

LECTIO DIVINA: (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 6 December 2020
Second Sunday of Advent, Year B

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:

Dec. 08: The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Solemnity)

Dec. 13: St. Lucy (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:

Dec. 12: Armidale -Dedication of the Cathedral, (1919).

Hobart - Anniversary of the death of Archbishop Eric D'Arcy (2005).

In the Social Justice Calendar:

Dec. 10: Human Rights Day. On this day in 1948, the UN adopted the Declaration of Human Rights.

Dec. 11: International Mountains Day

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 40:1-5 and 9-11

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

***Lectio:* Read the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah, Ch. 40, v's 1-5 & 9-11.**

Read it in a reverent way. The Word of God is sacred. Let us give ourselves to the sacred text and open our hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit calling us forth to respond. Be aware of the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart as you read. This is the true "oratio" (prayer) of *Lectio Divina*.

***Meditatio:* A little background to the text, so that we understand it and can make an informed response to it.**

This text is from Second Isaiah, the book of comfort. Consolation is the theme of the first few verses. A vivid expression of consolation is portrayed in the last four verses: nourishment, "gathering lambs in his arms", "holding them against his breast", and leading the mothers to "their rest".

A word on "heart" - the "heart of Jerusalem": The heart was considered to be the organ of reasoning (in Jewish anthropology). The message is that God is trying to convince Israel of his concern, as God did in Hosea 2:16

A few words on **wilderness**: A theological approach to wilderness is one that understands wilderness as a place of testing, trial, purification. The early fathers and mothers of the Desert tradition lived in a “wilderness” situation in order to learn wisdom and to conquer (with prayer and fasting), the darkness of the human spirit, and thus make a way for God. And God gave to the world his only begotten Son who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. From another aspect: Jesus is the Way through the wilderness of our lives.

With this background, read the text again, and take a long time to ponder on the overall message. Build into each day some quiet time. Be still before the Lord. After pondering over many hours (days), you will want to make your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 84

The Response is: LORD, LET US SEE YOUR KINDNESS,
AND GRANT US YOUR SALVATION.

Psalm 84 is about the coming age of peace and justice – the age of the Messiah, Jesus the Christ.

Lectio: Read the Second Reading, from 2 Peter 3:8-14.

PAUSE. Read it again. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist, in order to bring forth the most authentic melody of your response...

Meditatio: Understanding the text so we can make an informed response to it.

This letter of Peter was written about the turn of the century and is a letter confirming the traditional doctrine for all churches everywhere, for all times.

The letter addresses the problem of theodicy. We might well ask: What is theodicy? The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church notes that the word was coined by G.W. Leibniz in 1720, and “since then it has been applied to that part of natural theology which is concerned to defend the goodness and omnipotence of God against objections arising from the existence of evil in the world.” There were attacks on theodicy from Epicureans and Jewish heretics, who argued that there was no providence or judgment in God, and no afterlife, and no post-mortem rewards and punishments. Jerome Neyrey, S.J. notes these issues in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary. The Second Letter of Peter is a debate over God’s providence and just judgment. The text we are given is number three of three “apologys”. In this sense Peter can be referred to as an apologist, since the task of an apologist of early Christianity (120 – 220 A.D.) was to make “a reasoned defence and recommendation of the faith to outsiders.” (Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church). There is a detailed study of this text in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary. I have selected what is appropriate for Lectio Divina.

A note on Epicureans. These were followers of Epicurus and his teaching. He lived from 342-270 B.C. He developed a system of philosophical ethics which held that the senses, as the one and only source of all our ideas, provided the sole criterion of all truth. (Cf. Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church).

Take time over the text before making your response to it in the days ahead.

I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is taken from Luke 3:4 and 6.

**PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE STRAIGHT HIS PATHS:
ALL PEOPLE SHALL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.**

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from Mark 1:1-8.**

Pause and ponder. Read the text again.

Meditatio:

The background to this text is that it is part of the prologue of Mark's Gospel. The full prologue is 1:1-15. This prologue "relates the promise of the Old Testament Prophets (1:1-3) to John the Baptist as the one who prepares the way (1:4-8) for the Lord."

The term "prepare the way" (Isaiah 40:1-5), became for the Jews of the Old Testament a classic expression of God's comfort and salvation.

John's clothing? It is reminiscent of the clothing of Elijah in 2 Kings 1:8. If John would have been dressed like a Roman Emperor, no one would have heard the message, except maybe Herod's family – out of fear.

John declares his unworthiness even to perform the service usually done by a slave owned by a wealthy Jew or a Roman family. He is not worthy even to undo the sandal Jesus is wearing. (cf. New Jerome Biblical Commentary 41:2).

John's baptism is a baptism of repentance, with water and confession of sin.

Jesus will come with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Stand back from the Gospel and ponder. Hear the words: **BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD.** Allow the Holy Spirit to play on the fibres of your heart like a harpist in order to bring forth the most beautiful melody of your response to God. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 3.

***Evangelizatio* is my LIVED RESPONSE to the sacred scriptures given to me each week by the Church for my formation as a Christian. If I don't respond, they are merely texts on a page. When I do respond, they are my life.**

1. I am responding to the image of "wilderness". Our Chaplain Fr. Paul Gurr, often sings a hymn called "Holy Darkness" during our liturgies. It is written by Dan Schutte and is based on the wisdom of St. John of the Cross, whose feast day we celebrate this week. Some of the words of that song speak to the text from Isaiah, the text given us for the Second Sunday of Advent, from the Book of Consolation. The Lord is speaking to me through this song, about the "wilderness" which is part of every life. *I have tried you in the fires of affliction; I have taught your soul to grieve. In the barren soil of your loneliness, there I will plant my seed. In your deepest hour of darkness I will give you wealth untold. When the silence stills your spirit, will my riches fill your soul.* As I look back over my life, I can now see that God was there with me in the wilderness.

2. My response is to the Day of the Lord, coming to us like a thief in the night (that is, quietly – in the darkness. Yes, especially in our darkness). And in the light of this we should be living holy and saintly lives...lives without spot or stain so that God will find us at peace. I have asked myself: “What does it mean to be holy?” And I turn to the words of Cardinal Frances Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận: “...holiness is not the passive presence of God in a person, but rather it is God’s life and action in that person. Holiness is a human life filled with God. Lord, I have only one lifetime to become holy. I know this requires openness and effort, because it is the highest of values. Holiness allows a person to show forth like a vase of pure crystal, not merely a portrait of God, but God’s true image. (Prayers of Hope, Words of Courage, page 109).

3. In responding to this text, I am drawn to the most powerful prophet of our times, Pope Francis. In an article written by Christopher Lamb, in The Tablet, quotes the Pope as “on the front foot”, implementing the Second Vatican Council, and rooting the Church more firmly in the gospels and in ancient Christianity - going back to its sources. And like all prophets throughout the Old and New Testaments, the Pope has opposition. His opposition accuses him of allowing heresy to be propagated inside the Church. His opposition is bitter. So was the opposition to Jeremiah, and the other prophets who spoke on behalf of God. And the opposition to Jesus led to his passion and death. Many who listened to Jesus did not want to hear truth or be challenged to leave the comfort of their lives. And some people still don’t want to be challenged beyond what they are used to, or what is comfortable, and most of all, what is secure. Where am I in all this?

*Lectio Divina is Holy Reading,
 that is,
 reading of the Sacred Scriptures
 It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
 It is about reading (and listening),
 reflecting,
 praying in tune with the Holy Spirit within me,
 resting in God,
 and responding in the way I live.*

