

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)  
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.  
Sunday 2 May 2021**

**Fifth Sunday of Easter, 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:**

3: Sts. Philip and James (Feast)

**In the Australian Church:**

3: Townsville – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Timothy Harris (2017).

6: Adelaide – Anniversary of the death of Archbishop Leonard Faulkner (2018).

**In the Social Justice Calendar:**

3: World Press Freedom Day

3: 1990 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission was established.

5: 2016 – Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv. Was appointed bishop of Parramatta – the first Vietnamese-born Australian Bishop.

6: 1992 – Introduction of mandatory detention of asylum seekers in Australia.

7: World Password Day.

8: World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day

8: 1997 – Wik Ten Point Plan to extinguish Native Title was announced.

**LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS**

**The readings are:**

Acts 9:26-31

1 John 3:18-24

John 15:1-8

***Lectio:* Read the First text from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 9, verses 26-31**

***Meditatio:* Some background so that we understand the text and can make a response to it.**

The text encompasses (in retrospect) the conversion of Saul. The first fact the text presents is fear of a man known to have been a persecutor of Christians. This was a just fear. His persecution was so terrible that it took a miracle to win Saul as a follower of Christianity. Knocked from his horse by the blinding light of Christ, and in reality, becoming blind by the same light was the dramatic hand of God to lead him away from destruction of human life – in particular, Christians, whom he hounded and murdered.

This persecutor of Christians had a friend and companion in Barnabas, the only one it seems who spoke positively about Paul. Could we say that Barnabas had a freedom

of mind – open to give others a chance? He is described as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. He was a Levite from Cyprus. He is mentioned 29 times in the Acts of the Apostles and 5 times in Paul's Letters.

To build up a character sketch of Barnabas it helps to read: Acts 4:32-37; Acts 11:22 & 23; Acts 11:25-26; Acts 13:9. Later, in the Acts of the Apostles, 15:1-5, both men present their case for the full admission of Gentiles.

Unfortunately, they had a "falling out" later about John Mark and after that, Paul refused to take him on his second missionary journey.

Paul is also a troublemaker. Being of Jewish/Hellenist background, (NJBC 82:53), he is equipped to argue with Hellenists. He is full of zeal for Christ and not afraid of arguing with them. The description of peace reads like a summary at the end of an assignment: "They built themselves up, lived in fear of the Lord. They were filled with the consolation of the Holy Spirit."

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 recognize that the Holy Spirit is calling you to this word, this phrase, this sentence, to the whole situation. Ponder for a while. Maybe a day or more! Make your response.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

**The Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 21

**The response:** I WILL PRAISE YOU LORD, IN THE ASSEMBLY OF YOUR PEOPLE.

Psalm 21 is a psalm about the suffering servant who wins the deliverance of the nations. We are given the last two blocks: 26-28 & 30-32.

**Lectio: Read 1 John 3:18-24**

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

Christian love must be "something real and active". This is the only way we can know if we are people living in truth. Jesus Christ said of Himself: "I am the way, the truth and the life".

God's commandments are these: "that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and that we love one another. God lives in us by the Spirit he has given us."

This reading cuts to the quick. Love, in order to be authentic, must be real and active. There's no other way.

Hence, John is fulfilling a moral purpose: teaching Christians what is expected of them in regard to their behavior towards one another. This moral purpose covers all aspects of the way we treat every single person.

**The Gospel Verse is from John 15:4 & 5.**

LIVE IN ME AND LET ME LIVE IN YOU, SAYS THE LORD;  
MY BRANCHES BEAR MUCH FRUIT.

**Lectio: Read the Gospel text: John 15:1-8.**

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

"I am the vine; you are the branches." This beautiful story with its use of metaphor is a paradise for gardeners. The disgrace in the garden of Eden is reversed. Jesus is a vine, a vine which gives life to all who believe in him. Those who don't believe are the branches which are cut off and thrown away to be burnt or mulched.

**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 take comfort and respond to the fact that Paul and Barnabas had a "falling out". Paul refused to take on John Mark. Barnabas wanted John Mark to be included. If Paul and Barnabas, who worked so closely in the early Church, could have a "falling out", that is comforting. So, we all know about falling out with someone. There was a case in my family which went on for over 30 years. In the end of course, neither party could remember what it was about. I witnessed a big falling out when I was about 11. My grandmother went to Lourdes on the 1954 Pilgrimage, led by Archbishop Patrick O'Donnell. She also included Ireland, the land of her birth. She came to live with us for a while after her pilgrimage and brought lots of relics and Lourdes water. My father didn't want me becoming attached to relics. For him, relics weren't necessary because we had the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. There were lots of arguments. My father didn't yield - neither did my grandmother. In fact, the arguments became more frequent. In the end, grandmother bought a new house and moved there. Am I given to arguing with others? Do I look for an argument? Do I often fall out with others, or do I give way to others, and be that person of peace? Heated arguments, raising one's voice in argument, refusing to cooperate with others - we know all about these events! "Give and take" form one of the foundations of Christian living, of marriage, of working with others. If you are tempted to shout and storm out, press the pause button. A spiritual director taught me that. Stop and press the pause button. If we have a bad back, we usually don't lift bricks. Is it worth another trip to the Chiropractor? Let alone the money. So, is it worth getting into heated arguments or falling out with others as did Barnabas and Saul? The emotional cost wears us down.
2. I am responding to: "Christian love must be real and active." In the book, "The Life of Antony [of Egypt] and the Letter to Marcellinus." (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), we read about the life of Antony. In one excerpt, Antony of Egypt was so exhausted by the attacks of the devil, that he couldn't stand up. To the devil he quoted Psalm 26, verse 3. "The devil's

attack is first of all on those who have attained a very great measure. They know that in this way, they can cut us off from God, for they know that those who love their neighbor, love God. For this reason, the enmities of virtue sow division in our hearts, that they may be filled with great enmity against each other and not hold any converse with our neighbor even from a distance.” Does any of this ring a bell? If it does, Christian love is not real and active. This week gives us the opportunity (hopefully we will seize it), to meet a family member, friend, colleague in a “real and active” way, putting aside former grievances and letting our Christian love be authentic.

3. Since we had holidays recently, I allowed myself the pleasure of a few episodes of “Gardening Australia”. One episode included a segment on sharpening secateurs (one of my favourite occupations). We were advised by the presenter to close them carefully after sharpening and oiling or one’s finger may be sliced. (ouch!). Then another presenter showed us how to prune vines – mostly, how to train a branch with a tendril trying to reach another branch to cling on to and rise up in new growth. Branches that were in the way of growth were snipped off. There’s one sentence in this text that can’t be done in real life: we cannot light fires to burn unwanted branches – not in Australia. Those lovely Saturday afternoons in autumn where we raked leaves and burnt them are a thing of the past. Instead of fires, we now have mulchers. The branches are chopped up and put in with our compost. There’s a powerful spiritual lesson here. What prevents new growth within us, is cut away and chopped up for the compost which in itself will become an important ingredient of new growth when spread or mixed with the soil of our hearts or the garden of our souls. Just one last response: either way – fire or mulcher, the action is a brutal one. St. Teresa of Avila complained to God about the way God treated his friends – so badly, that it is a wonder he had any friends!

*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.*

