

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 24 January 2021

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Three

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:

- 25: The Conversion of St. Paul (Feast)
- 26: Australia Day. (Feast)
- 28: St. Thomas Aquinas. (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:

No anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

- 25: Announcement by St. John XXIII of his intention to convoke the Second Vatican Council (1959)
- 26: Australia Day/Survival Day
Establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra (1972)
- 27: International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust.
World Leprosy Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Jonah 3:1-5, 10
1 Cor. 7:29-31
Mark 1:14-20

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Prophet Jonah, 3:1-5, 10.**

Be aware of the way you handle your bible. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep awareness. This text is given to all of us on this particular day in the Church's Liturgical Year, for our formation as Christians. Think of the Sacred Scriptures as a school from which we never graduate. We are learners until the close of our lives on earth.

***Meditatio:* Some notes on the background of this text will help us to both understand it and make a response to it.**

The New Jerome Biblical commentary notes that the literary form of the book "belongs to a period that had already become the stuff of legend. 2 Kings, 14:25 reports briefly on the activity of a certain 'Jonah ben Amittai', during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (786-746)." (39:2).

However, the author of this book presents not history, but the mercy and justice of God. This small account is Jonah's second mission. It is about the conversion of Nineveh. It is a success story. The people did not break their covenant with the Lord, as Israel had done, or witness the destruction of Jerusalem, and endure an exile in Babylon. No. The people of Nineveh, a city which took three days to cross, put on sackcloth, and proclaimed a fast. "God saw their efforts to renounce their evil behavior. And God relented: he did not inflict on them the disaster which he had threatened."

Read the text again a couple of times. Stay with it. Ponder on it for a day or more. However, if you are aware of the Holy Spirit calling forth your response to the text, note it down. When the Holy Spirit prays within you or pours unction on a text and calls you forth, this is the true "prayer" (*oratio*) of *Lectio Divina*. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 24

The response is: TEACH ME YOUR WAYS O LORD.

Psalm 24 is a prayer for protection and forgiveness. "Remember your mercy Lord, and the love you have shown from of old. In your love remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord."

It is good to read the whole Psalm and see that it simply states the case, admits the guilt and asks for mercy. Can anyone before God do more? (From the Abbey Psalters)

Lectio: Read the second text, from 1 Corinthians 7:29-31.

Meditatio: Brief explanation of the text, so we can understand it and respond.

To understand this text, we need to leave aside our literal analysis. What does it mean? Quite simply it means that Paul expected an immanent Parousia (1 Thess 4:16-17; 1 Cor. 15). Because of this, he recommended detachment. It would be silly to make new commitments when all is going to end." (NJBC 49:40).

Take time to ponder on this reading. This is done as we go on with each day's work, or rest, - it may be that we are working from home, and this is the ideal situation. *Lectio Divina* is a way of life. Once it becomes so, then we can ponder anywhere. Write your response to the text. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from Mark 1:15

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR.

BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Mark 1:14-20.

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. Stand back from it and ponder.

Meditatio: Some background to help us understand the text and respond to it. This is an extraordinary Gospel – the way the apostles just abandon everything and follow Jesus!

Some background is necessary. “Jesus had been at the Jordan River with John the Baptist and in the Judean wilderness. Now he returns to the place of his ministry – Galilee, which is generally more favourable to Jesus than Judea will be (though Jesus is rejected by the people of Nazareth (6:1-6), and John is killed by order of Herod Antipas of Galilee (6:14-20). Preaching the Good News of God used the terminology of Second Isaiah, (the Book of Comfort). Read Isaiah 40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 60:6 and 61:1-2. The Good News came from God and had God’s action as its content.

God’s kingdom will demand a reorientation of life, as John had already made clear. As for the speedy response of the fishermen to Jesus, it was customary for Jewish students to approach a distinguished teacher and to attach themselves to him. (cf. John 1:35-42). These background notes have been summarized from the New Jer. Bib. Commentary

Read this Gospel text again. Make your response in the days ahead. 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.

1. My response: When Mother Benedicta was alive and was abbess of our community, she gave more than once a homily about the grain of sand in the oyster, the grain which was an irritant, and at the same time, a creator of the pearl. Are we aware that it is the irritant (s) within the oyster that makes the pearl? So, I have to be patient. It is hard just to convert and put on sack cloth and fast to overcome bad feelings towards another. But can I remember that the “other” is the irritant who is making me into a pearl? It helps if we can do this. But I wish I could say that it’s easy. It’s not! The irritant is mostly very irritating!
2. My response to this text from 1 Corinthians, is to be aware that God will call for me one day or night. For me, the Parousia isn’t imminent. But as a Benedictine, I take seriously that verse from our Rule: Keep death daily before your eyes. To do this is a way of life. It keeps me on course. I tend to accumulate stuff. There are friends I should contact. There are those I need to forgive. I want to think positively about everyone in my community. I want to keep my gardens looking beautiful. Beauty is an important value for me. Love of animals is important to me. Having a cuppa with Sr. Elizabeth is important. She is now 94. Joy, admiration, positive speech, appreciation – This is where I want to be.
3. I hear this Gospel text as applying to any commitment made through Christ: marriage; the single life and its vocation; foster parents; ministry to the homeless in the name of Christ; ministry to youth; pastoral care in hospitals or hospices etc. Then there is a commitment to Christ in monastic life. Many religious congregations seem to have made the decision to close and are waiting for God to take them home one by one. The priesthood still struggles but there is news of

fresh commitment. Teachers and nurses, paramedics and doctors – these are the holy people of the present time. While not shouting aloud about their commitment to healing, they could well do with our prayer support. Sr. Stan of Dublin quotes Mahatma Gandhi as saying: “Prayer is the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening.” (Day by Day, A treasury of meditations on mindfulness to comfort and inspire.). Can we try to open each day with the key of prayer and place medical staff first on our list? Can we end each day with the bolt of the evening, having held up to the Lord all who are affected in any way by COVID-19? Let us pray: “O God, the Strength of the weak, the Comfort of the sorrowful, the Friend of the lonely: let not sorrow overwhelm thy people, nor anguish of heart turn them away from you. Grant that in the patience of hope and the fellowship of Christ they may continue in thy service and in all godly living, until at length they also attain into fullness of life before thy face, through Jesus Christ our Lord. (From a Methodist Book of Offices). And on behalf of the sick and dying: “My back is broken...O Beloved One, come and stroke my head in mercy. The palm of thy hand on my head gives me rest. Thy hand is a sign of thy bounteous providence, Remove not thy shadow from my head. I am afflicted, afflicted, afflicted. (Rumi). Both prayers can be found in “The One World Book of Prayer” compiled by Juliet Mabey. (Oneworld Publications, Oxford England).

*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.*



Call of the Disciples by He Qi