

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 18 July 2021

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Four

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:

July 22: St. Mary Magdalene (Feast)

In the Australian Church:

No anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

18: Nelson Mandela International Day.

20: 50th Anniversary of the first moon landing – 1969

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Ephesians 2:13-18

Mark 6:30-34

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Prophet Jeremiah, chapter 23, verses 1-6.**

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 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.**

We have a text that occurs in the first stage of Jeremiah's ministry – during the reign of King Josiah (639-609). Remember that we count backwards in the centuries before the birth of Christ. We count forwards after the birth of Christ.

Old Testament history reveals that Jeremiah grew up about the same time as King Josiah. His prophetic ministry began about five years before King Josiah's reforms (Jeremiah 1:2) reached their heights. (2 Kings 22:3-23:23). 2 Chronicles mentions that when King Josiah died, Jeremiah lamented his death.

The second stage of Jeremiah's ministry was firstly during the three-month reign of Jehoahaz and then Jehoiakim. The king of Egypt revoked Jehoahaz from his throne and installed Jehoiakim. Jeremiah condemned the sins and injustices of Jehoiakim's kingdom. He also predicted that Jehoiakim, next in line to the Davidic throne, would be exiled to Babylon. His ministry and his message were negative, dark, intolerable to many. It is summed up in Jeremiah 1:10: *I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.*

Jeremiah says that the present shepherds of God's people allow the flock of God's pasture to be destroyed and scattered. One can hear the anger in God's words: *I will take care of you for your misdeeds...the remnant of my flock I will gather and bring them back to their pastures. I will raise up shepherds to look after them...no fear, no terror for them anymore.* Read the text a number of times. Then, let us look into our own hearts and listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 22

The response is: THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD. THERE IS NOTHING I SHALL WANT.

After praying the psalm, step back and reflect. Macrina Wiederkehr, in her book "The Song of the Seed" says: *It has been good to drink at the streams of the shepherd psalm again...I am reminded of the seeds that have been sown in my life. I can become green pastures and restful waters for others – only if I am faithful in attending to the green pastures and restful waters of my own life.* (page 30)

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading, from Ephesians 2:13-18

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

This seems like a nice simple text, but it is not. It is about Israel and pagans. Paul (if he wrote this letter) is preaching about the fruits of the Crucifixion of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Paul addresses:

Unity

Reconciliation

The good news

Peace

An end to hostility.

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 John 10:27.

MY SHEEP LISTEN TO MY VOICE, SAYS THE LORD;

I KNOW THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME.

Lectio: Now read the Gospel text from Mark 6:30-34.

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

We are presented with four golden verses which tell the story of humankind in its "lost-ness". There is no one on earth who hasn't at some stage been like a lost sheep needing guidance.

“They were like sheep without a shepherd.” Without a leader. Without hope. A people lost and lonely and desperate for leadership. This has been the case since the time of Jesus and in every century since then.

And it is certainly the case now. Pause a while. Think about those good people who have lived all their lives as Christians and who have seen the institutional arm of the edifice crumble. The Institution is part of the arm of each religion: Anglican, Wesleyan Methodist, Catholic, Greek and Russian Orthodox, and more. Once we took pride in all that we called our own, and now many Christians can’t even bear to talk about it.

Make your response 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. This is a reading for our times. We’ve seen good shepherds and bad shepherds looking after God’s people on earth. Not every shepherd is bad, not every shepherd is good – we tend to focus on the bad shepherds. Sr. Macrina Wiederkehr takes us to a place we may not have been before. She has a meditation on “The dance of the Good Shepherd.” She gives us a “focus for the day”, saying: “Bending to the shepherd’s care, surrender to the loving guidance of the One who walks through the dark valley with you. Let these words enfold you in the Shepherd’s [Christ’s] embrace. And we pray: “Through the dark valley, beside restful waters, sustained by your love, I abide.” (page 28). Let us pray it in faith. May our trust be as the trust of a child. Pope Francis says: *If up until now, you have kept Jesus at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms. Bend to his embrace.* (The Church of Mercy, A Vision for the Church, pg. 11). Bend to his embrace. Ask yourself, “What is the most recent dark valley you have had to face? Who was there for you? Who wasn’t there for you? Did you lose your job? End a long relationship? Did you see a close friend die from cancer? Did you lose a child in a miscarriage? Are you suffering from depression following childbirth? Whatever the experience, remember these words: *“Through the dark valley, beside restful waters, sustained by your love, I abide.”*
2. Once, I (we) used to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and hopefully we confessed our disunity, inability to live in peace, our lack of forgiveness of those who were different from us, or who hurt us. The author of Ephesians is reminding us that Christ has achieved all for us, shedding his very blood. How could we not respond whole-heartedly? St. Maximus the Confessor has some sound advice for us: *Do you maintain that you are keeping the commandment of love towards your neighbour? If so, why is there so much bitter ill-feeling in you against this or that person? Sadness [depression] and ill-feeling go hand in hand. So, if you are sad when you see your brother or sister’s face, that probably means that you are harbouring ill-feeling.* St. John

Climacus teaches: *Forgetting offences is a sign of sincere repentance. If you keep the memory of them, you may believe you have repented but you are like someone running in your sleep.* Of three essential words which Pope Francis teaches us as being necessary, “Sorry” is number three: “We all make mistakes, and on occasion someone gets offended in the marriage, in the family, and – I say – plates are smashed, harsh words are spoken, [doors are slammed]. But please listen to my advice: don’t ever let the sun set without reconciling. Peace is made each day in the family: “Please forgive me,” and then you start over. (Address, Pilgrimage of Families, October 26, 2013).

3. Here in the Abbey, we have two Indonesian Sisters who are deeply upset by the statistics coming from Indonesia - figures like 20,000 dead, or 2000 deaths a day and many of them children. We also have an Indian sister. She too has taken it badly. One of the Indonesian sisters has lost relatives to the Covid virus. So far, her parents have been spared. People all over the world are like “sheep without a shepherd”. What can I do about it? In our community, we have a prayer wall, on our way into the church. This is where the faces of the dying and the sick and the statistics are placed. The sick and the dying, the doctors, nurses and paramedics, - these are our brothers and sisters. May we be in solidarity with them as we listen intently to the voice of God in all the mess and raise our hearts in prayer for Christ’s suffering people on earth. A friend of mine carries a crucifix around with her. In her lunch hour, she sits in the park near St. Mary’s Cathedral, holds the crucifix and places herself with the dying members of Christ’s body on earth.

Lectio divina is a way of life, not a method of prayer.

We read the text from the sacred scriptures.

We take time to understand the text by way of a commentary.

We respond to the text and listen to the prayer of the Holy Spirit within us.

Such a response is taking place from the beginning of our prayer.

The Spirit will place unction on the word/words we are meant to hear.

We ponder as we go...

Like the Mother of God, we treasure all this in our hearts.

