

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 21 March 2021
Fifth 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:

24: St Oscar Romero

25: The Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord.

In the Australian Church:

24: Toowoomba – Anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral (1935).

In the Social Justice Calendar:

21: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, International Day of Forests, World Down Syndrome Day, World Poetry Day, Week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against racism and racial discrimination, National Harmony Day

22: World Water Day

23: World Meteorological Day.

24: St. Oscar Romero. International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims.

25: Death of Caroline Chisholm - 1877.

26 Biological Weapons Convention – 1975.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 12:20-33

Lectio: Read the First Reading from the Prophet Jeremiah Ch. 31, v's 31-34. 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 situated in the third stage of Jeremiah's ministry...during the reign of Zedekiah, (597-586), the last king of Judah. The Babylonians installed Zedekiah as

their vassal after taking Jehoiachim to Babylon. His advisors however, urged him to turn against Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 34:1-7). The long-term result was the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

If we go back to Deut. 4:25-31, we will see a twofold framework of Jeremiah's message: Moses warned that covenant curses will be brought against Israel when future generations provoke the Lord to anger. They will be without peace in their land and driven into exile. (Deut. 4:25-31).

At his own peril, Jeremiah pointed out the sins of the people, especially their idolatry (Jer. 16:10-13, 20; 22:9; 32:29; 44:2-3). In the text we are given, Jeremiah announced the renewal of the covenant, (31:31-34), and the restoration of the throne of David. (Notes summarized from the Who's Who in the Bible, edited by Paul Gardner). The covenant which Jeremiah is announcing is different from all the others. This is about the heart: "Deep within them I will plant my law, writing it on their hearts. Then I will be their God and they shall be my people." And then those powerful words of the Lord: "I will forgive their iniquity and never call their sin to mind."

Make your response to this text in the days ahead. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 50

The response is: CREATE A CLEAN HEART IN ME O GOD.

Psalm 50 is a prayer of contrition, an ideal Lenten Psalm.

Lectio: Read the Second text from the Letter to the Hebrews, Ch. 5, verses 7-9.

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.

5:1-10:25 is about the priesthood of Jesus Christ and the Levitical High Priest. The text is clear: during his life on earth, Christ shared in the experience of humanity: the universal experience of suffering, grief and death. In verse 7, prayer is an offering from the soul to God. "Aloud and in silent tears" may be a reference to the agony of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane." (Jer. Bib. Comm.) Verse 8 places Jesus as a true Son, who was obedient from the very beginning in heart and will. The learning of obedience, in the case of Christ was by trial and testing. Were the last hours of Christ's life a climax of the testing of his obedience, with the expiring cry, "It is finished".

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 from John 12:26.

**IF YOU SERVE ME, FOLLOW ME, SAYS THE LORD;
AND WHERE I AM, MY SERVANT WILL ALSO BE.**

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from John 12:20-30.

Meditatio: A little background to the text, so that we may gain an understanding, and make an informed response.

This text from the Johannine author is richly gifted with images of the passion and death of Christ: the dying and rising of the grain of wheat; what it means to be a disciple of Jesus; the reference to the “hour” of Jesus. “Hour” is a common theme in John’s Gospel. At Cana in Galilee the wedding guests ran out of wine. The mother of Jesus, asks him to do something about the situation, and he says, “Woman, my hour has not yet come.” At least that’s the translation we are used to.

In the Gospel with which we are praying, Jesus says: “Father, save me from this hour?” And in the next breath: “But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” The Father responds with the assurance that his Name has already been glorified – and it doesn’t take much on our part to realize that every time Jesus has prayed, preached, healed and raised the dead to life – this has been the glorifying of the Father’s Name.

The other image which is present to us is the “lifting up” of Jesus, not on the cross, but “from the earth”. Yes, it does mean on the cross, but the words “from the earth” can also be interpreted as the ascension of Jesus to the Father. Those of us who have had the privilege to study the Gospel of John at different stages in our lives will have come across commentaries which say that the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus occurred on Calvary. Others also add the coming of the Holy Spirit as occurring. (“He bowed his head and gave up the spirit”).

