

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.**

Sunday 16 May 2021

Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord

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 the Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

No memorials, feasts of solemnities this week.

In the Australian Church:

19: Canberra-Goulburn - Episcopal Ordination of Archbishop Christopher Prowse (2003).

22: Rockhampton - Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, 1982.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

16: International Day of Living Together in Peace

17: World Telecommunications and Information Society Day

17: Death of Fr. Ted Kennedy

20: Timor-Leste Constitution enters into force

21: World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development

22: International Day for Biological Diversity

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 4:1-13

Mark 16:15-20

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 1, verses 1-11.**

As always, it is best to read the Word of God slowly. Be aware of the Holy Spirit placing unction on the message of this text. When your heart responds to a word or a line, or a phrase, this is the Holy Spirit touching your heart and calling forth your response.

***Meditatio:* A little background to the text will help us understand it and make a response to it.**

This is Luke's account of the Ascension of the Lord. In looking for a brief but informed background to this Solemnity, I read through a number of sources. Finally, I found Gerhard Podhradsky's New Dictionary of the Liturgy, which names the early patristic sources and their acknowledgment of this feast: "This feast is mentioned by St. John Chrysostom (d. 407), Augustine (North Africa, d. 430) and Pope St. Leo the Great (Rome, d. 461). The pilgrim nun, Aetheria, however, found that the custom of

holding the commemoration of the ascension simultaneously with Pentecost was still observed in Jerusalem. (at the same time). In the middle ages the celebration of the feast was dramatized by a crucifix, or figure of the risen Christ, being pulled up to the roof of the church. The extinguishing of the paschal candle after the gospel of the Mass, which is still observed, is a modern vestige of various popular customs.” Since this Dictionary was published in 1967, the Second Vatican Council has happened, and the Liturgy has been revised. The solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord occurs on the Thursday after the 5th Sunday of Easter – that is, the 40th day after Easter (in some countries). In Australia, it occurs after the 6th Sunday of Easter. It has been taken from Thursday to Sunday, thus allowing more Catholics to attend Mass on this day. There are a lot of reasons for the change, most of them being “pastoral”. The Paschal Candle is extinguished after Night Prayer on Pentecost Sunday, not on the solemnity of the Ascension.

Before Luke’s account of the Ascension in Acts, there is the Gospel of Luke – 24:50-53. “It has been held to imply that the Ascension happened on the evening of the day of the resurrection, but according to Acts 1:3, it occurred 40 days later.” (Dictionary of the Christian Church, entry under Ascension of Christ). We could be forgiven for asking: “When on earth, did it take place?” The answer to this question has not much relevance for prayer.

Lectio Divina is a way of life – allow God’s word to travel with you. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 46

The response is: GOD MOUNTS HIS THRONE TO SHOUTS OF JOY;
A BLARE OF TRUMPETS FOR THE LORD.

Psalm 46: “The glorified Body of Christ has thrown off the chains of place and time, and he has the power to lead us always and everywhere.” (Grail Psalter, England 1963)

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading, from Ephesians 4:1-13.

Meditatio: A brief explanation to help us understand this text.

This is not an easy text to take hold of. Ephesians 4:1-6:20 spells out the significance of church membership for daily life. Paul presents the diversity of the gifts and functions of its members. Christians are called to walk worthy of their calling by humility, and loving forbearance, careful guarding of the spirit. The result of these choices is unity. Verses 4-6 are particularly important because of the Gentile background of the readers and because of the author’s stress on the subjection of all heavenly powers to Christ. (1:20-22).

The inspiration behind the passage is Colossians 3:12-15. Take time to read this text.

2:14-16 is about the unity of the new humanity created in Christ. Take time to read this text. (These notes are summarized from the commentary by Paul J Kobelski in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 55:25).

Ponder on the text for a day or two, and then make your response. The Holy Spirit will lead you in this. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Matthew 28:19 & 20.

GO AND TEACH ALL PEOPLE MY GOSPEL.

I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD.

Lectio: Now read the Gospel text from Mark 16:15-20.

Meditatio: Some background to the text which will help us respond.

This Gospel text comes under the heading: "Later Endings" (Daniel Harrington, NJBC 41:109). Verses 16:9-20:

- Differ in style from the rest of the Gospel.
- Is absent from the best and earliest manuscripts now available and was absent from manuscripts in patristic times. Meaning: if the early scholars of the Sacred Scriptures didn't have access to it, they could not write their own commentaries and interpretations.
- It is most likely a second century piece based on Luke 24, with some influence from John 20.

This reality does not affect our prayer. It is a magnificent and exciting text: The commissioning of the Eleven to proclaim the Good News to all creation!

Those who believe the Good News will be gifted with a series of extras: in the name of Jesus, they will lay their hands on the sick and the sick will recover. They will cast our devils. They will speak in tongues. They will pick up snakes or drink deadly poison and not be harmed. Nothing will harm those who believe the Good News.

Make your response to this in the days ahead. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 3*.

EVANGELIZATIO – this is one's lived response to the texts given us by the Church each Sunday. It is about the evangelization of the "self" and pins me down to be who I am: A Christian who prays with the Word of God and responds to the call of the Word of God in my everyday life.

1. "Standing looking into the sky..." reminds me of St. Augustine's beautiful and challenging: "Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient ever new." Augustine wasted time and therefore was running very late. He looked in all the wrong places for his God. He looked "outside" instead of "inside". He was like the disciples staring up into the heavens. Closely linked to this response is verse 11 of our text: "This same Jesus who was taken away from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go to heaven." Fr. Karl Rahner offers a theological and spiritual challenge, when he says: "Jesus has departed from us by his death. In this way he redeemed us. He

comes again by taking us into the unfathomability of God.” (The Great Church Year, the Best of Karl Rahner’s homilies, sermons and meditations, page 209). This is not a sudden occurrence, but a deep and meaningful procession through life, emanating from our daily Lectio Divina, Christian meditation or centering prayer. For our part, all we have to do is be faithful.

2. I hear the call to embrace humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance as the foundations for any of the ministries in the second part of the text. If humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance are not there, we build our house on sand, as our ministry crumbles around us. Jesus said: “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.” The ministry of Jesus – prophetic, evangelical, pastoral and exhortative was not heralded by an army with trumpets blasting, brandishing weapons of war. No, Jesus was heralded by John the Baptist who wasn’t dressed in fine robes with gold braid. He probably had scanty clothing so that he could wade out into the Jordan river and baptise those who desired it. Humility for me, is quietude and simplicity – all my words and actions done in a spirit of quiet simplicity. Sr. Joan Chittister, in her commentary on the Rue of St. Benedict, says: “Humility is a proper sense of self in a universe of wonders.”
3. My response to this Gospel is to the three negative or dark signs: casting out devils, picking up snakes and drinking deadly poison. For me this speaks of two realities: (1) There will always be such challenges in the lives of Christians, and (2) The loving protection of Our Lord, in whose name we minister, will not abandon us. St. Mary of the Cross teaches us that “His goodness and beauty and gentle care pursue me everywhere.” The Lord is there, no matter what the challenge.

*Lectio Divina is prayer with the Sacred Scriptures.
We read, we seek to understand with the help of a commentary,
we ponder, we take time for stillness and we respond.
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.*



The Ascension by Sr Mary Stephen CRSS