

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 31 January 2021
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Four

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:

- 02: The Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. If you are able to attend Mass on this day (depending on Covid restrictions), Mass begins from outside the church, with the Candlemas procession.
- 05: St. Agatha
- 06: St. Paul Miki and Companions.

In the Australian Catholic Church

- 04: Canberra-Goulburn – Anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral, 1973.

In the Social Justice Calendar: February

- 02: World Wetlands Day.
- 04: 1939- Walk-off by Aboriginal people from Cumeragunja Mission (NSW) in protest at living conditions and restrictions.
- 06: International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

- Deuteronomy 18:15-20
1 Corinthians 7:32-35
Mark 1:21-28

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Book of Deuteronomy 18:15-20**

Read it slowly and pause for a while. Then read it a second time. In your prayer journal, note what has spoken to you in this text – a word, a phrase, a sentence.

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

We need to understand Old Testament “prophecy” and the vocation of an Old Testament Prophet. The New Jerome Biblical Commentary notes that “Prophecy is Israel’s form of mediation.” The term “Prophet” is used distributively i.e., prophets will be raised up as the occasion requires. The true prophet is called by the Lord, is a native Israelite, and is a continuator of the prophetic office of Moses. (cf. Exod 33:11; Num. 12:1-8; Hosea 12:13)...prophecy originated in the request for mediation at Horeb, (Deut. 5:22-28).

“My Words” may also be interpreted as commandments – there is, in prophecy, a close connection between prophecy and law. A text which substantiates this is 2 Kings 17:13-15.

The last verse of the text addresses the usurper. The death penalty is the reward for the prophet who is not commissioned by the Lord, and therefore should not (cannot) speak on the Lord’s behalf. (6:37 NJBC). In the Hebrew Scriptures the word for prophet translates as God’s mouthpiece.

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

The response is: IF TODAY YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
HARDEN NOT YOUR HEART.

Psalm 94 is a call to praise and worship: a processional hymn. Verse three deals with Meribah and Massah. “It was at Rephidim in Sinai and in the place called Massah and Meribah (Trial and Dispute – Exodus 17:1-7) that Israel tested the patience of God.”

In our time, Moses is not our leader. Jesus is our leader, and the rest he would take us to is not Palestine but a land which the meek inherit, a rest which is the eternal sabbath of God. (Hebrews 4:10) These few notes are from the Grail Psalter, 169.

Lectio: Read the second text from Corinthians 7:32-35.

Meditatio: This part of *Lectio Divina*, is about explaining the text and reflecting as we hear the explanation (like the monks of the early centuries). Be aware, that we can easily read too quickly, or be distracted.

About *LECTIO DIVINA*, Blessed Columba Marmion says: “We read under the eye of God until the heart is touched and leaps into flame.”

This text is not what it seems. No need to take it literally. Maybe we have already closed the book! A commentary can clear up our difficulties with a text like this.

Anxious concern is a characteristic of unredeemed existence. (NJBC 49:40).

The unmarried man is a problem. “Even though his work is connected to the things of the Lord, his care is not a good thing. It suggests a fawning servility rooted in a lack of confidence in God’s love. One scholar rightly sees it as a criticism of the asceticism in vogue at Corinth.

Then, there is the married man. Paul “does not have in mind the love of husband and wife (Gal 5:13-14) but the complete absorption in one another of the newly married.”

Both are members of a community of love. Both must put the Lord first and the rest second. In verse 35, “Paul gives clear advice but does not impose solutions. His attitude stands in vivid contrast to the doctrinaire positions adopted by some at Corinth.” (39:40). Perhaps it could be summed up as “teething problems” in the Church of Corinth. Those of us who are alive in the 21st century have no idea what it was like in the first few decades after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, as new

churches were founded by Paul and other Apostles. And yet, in one sense, the problems remain in many parish communities.

In this text, what phrases, what sentences, what words are to change your life? I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Matthew 4:16.

A PEOPLE IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT:
A RADIANT DAWN SHINES ON THOSE LOST IN DEATH.

***Lectio*: Read the Gospel text from Mark 1:21-28.**

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: The Glenstal Bible Missal notes that in this Gospel text, “the time of the new Moses has come.” This takes us back to the first text from Deuteronomy, and the Responsorial Psalm. Christ has come, and this text is akin to an inaugural address. What is so special about Capernaum? Surely, that it is the place where Jesus celebrated the Sabbath by going into the Synagogue; the place of his inaugural teaching which “made a deep impression on them because unlike the Scribes, “he taught them with authority.” Then he drives out an unclean spirit from a tormented soul (more than one). What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? “

The teaching of Jesus is new.

He teaches with authority.

His reputation spreads through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.

The people would have endured decades of teaching from the Scribes and Pharisees, who mostly laid religious burdens upon their shoulders - more laws with very little to do with love. Jesus is the refreshing change they needed.

As we read, let us listen for the Holy Spirit playing like a harpist on the fibres of our heart, bringing forth the melody of our response. I share mine 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. In our present age, we may encounter difficulties when we’re told half-truths, or tall stories about important matters. I feel so hyped up and so disillusioned by the media and its destruction of persons, that it is hard for me to remain firm in my convictions. One of these is respect. Is there any respect of persons? Not much, I’d say. Our Premier had a bucket of dirty water thrown over her by the media. The president of the United States let thousands die from COVID-19 because they were not on his radar. Sr. Joan Chittister speaks out on behalf of persons, and she values reverence and respect. I believe she’s a prophet for our times, one who speaks on behalf of God: “Our goal in life is

to convert ourselves from the pernicious agenda that is the self, to an awareness of God's goodness present in the other." The beauty of the open soul is not easy to come by in a world where the other – the alien, the foreigner, the stranger – threatens my sense of security and the pyramids of social control." (Illuminated Life, page 127). This coming week, we could sit with the notion that a prophet is God's mouthpiece, and name those who spoken to us throughout our lives, spoken wisdom which has formed us. May we thank God for them.

2. This is a difficult text for me, because it takes me back to my home and family of the 1950s and 60s when my father was an active member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. At least three or four nights every week, he would be out working for the poor. There were six of us. His ministry to the poor was not balanced with his commitments to family. And then, there are other situations. Once I worked in a parish, helping with music and liturgy. Between this and Charismatic Renewal, I was out five nights a week, and missed the evening meal with my community. This can't have been life-giving. I also fasted every Friday and missed lunch with my community. Was I like the unmarried man in today's reading? Since then I've learnt that on judgment day, God will not ask me how often I fasted, but whether or not I loved my sisters, my family, those in my prayer group – in the evening of life, we will be judged on love. (St. John of the Cross).
3. My first response is to the fact that Jesus taught them with authority, without the added burdens of a religious institution. Pope Francis wants a Church that welcomes all – a house that welcomes all. In August 2020, Christopher Lamb, writing in the Tablet, says that Francis shows no signs of slowing down. At the end of July 2020, the Pope said that his forthcoming Wednesday general audiences would be devoted to Catholic Social Teaching, so that the Church can help "prepare the future" in the light of COVID-19. Some voices in the Church want him stopped and silenced. He needs our prayer.

Lectio divina if 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.