Some of these interpretations have been expressed in religious art. In the monastic church at Jamberoo, our figure on the cross embodies the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, as being one movement, one mystery. In this sense, it is a Johannine cross.

We can take comfort in the words of Jesus: “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all humanity to myself.”

Take time every day for *Lectio Divina*: a line or word, or more. 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.**

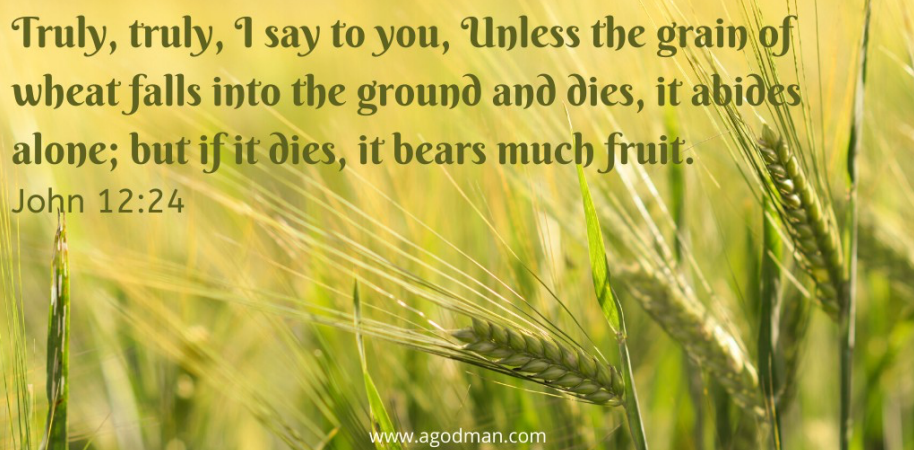
1. I am responding to this personally. I know about the covenant the Lord made with me at my baptism, but this is taking it much further. As I go through life, I do so with God. Whether I am young middle-aged or old, I do so with God. Married couples say, on their wedding day: in sickness or in health, ‘til death do us part. These are the words of the older marriage formula. We have no need to ask God: will you love me when I’m old, when I make stupid mistakes, when I’m ill? God’s love for us will never be taken away. “My love for you will never leave you, and my covenant with you will never be broken.” (Ps. 88). There are secular covenants too, agreements between local councils and landowners. We entered into a covenant when we moved to our

present property: no cats because of the bird life, no goats because they eat out the rainforest, and no dogs to be taken through the rainforest walking track, because of the small animals and their habitats. It is about escarpment and rain forest protection. These conditions were written on paper. God's love for us and his relationship with us is written on our hearts.

2. How aware am I that Jesus, during his life on earth shared everything that I have experienced as a human being? If I could get hold of this truth, I would be much more peaceful and faith-filled. The scriptures are full of covenants. The people stray from God, and a new covenant is necessary. It reminds me of marriage covenants, agreements to reverence the land, a commitment to a monastic community (as in my case). The falling by the wayside is a fairly regular occurrence. God sends friends to listen to our woes, to help us up again, and point us in the direction of God. To fall and fail is not the end of things. God forgives, and forgives and forgives, and as God has said, he will never call our sins to mind.
3. Sometimes, images of Jesus travel with us all our lives, and there is no need to move on or change the image. It grows with us. For me, it has always been the "lifting up" of Jesus from the earth. Some very apt and inspiring words have been written by J.C. Ryle (Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, Vol 1). "Christ's death is the Christian's life. Christ's cross is the Christian's title to heaven. Christ 'lifted up' and put to shame on Calvary is the ladder by which Christians enter into the holiest place and are at length landed in glory." C.S. Lewis once wrote "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." Can we apply this to the cross of Jesus, look up to the Lord who is lifted up from the earth, and see everyone and everything in the Mystery of Calvary?

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.*



Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

John 12:24

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