

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 21 February 2020
First Sunday of Lent, Year B
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week One

Before beginning prayer with the Sacred Texts, let us take a look at the week ahead in the Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

22: The Chair of St. Peter the Apostle.

In the Australian Church:

22: Lismore – Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Gregory Homeming, 2017

Wollongong - Episcopal Ordination of Bishop Brian Mascord, 2018

26: Adelaide – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Patrick O'Regan, 2015

In the Social Justice Calendar:

21: International Mother Language Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Genesis 9:8-15

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:12-15

***Lectio:* Read the First text from the Book of Genesis, chapter 9, verses 8-15.**

***Meditatio:* Some background to understand the text and make a response.**

Revising briefly, we know that the creation of the world is told in Gen. 1 and 2; the sin of the world is told in Genesis 3 and 4; Noah and the flood is told in Genesis 5-9; the beginning of nations and languages (Genesis 10 and 11).

Then patriarchal history begins at Genesis 12 and goes on to the end of the book. Patriarchal history begins with Abraham and his family.

So, back to Noah. The story of the flood, if analysed with human reason is impossible. The way to look at this story is to be aware that "it belongs to a general tradition of deluges of which accounts survive in many countries e.g., Greece, Australia, Polynesia, Tibet, India and America, and is closely parallel to the Babylonian flood narrative as told in the epic of Gilgamesh." (A new commentary on Holy Scripture, ed. Charles Gore). In fact, legends such as these were transmitted orally and thus became a tool to describe the sins of humanity, and the way God dealt with them. In this case, God makes a Covenant with Noah, and the rainbow will be the sign of God's promise. Later, God will make a covenant with Abraham.

Read the text again and maybe a third time. Read it slowly, marking some of the words, phrases, sentences which may cause you to stop and recognise that the Holy Spirit is calling you to this word, this phrase, this sentence, or the whole text. Ponder for a

while. Maybe a day or more! Perhaps you would like to follow up some of the other flood stories mentioned above. Mr. and Mrs. Google are always happy to oblige! I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 24

The response is: YOUR WAYS O LORD, ARE LOVE AND TRUTH
TO THOSE THE WHO KEEP YOUR COVENANT.

Psalm 24 is a prayer of protection and forgiveness. In Hebrew, it is an alphabetical psalm. “God is the teacher, the loving guide. He goes in front of us and we watch him, and at times he turns round to see if we are following.” (Grail Psalter, commentary on Psalm 24).

***Lectio:* Read 1 Peter 3:18-22, the second text for the first Sunday of Lent.**

***Meditatio:* Some background to help us understand the text and respond to it.**

Without much prompting, we can see the connection between this text and the Easter celebrations.

- The death and resurrection of Jesus.
- Noah and Noah’s ark, at home on the water, “a type of baptism which saves you now, and which is not the washing off of physical dirt, but a pledge made in God from a good conscience...”
- The Ascension of Jesus (at the end of Eastertide)

The Gospel Verse is from Matthew 4:4.

NO ONE LIVES ON BREAD ALONE,
BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel - Mark 1:12-15.**

***Meditatio:* Some background to the text to help us respond with understanding.**

The first important two words are “forty days”. Forty, when used in the Scriptures, represents a time of testing. The chosen people wandered for forty years in the wilderness. Forty days after the birth of Jesus, his parents took him to the temple as was the custom for Jewish children. There is a very beautiful account, in the Greek Orthodox liturgy, of Mary being presented by her parents Joachim and Anne. She skipped up the stairs as a child of that age would have done.

The temptations of Jesus are the three classic temptations, not mentioned by Mark.

The temptation took place in the desert region of the lower Jordan Valley. The second took place on a high mountain (possibly one of the abrupt cliffs near Jericho that present an unsurpassed panorama), and the third took place on the pinnacle of the temple, from which the priests sounded the trumpet to call the city’s attention to important events. No technology!

Mark sums up things in a few words: “He was with the wild beasts and the angels looked after him.”

Having been thoroughly tested, Jesus doesn't waste time, but "went into Galilee...[and] proclaimed the Good News."

It is Good News for every Christian: 'The time has come, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News.'

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. "I will lead her out into the wilderness and speak to her heart." These words, from the Prophet Hosea, are the words that have welled up within me, as I read the story of the covenant with Noah. The wilderness is where it all happens, the place where God speaks to one's heart. "It does not consist in doing anything, nor in trying to become somebody. It is a sharing in the solitude of God." (The Wound of Love, A Carthusian Miscellany). Wilderness is the English word for eremitical, hermit, - the place where God tests me, speaks to my heart and calls me to follow closely. The wilderness is not the place to feed my ego, or to become more closed in on myself. This would be easier. No – the wilderness is where I will be reduced to truth and only truth. Am I brave enough to take time in the wilderness? Is the Spirit driving me to the wilderness? Will I be able to resist the temptation to satisfy my bodily hunger by seeking security in magic rather than in God; to jump off the pinnacle of the temple in order to make a name for myself; to fall down and worship Satan in order to receive in exchange absolute power over the nations of the world. These are the three temptations explained by Fr. Thomas Keating: security, esteem and power. (The Mystery of Christ).
2. I am responding to the words: "...which is not the washing off of physical dirt, but a pledge made to God from a good conscience..." Each of us will have an understanding of just what is a good conscience. I understand it as living in truth, as explained by Jesus in Luke 6:27-38. This contains some of the hardest teaching of Jesus: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. To those who strike you on the right cheek, offer the other also; and from those who take away your possessions, don't ask for them again. And as you wish that others would do to you, do the same to them. Judge not. Condemn not. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given unto you." Living like this or even striving to live like this is the quest of a lifetime. Lent is a good chance to keep in practice.
3. Which of the temptations confronts me the most? I would answer truthfully: the need for security. In the present pandemic, there isn't much security. Will a vaccine soon be released? Will it stop the virus? What's in the vaccine? What are the effects of the vaccine? I believe that once I confront my insecurity, I will be in a place to trust in God. The words "trust in God", can be just that, three words which we say so easily. When I mean them, I am being faithful to the Covenant which God made with me at my Baptism.

*Lectio Divina is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
We read the word of God (Lectio),
we seek to understand the Word of God, with the help of a commentary.
we are still at times in God's presence and open our hearts to the way God comes.
We are aware of the Holy Spirit praying within us.
And we respond to the Word,
as it seeks to turn us towards the Light of God's Presence.
Like the Mother of God, we go on pondering over and over.*



*“I will lure you into a desert place,
There I’ll speak unto your heart...
There you’ll learn the treasures of abandonment,
There you’ll know I am your God”*

~ From “Desert Place” by Trish Watts