

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 25 July 2021

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 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:

26: Sts. Joachim and Anne, parents of the Mother of God. (Memorial)

29: Sts. Martha, Mary and Lazarus. (Memorial)

31: St. Ignatius of Loyola. (Memorial).

In the Australian Church:

No anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

26: 1833 – Approval of the Emancipation Bill, abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire.

28: National Tree Day

30: International Day of Friendship

30: World Day against Trafficking in Persons.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

2 Kings 4:42-44

Ephesians 4:1-6

John 6:1-15

***Lectio:* Read the first text from 2 Kings, 4:42-44.**

Read it 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 text is nothing more than it says. Elisha multiplies the bread so that the people present (one hundred) have something to eat – they ate and had some over. The “some over” is a powerful message for us: the Lord’s food will never run out. The same miracle will be performed in the Gospel of John, chapter six. Five thousand people are fed with five barley loaves and two fish, and there is ample left over. THERE IS ALWAYS MORE.

Read the text again and spend time with it as you go about your work and leisure. If you have the time in your week, take your reflection to a seat where you can watch the ocean, the lake, the river, the mountains, your own garden. Just take time. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 144

The response is: THE HAND OF THE LORD FEEDS US. HE ANSWERS ALL OUR NEEDS.

Psalm 144 is a psalm in praise of God's grandeur, God's faithfulness and God's generosity: "All your creatures look to you to give them their food in due time."

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading: Ephesians 1:1-6.

Meditatio: A huge challenge from the author of Ephesians!

The text is found within 1:3-14, which is summarized best as a "blessing". If we take the whole text, it is an address, a greeting and a blessing.

The challenge is in "I implore...". This is strong language. It means "I beg..."

- Lead a life worthy of your vocation
- Bear with one another charitably: in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience.
- Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit, by the **peace** which binds you together.

Lastly, the homily on UNITY: One Body, One Spirit, One Community – one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, and one God.

One God who is Father of all, through all and within all. Our vocation is to be Christian – to be as Christ. The demands of this vocation are spelt out above, but we must realize that responding isn't like magic! Yes, I am a Christian, and every day I try to live out my vocation. I don't always have a day when I am forbearing, selfless, gentle and patient, but I try. This is more the reality we are used to.

With this background, read the text again, and then ponder as you work or take time for leisure. Allow God to speak to you in the depths of your heart. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from Luke 7:16

A GREAT PROPHET HAS APPEARED AMONG US; GOD HAS VISITED HIS PEOPLE.

Lectio: Now read the Gospel text from John 6:1-15

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

This is John's teaching on the Eucharist. The Synoptic Gospels have a different setting. John has it outdoors, with lush grass and wildflowers – freshness.

The Synoptics have it outdoors, but in a desert where the people are hungry because they have been listening for too long. So, John 6:1-15 is not just a teaching on the

Eucharist, but one that draws us into the depths of mystical presence – into Jesus! It is a Presence we can't easily run from. The movement of Jesus is upwards into the hills. The crowds follow him because they have witnessed all the miracles he has worked!

Jesus sat down with his disciples – the scene is a spring scene. One would only be able to sit down if there were spring grasses and wildflowers.

Jesus saw the crowds and asked Phillip: *How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?* While he said these words to test Philip, we witness again the Lord who saw the crowds as sheep without a shepherd, and who cares that they might be hungry; hungry for earthly food and as we will see; hungry for the Body of the Lord. Some years ago, when I had the privilege of studying this chapter of John's Gospel with Fr. Kevin O'Shea, C.SsR. He asked us to note verse 10: *Make the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place.* This was the spring lushness, freshness, and it was good to feel it. The words "sit down" mean in the Greek N. T., "recline". This is the perfect picture of rest on the new grasses of springtime – a glimpse into life lived in the presence of the Lord.

Stand back and ponder on the text – every aspect of it – over a few days. Listen to the Holy Spirit praying within you. This is the true *oratio* of *Lectio Divina*. Allow your spirit to rest and be still. Finally, make your response to the text and keep it in your prayer journal, and in your heart.

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. I am responding to "what's left over", or "always more". When I was young in monastic life, I wrote out a passage from "The Mystery of the Eucharist" by St. Ephrem, Confessor and Doctor. I found the words inspiring: *Have ever before you the Face of the Lord. Look upon His beauty, and let your earnest gaze turn nowhere away from Him. Go before Him into a desert place and see the wonder of His works, where He multiplied in His own Hands the bread that sufficed to feed a great multitude. Go my friends. Go forward, and with all the love of our souls, follow Christ wherever He goes.*

Do we remember Bl. Peter Julian Eymard? He believed that "the great sickness of the age is that it does not turn to Jesus Christ as its Saviour and God. It abandons the sole foundation, the only law, the unique grace of salvation...it no longer relies on Jesus Christ or points towards him. Bl. Peter Julian is certainly on the right path – we as Christians turn away from Christ so often – we lose sight of the guiding light of Christ, and the Words of the Sacred Scriptures. We need to think about this.

2. St. Athanasius offers a reflection on harmony: *There is harmony among the seasons: The four seasons have contrasting characteristics. One brings cold, the*

next brings heat, one signals the beginning of life, another at its end. Yet they all render equal service to the human race. They are all equally useful. It is impossible not to realize that there must be a Being superior to earthly objects, which is invisible but gives unity to their multiplicity, and orders their existence. And it is that Divine Being, whom we call God, or Father or Mother, who gives us the grace to be at one with others, and to practise patience, gentleness, kindness, while we live in harmony with one another, or while we try to live in harmony with one another, instead of destroying humanity and planet earth. There has been a lot written about war and peace, but something written by Siegfried Sassoon in 1930 seems to me to be honest, - words from a person of integrity. It is a statement sent to his commanding officer, in July 1917: *I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority, because I believe that the war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it...I have seen and endured the sufferings of the troops, and I can no longer be a party to prolong these sufferings for ends which I believe to be evil and unjust.* (Memoirs of an Infantry Officer). He was in the British army with a friend of mine. My friend was much younger, but had the privilege of driving Siegfried to Stanbrook Abbey, to visit one of his Benedictine friends. Siegfried Sassoon was one who detested war, wanted peace, and was taking a stand against it. I remember studying Siegfried Sassoon's writings when I was in secondary school. Harmony, unity, gentleness, patience and **peace**. We've had enough of war, enough of slaughter, enough of nations rising up in power against other nations, of political games, of lies. Even in the most recent lock-down in Sydney and beyond, we had people having parties and being fined. Did they have any thought for vulnerable people? We could honestly answer "no" to that question. The Premier made it quite clear – stay at home. So, since human life is not respected on this level, imagine how it is on an international level, where vulnerable people are thrown to the sword. As Tacitus said in 56 A.D. "They create a desert and call it peace." This is not the answer to our troubles. Jesus said: "Those who take up the sword will perish by the sword." (Matthew,28:52).

3. I love John's teaching on the Eucharist. I love Jesus being so much part of the freshness and lushness of Spring and giving me the gift of Himself within this beautiful setting. I can't go past this text without a reference to my favourite poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins. "Nature is never spent; there lives the dearest freshness deep down things; And though the last lights off the black West went. Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs – because the Holy Ghost over the bent World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings."

*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.
Take the Mother of God as your model,
the one who pondered the Word of God in her heart
and brought forth the Word made Flesh, our Saviour Jesus Christ.*