

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 15 August 2021

Solemnity of the Assumption

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:

20: St Bernard (Memorial)

21: St. Pius X (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:

16: Lismore – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (1919).

20: Darwin – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (1972)

21: Cairns – Episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. James Foley (1992).

In the Social Justice Calendar:

16: Return of Wave Hill Station (N.T.) to the Gurindji People.

17: 1971 - Swearing-in of Senator Neville Bonner as the first Aboriginal Australian to hold a seat in Federal Parliament.

18: 1978 – Tiwi Land Council established

19: World Humanitarian Day.

21: 1939 – Election of the first women members of the Australian Parliament: Enid Lyons (House of Representatives) and Dorothy Tangney (Senate). The ABC program “Ms Represented” features both Enid Lyons and Dorothy Tangney.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Apocalypse 11:19 and 12:1-6, 10

1 Corinthians 15:20-26

Luke 1:39-56.

***Lectio:* Read the First Reading from the Book of Apocalypse, chapter 11, verse 19, and Chapter 12, verses 1-6 and 10.**

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.**

If we can get past the violent images in the first part of the reading, we will understand the true meaning of the text.

So, let's deal first of all with the dragon. It is a mythical monster. Harry Potter would be the most likely character to tell us about mythical monsters. They are fictitious, and inserted into fables and myths to make a fictional book or film more attractive to us. The dragon is used in the book of the Apocalypse to represent the devil. 12:3-4,7,9,13,16-19; 13: 2,4,11; 16: 13; 20:2.

Now let's move on to the woman and the dragon. A great biblical scholar of the 19th century (Gunkel), said that the main idea comes originally from the Babylonian myth of Marduk the sun-god. The language may have originally applied to a sun-goddess crowned with the twelve signs of the Zodiac and giving birth to a sun-god who is saved by the gods above from the dragon of chaos and darkness. For us, who are followers of Jesus and bear the name Christian the woman is the church of God, at first seen in travail with the Messiah (Is. 66:6,7; Micah 4:9,10) and later as suffering persecution after the Ascension.

There are a lot of supporting texts we can take for prayer this week as we wrestle with this reading: Daniel 7:7, Apoc. 13:1, Daniel 8:10, Is 14:12-15.

Let us make our response to this text in the days ahead. I share mine in *Evangeliztio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm:

The response is: THE QUEEN STANDS AT YOUR RIGHT HAND, ARRAYED IN GOLD.

Psalm 44 is a royal wedding song. "Christians feel that they must recite this psalm in praise of the Messiah-king. The Jewish tradition before us did the same. Christians have to make a further adjustment: the 'bride' is no longer the old Israel, but the new 'Israel of God', the new Jerusalem prepared as a bride, adorned for her husband (Apoc. 21:2)." Grail Psalter, 1966).

***Lectio:* Read the Second text, from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians – Chapter 15, verses 20-26**

PAUSE. Read it again. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart in order to bring forth the most authentic melody of your response.

***Meditatio:* Understanding the text, so that we can make an informed response.**

This text stops just two verses before 28. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor calls it "Paul's thesis." "Human logic gives way to the passion of the prophet proclaiming a conviction that transcends reason and experience." (New Jerome Bib. Comm. 49:68). The rest of the text captures the first man and the second man. Death from the first, life from the second. Life in Christ is the gift of God to us. Christ as the first fruits and then those who belong to him. The power and sovereignty of Christ is manifest in his conquering of every other sovereignty, authority and power and the very last is death.

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 the Liturgy of today's Mass:
MARY IS TAKEN UP TO HEAVEN, AND THE ANGELS OF GOD SHOUT FOR JOY.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 1:39-50

Meditatio: A little background to the text so that we may gain a deeper understanding.

It is a long text which tells the story of Mary's visitation to her cousin Elizabeth and the Magnificat.

Of the Magnificat, Robert Karris says: "Mary's Magnificat elicits reflection upon the nature of God, active in the conception of Jesus." He divides the text into 1:46-50 and 1:51-55. The first stanza deals with Mary, and the second universalizes from Mary's experience to reflect upon God's dealing with all humanity." Karris also draws attention to the parallel between Mary's Magnificat and the Song of Hannah, mother of Samuel. (43:22 – New Jerome Bib. Comm.)

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. My response is to the devil as one vigilant, stalking its prey, ready to pounce as a lion or a tiger in the wild. Because of this reality, I need to be vigilant, ready to resist temptations against the Gospel of Jesus. Temptation is an old-fashioned word and yet it is an ever-present reality. Perhaps the temptation which most of us fall into, is negative criticism about, and rash-judgment of, other persons. It happens so quickly and is over before we know it – yes, locked into a negative conversation with a friend. Negativity and rash-judgment do not bring happiness to our lives. "Negativity", says Sr. Joan Chittister, "is that posture of the human psyche that colours everything unknown either grey or mottled. Negativity looks at life with a jaundiced eye, a suspicious eye, a wary eye. There's nothing wrong with it perhaps, but there's nothing right about it either." (Happiness – Joan Chittister. Michigan: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 2011, page 99)
2. I am called to respond to the fact that Jesus has destroyed all powers and sovereignties and the last power was the power of death. This week I will pray for someone (known or not known to me), who believes that death is the end, - there is nothing more, just death. Martin Luther once said: "When I feel the dread of death, I say, 'O death, you have nothing to do with me, because I have another death which kills my death. And the death which kills is stronger than that which is killed.' St. Oscar Romero said: "I don't believe in death. I believe in the Resurrection of the dead."

3. First of all, I respond by making a commitment to pray sincerely both the Benedictus and the Magnificat throughout this coming week. Since I entered the Monastery in 1982, I have been drawn more and more to this feast, celebrated as the Dormition of Mary in the Eastern Orthodox liturgy. This image of the Dormition, was made more concrete when I visited Downside Abbey (England), in 1993. While there, I was taken down to the crypt of the Basilica of St. Gregory, where Dom Hubert Van Zellar's sculptures were, and the one I spent time with was "The Dormition of Mary" – Mary sleeping. This was more tangibly powerful than all the writings on the Assumption of Our Lady. However, there is a most beautiful commentary on the Assumption of Our Lady by Modestus of Jerusalem – *The Falling Asleep of Mary*. Mary was the Ark whom God had sanctified. "This ark was not drawn by oxen like the Mosaic ark of old but guided and guarded by a heavenly army of holy angels. It was not an ark made by hands and plated with gold, but a living ark created by God, wholly luminous with the radiance of the all-holy and life-giving Spirit who had visited her. Within this ark there was no jar of manna; there were no tablets of the covenant, but instead the bestower of manna and of the promised blessings of eternity, the Lord of the New and Old Covenants who from this ark came into the world as a child and freed those who believe in him from the curse of the Law."
- My family used to pray the Litany of Loreto after the Rosary, The invocation "Ark of the Covenant" came before "Gate of Heaven". We learnt from an early age, that Mary was the Ark of the New Covenant, because she carried the Messiah within her.

*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.*



This very modern image of Mary rising is a watercolour by: Ronald Raab, CSC August 2019.