

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 22 November 2020
Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.
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 and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

24: Sts. Andrew Dung Lac, and companions, Martyrs.

In the Australian Church:

No Anniversaries this week

In the Social Justice Calendar:

24: Passage of National Service Act by Australian Parliament.

25: International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

25: 1981- UN Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief.

28: 1998 – Award of the first Sydney Peace Prize to Muhammad Yunus.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Ezekiel 34:11-12 and 15-17

1 Corinthians 15:20-26 & vs. 28

Matthew 25:31-46.

***Lectio:* Read the first reading from Ezekiel, chapter 34:11-12 and 15-17.**

Read the sacred text slowly and prayerfully, really listening as you read aloud. This is about our on-going conversion.

***Meditatio:* Understanding the text so that we can immerse ourselves in it and make our response to it.**

Ezekiel 34:1-10 presents Israel's bad shepherds. It helps to stop here and read 1-10, so that 11-12 shows the reason for the Lord's promise. 34:11-31 tells us clearly that God will be the good shepherd.

Other Old Testament texts support the Shepherd tradition. Pray with:

Psalms 22, Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10;

It is helpful to highlight the texts here, at least place them together on a page – however we like to do things. (Some notes from the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 20:83).

We then notice an overall similarity – God will be a good shepherd, with a list of ways in which he will carry out his care:

1. God will stand up in the middle of the flock, and keep all of his sheep in view, continually watching their movements.

2. God will rescue them from wherever they are scattered during the mist and darkness.
3. God will pasture his sheep (the greenest of pastures), and 4. take them to rest.
5. Look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded, and make the weak strong.
6. Watch over the fat and healthy and be a true shepherd to them

The last verse is a little different in its atmosphere: “The flock has both good and bad sheep, and they must be separated – a theme taken up in Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46 – today’s gospel).

Take time to ponder on this text from Ezekiel in the days ahead. May we all allow the Holy Spirit to work on the fibres of your heart and bring forth the melody of your response to this text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 22

The response is: THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD,
THERE IS NOTHING I SHALL WANT.

Psalm 22 is the Shepherd Psalm, re-emphasizing God’s promises of the first reading: fresh and green pastures for my rest, restful waters, revival from “my drooping spirit”; shows me the way (“along the right path”); a banquet provided by God.

Lectio: Read the second text from 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 & 28.

Jerome Murphy O’Connor wrote the commentary on this Letter, when the New Jerome Biblical Commentary was re-produced in 1990.

He calls this text “Paul’s Thesis”. So, we need to listen to the argument. His commentary is powerful and seems to capture the power of the text: “Human logic here gives way to the passion of the prophet proclaiming a conviction that transcends reason and experience.”

We note: “What has been done for Christ, can be done for others, and God’s goodness indicates that it will.” Those who belong to Him (Christ) will be brought to life in Christ. Words such as “sovereignty”, “authority”, and “power” refer to the forces of darkness, not the reign of Christ the King. It is the forces of darkness that must be conquered in order for Christ to be king. Everything must be subject to him.

“He must be king until he has placed all his enemies under his feet, and the last of the enemies to be destroyed is death.” And so, we arrive at the great mystery of Easter – having conquered sin (the dark forces), and death, Christ is now the King, the Lord who has risen from the dead.

Read the text again and allow the Holy Spirit to work on your heart. Listen to the Holy Spirit praying within you and prompting you to respond to words or phrases which call you forth and challenge you. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from Mark 11:10

BLESSINGS ON HIM WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!
BLESSINGS ON THE COMING KINGDOM OF OUR FATHER DAVID!

Lectio: Read the Gospel text: Matthew 25:31-46

Meditatio: Some background to the text so that we understand it better and can then make our response.

Of many Patristic commentaries, one written by Hippolytus speaks to me. Hippolytus was a Roman priest who lived from c.170-236. An excerpt from his commentary is uplifting: “As the holy gospel clearly proclaims, the Son of Man will gather together all nations. He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The sheep he will place at his right hand, the goats at his left. Then he will say to those at his right: *Come, my Father’s blessed ones, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Come, you lovers of poor people and strangers. Come, you who fostered my love, for I am love. Come, you who shared peace, for I am peace. Come my Father’s blessed ones, inherit the kingdom prepared for you who did not make an idol of wealth, who gave alms to the poor, help to orphans and widows, drink to the thirsty, and food to the hungry.*”

And then in this Gospel, we hear those words of Jesus: *Inasmuch as you did this to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.* Inasmuch as you received, clothed, fed, and gave a drink to those members of mine about whom I have just spoken to you, that is to the poor, you did it to me.

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

Read the Gospel again take quiet time. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing like a harpist on the fibres of your heart, to bring forth the melody of your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 3*.

EVANGELIZATIO: My lived response to the texts with which the Church gives me each Sunday for my formation as a Christian. 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 to this text is to good and bad shepherds. Who have been good shepherds in my life? Who have been bad shepherds? As we understand from the reading, good shepherds who have accompanied us through life from time to time, have called us back when we have been scattered in mist and darkness and not able to see the way ahead. We were lost. A good shepherd shows us where to rest and when to rest. A good shepherd notices when we are not there and seeks us in our lostness; a good shepherd brings us back when we stray from the path to life; bandages me when I am wounded, and when I am weak, a good shepherd makes me strong. Even the fat and healthy get a mention. Everyone, in every state of mind, and body is catered for in this text from Ezekiel. When we look at it from the other side, we can ask: When have I been a good shepherd to my family, my social group, those with whom I work?
2. I am responding to “the forces of darkness”. They are ugly, dangerous, destruction and deal in death. Christ our Lord conquered sin and death and came out the other side on Easter Sunday. At the Easter Vigil, we renew

our baptismal promises and we renounce satan and all his filthy attempts to bring us down in the dirt. (My computer is telling me that satan needs a capital S, but I'm ignoring it!). Today, in 2020, the darkness still reigns when committed Christians are not vigilant. Attending a research seminar on Nov. 10 at the Sydney College of Divinity, a priest of the Coptic Church was among our student group. In presenting his thesis, he was deeply passionate about the way Christians of East and West, have gone to war with one another for centuries and have succeeded in keeping the broken body of Christ alive. The lack of unity is tragic. Then there are the drug cartels, who make sure that hundreds of thousands of young lives will be lost. What to do? Be vigilant! Pray! Guard one's heart. Read at least one Gospel parable or teaching each day.

3. My family knew this gospel text by heart. Our father who was an active member of the St Vincent de Paul Society, taught us to be like the good shepherd, tending to others' needs. St. Augustine says of this Gospel: "What are we to receive? A kingdom. For doing what? I was hungry and you fed me". What is more ordinary than to feed the hungry, take the homeless into your house, clothe the naked. But what if you can't afford bread for the hungry, or have no house, nor spare clothes? Give a cup of cold water, put two pence in the alms box. 'The poor widow gave as much with her own two pennies, as Zacchaeus did with half his fortune. What you have is the measure of your gift. This Gospel text must be written on our hearts. It is the fire which fuels the active members of the St. Vincent de Paul society, the Salvation Army, the Smith Family and so many other organizations who feed and clothe the poor. The fire must be kept alight!

Lectio divina is a way of life, not a method of prayer.

We read the text from the sacred scriptures.

We take time to understand the text by way of a commentary.

We respond to the text and listen to the prayer of the Holy Spirit within us.

Such a response is taking place from the beginning of our prayer.

The Spirit will place unction on the word/words we are meant to hear.

We ponder as we go...

Like the Mother of God, we treasure all this in our hearts.

