

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.

Sunday 12 December 2021

Third Sunday of Advent, Year C

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 Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

13: St. Lucy. (Memorial)

14: St. John of the Cross (Memorial).

In the Australian Church:

12: Armidale – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral 1919.

12: Hobart – Anniversary of the death of Archbishop D’Arcy 2005.

17: Wagga Wagga – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Mark Edwards 2014.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

12: 1831 – founding of the Sisters of Mercy by Catherine McAuley.

18: International Migrants’ Day

18: 1894 – South Australian Parliament was the first in Australia to give women the right to vote.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Zephaniah 3:14-18

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:10-18

Lectio: Read the first text from the Prophet Zephaniah, chapter 3, verses 14-18.

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 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.

The name “Zephaniah” means “the Lord hides me”.

Like the Prophet Joel, Zephaniah is preoccupied with the ‘day of the Lord’. (Zeph 1:7, 14, and 3:11, 16, 20.

That ‘day’ is at the end of time and brings the promise of salvation as well as retribution (Zeph. 3:8-20).

The Lord will be with you.

Never again will you fear any harm (3:15).

This great Biblical theme becomes the basis for the Christian expectation of Christ's return. (I have summarized this background from Paul Gardner's "Who's Who in the Bible" – heading under Zephaniah the Prophet, page 680). Four other Biblical characters bear the name "Zephaniah".

Lectio Divina is a way of life – allow God's word to travel with you and make your response. I share mine to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm

The response is: CRY OUT WITH JOY AND GLADNESS:

FOR AMONG YOU IS THE GREAT AND HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL.

The Psalm is a hymn within the Prophecy of Isaiah: Isaiah 12:2-6.

It is a psalm proclaiming the Lord's glorious deeds and echoing the first prophecy from Zephaniah: People of Zion, sing and shout for joy; for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

***Lectio:* Read the Second Mass Reading, from Philippians 4:4-7.**

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

Brendan Byrne calls this text "a call to joy and peace of mind". God's peace surpasses all understanding, either as beyond the power of the human mind to grasp, or as accomplishing more than we can conceive of." He divides chapter 4 as:

4:2-9 A call to unity

4:4-7 A call to joy and peace of mind

4:8-9 A call to imitation of Paul. (Cf. NJBC 48:28).

"The Lord is very near" is the foundation upon which 4:4-7 stands.

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 adapted from Isaiah 61:1.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME.

HE SENT ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.

***Lectio:* Now read the Gospel text from Luke 3:10-18.**

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

Luke, as we know, was a Greek physician. His Gospel has been called "the Gospel to the Greeks" because it emphasized:

The beauty of Jesus' humanity

Jesus' acceptance of:

Gentiles, Women, Children and the poor.

Greeks associated these characteristics of Jesus with the ideal of the universal human being. Chapters 1:1- 4:13 cover the period of Jesus' birth, infancy, and the growing up years. The text we are given for prayer is about John the Baptist, who points the way to Jesus.

Fr. Karl Rahner comments on the question: "What shall we do?" He says: "Somewhat intimidated, people asked the question after John the Baptist's frightening sermon about sin and the inevitable judgment, about all-transforming conversion. John answered them; and suddenly his answer holds us just where we are living quite ordinarily; where we are, carrying on patiently in the "now". His answer means that it is here precisely that we can experience the coming of the Kingdom of God, if only we want to, and if only we can surrender in hope to the hidden meaning and innermost power of this everyday life of ours." (The Great Church Year, page 40.- Commentary on the Gospel for the Third Sunday of Advent

Spend time in prayer with this rather frightening text.

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. After two years of lockdowns, the text is a message of comfort. "The Lord, the King of Israel is in your midst. You have no more evil to fear. He will exult with joy over you. He will renew you by his love." The promise of better times to come, of love and comfort are what so many of us hope for in these unpredictable times. This is especially true for those who are hurt or grieving, those who feel lost or rejected, those who are abused physically or psychologically, those battling mental health...our list could go on. To all of us, Zephaniah says: "You have no more evil to fear. Do not let your hands fall limp. The Lord the King of Israel is in your midst. He will renew you by his love." The God who is in our midst is the only one who can see into our emotional and psychological pain. His promise of unconditional love is the source of our hope and renewal.
2. My response is to the words: "The Lord is very near." These words are also comforting. They give the reason for my responding to this "call to joy and peace of mind." Since "the Lord is very near" – not just near (as in the looming of Christmas), but very near in the "now" of my life. We only have the "today" of our lives. Someone like David Attenborough knows the truth of this – the "now" that needs his prophetic voice. Sr. Joan Chittister quotes Maimonides: "Be not a whisper that is lost in the wind; be a voice that is heard above the storms of life." Greta Thunberg is another with a big prophetic voice, and if she could hear Sr. Joan talking to her, she may hear the words: "Dear Prophet, for the sake of the children, for the sake of the world, for the sake of the gospel, cry out."

3. I am responding to the question various people asked of John the Baptist: "What must I do?" The first thing I have to do is to put myself in the place of those asking the question. The tax collectors were an interesting group. They collected taxes for the Romans, put up the price and keep the extra for themselves. (Wealth unjustly gained at the expense of the poor). "Exact no more you're your rate," said John. And I must listen to John the Baptist as he answers each person and take on board his instructions. No intimidation, no extortion. These are faults that are just as much part of society now as they were then. Look for their presence. Notice the signs. Do something about it. Speak out.

*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.*



Image ~ Susan Daily ibvm