

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 31 October 2021

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Three

Before moving into prayer with the Sacred Scriptures, let us look at the week ahead in the Liturgy, the Social Justice Calendar and the Australian Church.

In the Liturgy:

02: All Saints Day (Solemnity)

02: The Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed (All Souls Day)

04: St. Charles Borromeo

In the Australian Church:

No Anniversaries this week.

In The Social Justice Calendar:

31 Oct – 12 Nov – UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) *Let us keep this most important conference for the future of our planet in our prayer each day.*

04: Day of Prayer for Anglican-Roman Catholic Reconciliation.

05: World Tsunami Awareness Day

06: International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Deuteronomy 6:2-6

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 12:28-34

Lectio: Read the first text from the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verses 2-6.

Read it aloud. 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.

Deuteronomy is the last book of the Pentateuch, the Books of the Law.

The book records the great speeches (exhortations) of Moses.

Chapters 1-4: Moses' first speech.

Chapters 5-26: Moses' second speech.

Chapters 27-33: Moses' third speech.

Each speech is delivered to the people of Israel.

The text we are given is part of the second speech. It is short: 6:2-6. "Listen Israel: The Lord our God is the one Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. Let these words I urge on you today, be written on your heart."

And before that: "If you fear the Lord your God all the days of your life and if you keep all his laws and commandments which I lay on you, you will have a long life, you and your children and grandchildren..."

This text became part of the Shema, "The principal Jewish confession of faith, one that Jesus identified as the greatest commandment." (Matthew 22:36-38).

I have summarized from the commentary by Joseph Blenkinsopp, *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 6:22).

Read the text over a couple of times. And you will hear the Holy Spirit prompting you to respond. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 17

The response is: I LOVE YOU LORD MY STRENGTH.

Psalm 17 presents an image of God "as the great Master of Creation, side by side with a God who is the jealous guardian of his people. Here, God is the guardian of David. (Grail Psalter). The biblical scholar Carroll Stuhlmueller CP teaches that "the Psalms bring the beat of God's heart into every moment of human activity."

Lectio: Read the Second Reading from Hebrews 7:23-28.

Meditatio: A little background to help us understand the text and make our response to it.

This follows on from the last couple of Sundays, but with a difference. Jesus is the High Priest who does not need to offer sacrifices over and over every day "as the other high priests do for their own sins and then for those of the people...". Jesus is different "because he has done this once and for all by offering himself. The Law appoints high priests who are men subject to weakness; but the promise on oath, which came after the Law, appointed the Son who is made perfect forever." As we pondered this truth last week, so we ponder again: Jesus has died for each one of us, ONCE, to make us free by the gift of salvation.

Take time every day for *Lectio Divina*: a line or word, or more. Allow the Holy Spirit to bring forth your response to God. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from John 14:23.

ALL WHO LOVE ME WILL KEEP MY WORDS;
AND MY FATHER WILL LOVE THEM, AND WE WILL COME TO THEM.

Lectio: The Gospel is from Mark 12:28-34.

Meditatio: Some background to the text, so that we can understand it in its original meaning and make an informed response to it.

Jesus quotes the Shema which was quoted in the Deuteronomic text (the first reading).

Heart, soul, mind and strength need to be understood.

Heart: It is regarded as the seat of feeling, impulse, affection and desire.

The inner self.

The mind: thought, intention, intellect, understanding. A disposition of mind and heart.

Strength: power, might, faculty, ability.

The “shema” is huge: All this is expected of the people of the Old Testament, and of followers of Jesus in the New Testament.

With the added: “You must love your neighbour as yourself.”

Jesus then says: “This is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice.”

Listen for the message you are to hear in this Gospel text and be still as you receive the visitation of God into your life through God’s Sacred Word. When you feel called to do so, make your response to the text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 3*.

EVANGELIZATIO. *Evangelizatio* is about the evangelization of the “self”. It is that part of *Lectio Divina* where we make our lived response to the text. First of all, we pray with the text, take time to ponder and understand the text, be still with the text and listen to the response we are being called to make.

1. The great speeches of Moses are truly great because they were delivered with his own voice. There were no microphones, no technology of any kind, just persons and the human voice as teacher. Jesus taught like this too in the Sermon on the Mount, and at every opportunity that came his way to speak of love. Those who took the Gospel to the world also used the meeting (the church assembly) outdoors or in the houses of Christians and the human voice. St. Augustine was also an enthusiastic preacher. He said: “We will receive from God the amount of indulgence we have given to our neighbour.” We need to remember this – it comes out of “you must love your neighbour as yourself.” And St. John Climacus, in “Stairway to Paradise”, has an interesting little piece on crabs: “Just as crabs always stay in the same place, because first they go forwards and then they go backwards, so does the soul if it vacillates, now laughing, now crying, now plunging into unrestrained merry-making.” And we are reminded that the soul is the seat of religious and moral sentiment, the inner self. As a former teacher, and now a prayer companion to our Oblates, I like the personal approach to teaching monastic theology. However, I have had to adjust to “virtual” mode in order to bring the Gospel teaching to those entrusted by St. Benedict to our care.

2. I am responding again to the fact that Jesus has done everything for us ONCE. There is no need for multiple sacrifices. Jesus on the Cross of Calvary will be my focus this week. I will keep the crucifix beside me and thus focus on the Saviour who welcomed the thief into Paradise. When I entered the Monastery forty years ago, one older nun who had entered in 1921 carried a crucifix in her habit pocket. She shared that when someone hurt her or spoke to her sharply, she would put her hand into her pocket and feel the cross. I imitated her and so I can vouch for the fact that this practice is the best to bring me right back to a degree of peace. It stops me sinking quickly into negative mode, thinking negative or revengeful thoughts.

3. I am responding to one sentence of the Shema: You must love the Lord your God with all your soul. The soul represents the inner self. So, I see that I have a responsibility to keep my inner self healthy and clean. It is the seat of religious and moral sentiment. If so, judging others would be a “no, no”. Judging others would be an act against religious and moral sentiment. From the Wisdom of the Desert: “A hunter in the desert saw Abba Anthony enjoying himself with the brethren and he was shocked. (He judged and was therefore shocked). Wanting to show him that it was necessary sometimes to meet the needs of the brethren, Anthony said to him, ‘Put an arrow in your bow and shoot it.’ So, he did. Then Anthony said, ‘Shoot another,’ and he did. Then Anthony said, ‘Shoot yet again,’ and the hunter replied. ‘If I bend my bow so much, I will break it.’ Then Anthony said: ‘It is the same with the work of God. If we stretch the brethren beyond measure, they will soon break. Sometimes it is necessary to come down to meet their needs.’ When he heard these words, the hunter was pierced by compunction.” The seat of religious and moral sentiment contains must challenge.

*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.*



“Love the Lord Your God with all your Heart”