

LECTIO DIVINA: (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 13 December 2020
3rd Sunday of Advent, Year B.

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

Before beginning *Lectio Divina*, let us look at the week ahead in the Liturgy, the Australian Catholic Church, and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

14 December: St John of the Cross

17 December: The 'O' Antiphons at Vespers

In the Australian Church:

There are no anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

December 18: International Migrants' Day

On this day in 1894, the South Australian Parliament was the first to give women the right to vote. This meant that women in South Australia had a say in the Referendums leading up to Federation.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8 and 19-28.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 61:1-2, 10-11.**

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

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

This is the text that every oppressed person of any historical period wants to hear. It belongs to Trito-Isaiah (Third Isaiah), and is part of that beautiful and hope-filled section on the "glorious New Zion" (60:1-62:12).

The text leads us closer and closer to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus the Christ.

Important words are:

Spirit – a word rich in Biblical tradition. We are referred to: Judges 3:10; 1 Samuel 10:5-13.

It was Ezekiel who revived the important role of spirit and is also responsible for a dramatic priestly turn to prophecy. But, the writer of Third Isaiah perceives the spirit as being outside of priesthood and royalty, and as anointing the Prophets. The word

“anointed” designates an “interior enlightenment” one which infuses the prophet with knowledge of God’s word.

To bring glad tidings: We are referred to Isaiah 40:9 and 41:27.

Freedom to prisoners: Prisoners are led out of dark dungeons to full daylight. (literally). The writer is concerned about the total salvation of God’s people, body and spirit, individually, and as a society.

We can read about the jubilee year or the Year of Favour in Leviticus 25:10. In the “extraordinary jubilee” referred to here, all the land reverts back to the Creator, who distributes it equally and bountifully.

In the last few verses of the text before us, there is the image of rich earth, fresh things growing, the garden where seeds spring up. And the message is that the Lord will do this by making both integrity and praise “spring up in the sight of the nations.” These verses refer to the fulfillment of love between God and God’s people. (For some of these notes, I have used the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 21:59 & 60). There is also a book referred to in 21:59, written by R. North. It is a very old book, called the “Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee”, published in 1954. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church refers to the Jubilee Year as a year occurring once every fifty years, when Jewish slaves regained their freedom, and land reverted to its former owners.

Take time to ponder on this text in the days ahead as you go about your work, rest, recreation. 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: Lk 1:46-50. 53-54 (quoting Is 61:10)

The response is: MY SOUL REJOICES IN MY GOD.

What follows this week is a New Testament Canticle – Mary’s Magnificat which is used daily in the Liturgy of the Hours.

Lectio: Read the second text from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24.

Meditatio: Explaining the text and reflecting as we hear the explanation (as did the monks of the early centuries).

We are reading this explanation either on the computer, or in the leaflet we receive weekly. Be aware, that we can easily read too quickly, or be distracted.

This text contains “general exhortations on the Christian way of life. We are reminded that joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22; Romans 14:17). We are reminded that prayer proceeds from the Spirit. (Romans 8:15-16).

We are reminded that thanksgiving and prayer are closely associated.

Finally, there are exhortations on charisms and discernment.

We may remember that discernment of spirits is itself a charismatic activity (1 Cor. 12:10).

The final sentence is comforting: God has called you and will not fail you.

Read the text again and allow the Holy Spirit to work on your heart. What words, what phrases, what sentences are to change your life? I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Isaiah 61:1, repeated in Luke 4:18.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME;
HE SENT ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from John 1:6-8 and 19-28.**

Read it slowly and reflectively, and maybe a second time. Try to read aloud rather than with the mind. Listen to the text as you read.

***Meditatio:* What is it about?**

The first verses of this text (6-8) are part of the Prologue to John's Gospel: The Word coming into the world. The entire prologue is 1:1-18. Verses 6-8, which form the beginning of our text are the first "of a series of passages on the role of John the Baptist." (New Jerome Bib. Commentary, 61:23). Priests and Levites are the ones questioning in this scene. The next section of the text is 1:19-28. It is a proclamation from John that he is definitely not the Messiah.

Messiah: this title, for a future anointed agent of God, first appears in Daniel 9:25.

Elijah: The expectation of Elijah's return was based on Malachi 3:1, & 23.

Verses 24-25 present the Pharisees who question John's authority to baptize, if he is not a Messiah.

Verses 26-27: Matthew Mark and Luke distinguish Jesus and John the Baptist by contrasting water baptism and purification by the Spirit and finishing with a saying about John's unworthiness in comparison to Jesus. But John's Gospel is different. When questioned by the Pharisees, John the Baptist's answer points to Jesus as the one who is unknown to the Pharisees. Great depth in this sentence! One could make the association with the Gospel stories which speak of the spiritual blindness and the closed hearts of the Pharisees.

Read this Gospel text a number of times, and as you read, 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 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. The Word of God is life-changing for me, when I respond to it in a practical way.

1. I am responding to the words: "All the land reverts back to the Creator who distributes it equally and bountifully." This is how the Year of Favour is described by the Biblical Scholar Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. (His commentary on this text is the one I have used from the New Jerome Bib. Commentary). He has drawn on Biblical tradition and Jewish Law. But what of our world today? We surely need a Year of Favour. Why the differences between rich and poor, those who have too much land, and those who have not enough land to grow food? The families on the land? They struggle. What if the Creator of the world took it all back and began to distribute it equally and bountifully? Our First Nations people would be high on the deserving list of those whose land was taken and, in many cases, destroyed by an absence of reverence and respect on the part of the destroyers. Pope Francis says the

word creation has... “to do with God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance...creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion.” (Laudato Si, III:76)

2. I am responding to the word “thanksgiving”. Recently, our Abbess asked us to keep a “gratitude diary”, making a daily entry in a notebook – naming the person to whom we were grateful that day, and giving the reason why. I had never kept a gratitude diary before, and a whole new world opened up for me. I see gratitude and kindness as inseparable. Sr. Stan of Dublin quotes Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: “Kindness is the golden chain by which society is bound together.” Kindness begets gratitude.
3. My response is to the Johannine interpretation which points to the fact that Jesus the Messiah is unknown to the Pharisees. Many people claim to be Christian and yet Jesus is unknown to them. They claim that because they are baptized a Christian, all is fulfilled. But it doesn’t work like that, does it? If Jesus is known to us, then our lives are a proclamation of the Gospel. My former spiritual director, a Sister of Charity, was insistent that Jesus be called Jesus. The name “Christ” is the one we most use, and yet it means “anointed one” – Jesus “the anointed one”. The name Jesus is more personal and tends to invite us to a life of proclamation – proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus.

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.

