (most of whom were killed because people didn't want to hear the truth of their words).

Some people love a fight, they will argue with you for hours, just to get the better of you. Jesus, in this text, has cut them off at the pass. They are beaten, defeated, blocked - they didn't expect this. Where to now?

Listen for the message you are to hear in this Gospel text, and be still, as you receive the visitation of God into your life through God's Sacred Word. When you feel called to do so, make your response to the text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 3.

EVANGELIZATIO. Evangelizatio is about the evangelization of the “self”. It is that part of Lectio Divina where we make our lived response to the text. First of all, we pray with the text, take time to ponder and understand the text, be still with the text and listen to the response we are being called to make.

1. My response is to the active verbs in the text: molest, oppress, be harsh. These verbs express action contrary to the commandments. They also express an Old Testament view into the future: The Gospel of Jesus and the New Testament. If I take my response on board, I need to understand that ‘thinking’ is an act. We are responsible for what we think. We can think oppression, molestation and harshness. William James (d. 1910) said that a great many people think that they are thinking, when they are merely rearranging their prejudices. Is this me? My prejudices will keep refugees and asylum seekers safe behind bars, and conveniently out of the way. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) has wisdom to share: “No great improvements in the lot of humankind are possible until a great change takes place in the fundamental constitution of their modes of thought.” Oppression, prejudice, violence, harsh behaviour. All of these and more will be acted out, according to our mode of thinking. Are my thoughts violent, harsh, vengeful? Jesus speaks about the blood that was shed in the Old Testament (Luke 11:47-54. This text was the Gospel for Thursday of the 28th Week, Year II). The first Mass text this weekend is a call to remove the heart of stone from our bodies and replace it with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel). The heart of stone is a heart of denial. I do not think in terms of violence, oppression, harshness, so I am fine – I don't even need God. Our last abbess, Mary Barnes used the work of Mary Oliver in some of her Chapter talks, and Mary Oliver's writings spoke to our hearts and challenged us. Mary Oliver had a lot to say about denial, but one thing in particular spoke to us: “Oh, the house of denial has thick walls and very small windows and, whoever lives there, little by little will turn to stone.” Michael Casey has also used these words in his latest book: *Grace on the Journey to God*. The reference is: Mary Oliver, “Hum, Hum,” in *A Thousand Mornings: Poems* New York: Penguin, 2012.
2. I am responding to the notion of “witness”. Am I a witness to the Gospel of Jesus? Not all the time, I must answer. For a number of months now we have been without a confessor because of COVID-19. I am longing for the grace of

the sacrament, the help of God to be a good witness to the Gospel. I still believe in the grace of the sacrament, and in the sacrament itself. Am I old-fashioned? Probably. Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), says something profound about love, and if we take it on board, it is the same as Jesus is teaching: Shelley said: “Familiar acts are beautiful through love.” Love of God, love of neighbour: that morning tea with hot scones; sitting with a loved one, watching the ocean; mowing the lawn; washing the car; tidying the garden; cold drinks for workmen in the summer heat.

3. In the past week, has anyone tried to catch me out? Have I sought wisdom from the God of wisdom? Way back in 65 B.C., Horace said: “Dare to be wise!” Like Solomon, we need to ask God for the gift of wisdom. We receive the gift of wisdom when we make our confirmation, but do we claim it throughout life, or have we put it aside in a cupboard, as something we don’t really need? The gift of Wisdom will enable us to sense trouble, to be wary of tricksters, and to cut them off at the pass.

*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.*

