

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 8 August 2021

Solemnity of St. Mary of the Cross MacKillop

The National Liturgical Commission has chosen this arrangement,
making the 19th Sunday give way to our Australian Saint.

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:

09: St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein).

10: St. Lawrence, deacon and martyr.

11: St. Clare of Assisi

12: St. Jane Frances de Chantal

14: St. Maximilian Mary Kolbe, priest and martyr of WWII

In the Australian Church:

08: National Patronal Feast.

Brisbane, Parramatta, Port Pirie, Wagga Wagga – Patronal Feast.

Darwin: Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Edmund John Patrick Collins, 2014.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

09: International day of the world's Indigenous Peoples.

09: 1945 – Destruction of Nagasaki by the atomic bomb.

14: 1963 – Bark Petition from Yirrkala presented to Parliament.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

1 Kings 17:8-16

Colossians 3:12-17

Matthew 6:25-34

***Lectio*: Read the First Reading from the First Book of Kings, chapter 17:8-16**

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*: Some informed background so that we can honour the text in its original meaning.**

It is a courageous man who follows the Lord's command to go to Zarephath where a widow will look after him. Nigel Hepper has a note about Zarephath in his “Illustrated Encyclopedia of Bible Plants”: *In biblical times, the ordinary peasant such as the widow of Zarephath who looked after Elijah, gathered sticks for cooking purposes, and nobody expected to pay for fuel, except in times of distress. (Lamentations 5:4).*

The miracle of Elijah (or rather, the miracle of God, through Elijah), rings out in the words of St. Mary MacKillop: *I find myself invited to desire, only what His heart desires.* St. Mary MacKillop, the widow of Zarephath and Elijah were all faith-filled and are remembered for their abiding trust in God's providence. The widow was prepared to die and expecting to die. She knew that food was running out. Elijah had no idea where all this was leading. He was just carrying out God's command. Mary MacKillop faced calumny and excommunication from the Catholic Church, but went on responding in love, and continuing to trust.

After pondering over many hours or longer, you will want to make your response. Of course, the Holy Spirit may draw forth a response immediately. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 62

The response is: MY SOUL CLINGS TO YOU, YOUR RIGHT HAND HOLDS ME FAST.

Psalm 62: O God, you are my God, for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting. It is the perfect prayer for us to say as we begin Lectio Divina each day.

Lectio: Read the Second text from the Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians, chapter 3, verses 12-17.

Meditatio: The Letter to the Colossians confronts false doctrine by affirming that Christ must be our centre. That's where it is for those who are followers of Christ and called Christians. The false doctrine at Colossae was Gnosticism. It was a system of thought (gnosis) that exalted knowledge of certain divine mysteries as a way of salvation. Hence chapter 2:8. "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."

In our times, just as in the time when Colossians was written, false systems of thought push other empty, hollow and deceptive philosophies right in our path. And so, Paul presents us a blue-print of how to live. It's wonderful on paper, but most of us may have already put it in the "too hard" file. Is it possible? It is another explicit way to clothe oneself. What if the clothes don't fit? Can we take them back and get a refund? Unfortunately, no. We are God's chosen ones already, holy and beloved. There's no way out. So, why not wear the clothes, wash them, iron them, keep them fresh. The washing detergent? There's no better than *Lectio Divina!*

PAUSE. Read the text again. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist, in order to bring forth the most authentic melody of your response...

I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Matthew 27:55.

MANY WOMEN WERE THERE BY THE CROSS, WATCHING FROM A DISTANCE;
THE SAME WOMEN WHO HAD FOLLOWED JESUS AND LOOKED AFTER HIM.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 6:25-34.

Pause and ponder.

Meditatio: Some background to the text so that we can better respond to it.

This Gospel text is in line with the theme of the Old Testament reading from 1 Kings. We are confronted with the call to trust. Like Elijah, we don't really know what's ahead of us. Like the widow of Zarephath, we might protest that we have nothing more to give. Our faith is hanging by a thread. "Divine Providence"? The last thing we need to hear. And yet, like the widow, we somehow manage to give the last bit of oil and flour, knowing the consequences. We do one last load of washing for our elderly or sick neighbour, knowing that we are already overtired. The call to us is that God is there for us. God will provide for us. We are called to trust in Divine Providence. With all due respect to Elijah, I see the widow of Zarephath as the stronger character in the story. Like St. Mary of the Cross, the widow risks all she has, knowing that death will be the consequence, or poverty, or persecution. (as in St. Mary's case). St. Mary MacKillop went to the cross and somehow survived the ordeal which she suffered as a Catholic religious. Elijah was a man in a patriarchal society. It was not unusual for women to serve a stranger, especially a prophet, referred to as "a holy man of God". Read 2 Kings 4:8-10, when a Shunammite provides Elisha, successor to Elijah, with a small roof chamber walled in, a bed, table and chair and a lamp, so that he can stay there when he passes through Shunem.

Stand back from this text. Later, read it again, until something leaps out, and then stay with that. Go to a quiet corner of your garden or a nature reserve, or your own home, or a church which is open for prayer. Hear the words: BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD. 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 to this text is to marvel at the faith of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath. Widows were poor. In a patriarchal society, without a husband, women were poor. Widows and orphans are often paired together as two classes of people needing care. This poor widow was on the brink of starvation and therefore death. She took a risk by saying that she couldn't possibly give food to Elijah. It is interesting following the progress of the story. It is almost like a liturgy. Elijah listens to the Lord. He makes the journey to Zarephath. The widow is there, so he says the words he's been told to say. The widow is desperate – what on earth can she do? But she does what he tells her to do, and then follows a magnificent miracle. And Mary MacKillop – she pioneered a new form of religious life to provide for the children living in isolated colonial families. She and her sisters shared the life of the poor and the itinerant. They offered care for destitute women and children. What kept her going? Her own words say it best: *The love of Jesus is too strong and too beautiful for me not to cling to Him*. And of course, for song for her journey was the Gospel song.
2. My response is to St. Mary MacKillop, and her teachings. When she was near death she left an exhortation with her sisters. This exhortation fits today's second text from Colossians and before that, the teaching of Jesus. She said: *Love one another, bear with one another. Let love guide you in all your life*. Let's apply the situation to ourselves. If I

am gravely ill and I want to leave words of loving exhortation with my family, what would I say? If I am resigning from my profession after thirty to forty years, what would I say at the farewell dinner? Have you ever presided at a “scattering of ashes”? What did you say? I had a chance this year to help a family cope with the death of their horse, Queenie. It was their daughter’s horse, and she was in a bad way, a place of deep grief. We exchanged a lot of comforting words, and the death went peacefully. The vet was also a sensitive person. We did a lot of hugging and crying together, without words.

3. My response to this text is to share that every time I don’t trust in God, God seems to shame me. When problems are solved and things work out for me, I end up saying: “Why didn’t I trust?” As I grow older, I’m getting better at it – trusting God, that is. And I’m learning from the Sisters in their 90s. They are great teachers without saying anything. They are in different stages of needing care. They are present to me as they hold in their heart the tradition of all that’s monastic. They’ve lost the ability to walk vigorously, to work as they would have done thirty years ago, but they have an aura of acceptance, and a peace that can only come from Jesus who said: “Peace I leave you. My own peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.” (John 14:1, 27).

*Lectio Divina is Holy Reading,
that is, reading of the Sacred Scriptures.
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
It is about reading (and listening), reflecting and praying
in tune with the Holy Spirit within me,
resting in God and responding in the way I live.*



St Mary MacKillop, pray for us.