

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

Sunday 9 January 2022

**Feast of the Baptism of the Lord and the First Sunday in Ordinary Time.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Two**

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:

No memorials, feast of solemnities this week.

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

10: Anniversary of the first Mass in New Zealand, celebrated by Bishop Pompallier.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

15: Birth of St. Mary MacKillop in Fitzroy, Victoria. (1842)
Birth of Martin Luther King Junior in Atlanta U.S.A. (1929)

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 40:1-5 and 9-11; Psalm 103; Titus 2:11-14 and 3:4-7; Luke 3:15-16 and 21-22

***Lectio*: Read the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 40:1-5 and 9-11.**

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 to it.**

Isaiah 40:1-55:13 is known as the Book of Comfort. Chapter 40 is the first chapter of this book, and so it contains the foundations on which the book takes shape.

40:1-5 presents some very interesting background.

1. Verses 1-2. God addresses the heavenly assembly in the words: “Comfort, comfort...” This is a double imperative and there are more examples of this if you want to read them: 51:9; 52:1.
2. We are to note the tone of mercy.
3. The heart: (in Hebrew anthropology) was considered the organ of reasoning; God is trying to convince Israel of his concern.
4. Deutero-Isaiah (the Isaiah of the “Book of Comfort”, introduces the theme of the “way”. (Deut. 32:4). John the Baptist will announce the “way” of the Lord. (Mark 1:3) Christianity therefore is simply called “the way” (Acts 9:2 and 19:9, 23). Jesus declares that he himself is “the way” (John 14:6).

5. The whole of 40:1-11 focuses on the glorious procession to Jerusalem. (These notes have been summarized from the New Jerome Biblical Commentary 21:9 & 10).

Take time over the text before making your response to it in the days ahead.
I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 103

The response is: OH, BLESS THE LORD MY SOUL.

Psalm 103 is a psalm about God's boundless care for creation. "The creation was described in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis with brief phrases; here, the same account is painted in loving detail. (Grail Psalter, 1963). This is helpful background but despite reading of the loving detail in the psalms, we know our current reality is that the springs that should gush forth in the valleys are dried up (global warming) or contaminated by open-cut mines; farmers struggle to grow wheat for bread, grapes for wine, olives for oil; wild beasts are hunted for their tusks or ivory; sharks are captured for shark-fin soup – for the wealthy restaurants of Asia and Europe. Sr. Joan Chittister addresses all this in her book "Our Holy Yearnings", saying: "We dig new lakes and fill with debris the ones that were there before us. We drill for oil under water and kill fish. We use chemicals to energize our land and pollute our skies." The sentiments expressed in this Psalm belong in another age. Unfortunately! When our pipe organ was being installed in the Abbey Church (1989), ivory was forbidden – as late as 1989! The damage was done by then. In keeping with the current laws of that time, we were given wooden keys.

Lectio: Read the Second text from Titus 2:11-14 and 3:4-7.

Chapter two, verse 11 is a key verse. The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to everyone. It is the grace of God that gives us strength to give up everything that does not lead to God and to give up all our worldly ambitions. The demands on us are difficult but with the grace of God all is possible. We can be self-restrained and live good and religious lives here in this present world..."

The second paragraph of the text is a reminder that however self-restrained we are, however, good are our lives, it is nothing to do with us. It was because of God's own compassion that he saved us. It has nothing to do with us. These themes are consistent with Paul. It is commonly thought that Paul wrote this letter to another young pastor and that he wrote it when he was in prison in Rome.

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 Luke 3:16

JOHN SAID: HE WHO IS TO COME IS MIGHTIER THAN I;
HE WILL BAPTISE YOU WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND WITH FIRE.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 3:15-16 and 21-22.

Meditatio: A little background to the text, so that we may gain an understanding, and make an informed response.

Fr. Thomas Keating leads us directly into the mystery of Epiphany. The first text is Matthew 2:9-12 which recalls the manifestation of Jesus in his divine person to the Gentiles (namely the Magi). The second text is Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:15-16 and 21-22. These texts recall the manifestation of Jesus in his divine person to the Jews at the river Jordan. The third text is John 2:1-12, which recalls the manifestation of Jesus in his divine person to his disciples at the wedding feast of Cana. He goes on to say that “the first text describes the manifestation of Jesus’ divinity to the Magi. They came from the ends of the earth and thus are symbols for all time of genuine seekers of the truth. Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan...is a preview of the graces of Easter and Pentecost, in which we celebrate the Mysteries of divine life and love. His descent into the waters of the Jordan anticipates his descent into the sufferings of his passion and death; his emergence from the Jordan symbolizes his resurrection; and the Dove’s descent prefigures the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.” (Pages 29 & 30 – “The Mystery of Christ”).

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 share that I believe the Book of Comfort has never been more relevant than it is at present. We wake to the early news of the latest statistics: hundreds, thousands – the dead, the dying, the not so sick, those in the grip of fear, those waiting hour by hour for a test – in their cars, in a queue five kms long. It is hot and tempers boil over. Those waiting are stressed. Stress is leading to strokes and heart attacks, emotional and mental illness, And so we pray: “Lord, comfort your people. Lay your healing hands upon the sick and dying.” Some of the teaching of Thomas Merton has been a help to me. What we most need in this dark [desperate] journey is an unfaltering trust in divine guidance as well as courage. Merton is talking about contemplative prayer. I have taken his words out of context because they help me at present. Trust without faltering. Surrender to divine guidance. Three of the nuns of the Jamberoo community have immediate family with the Covid virus: four members of one family (Melbourne), one member of a second family (England), and one member of a third family (Melbourne). With the current numbers, it seems that everyone now knows someone who has Covid. We hold them all in prayer.

2. My response to this text is to note that Paul repeats his teaching over and over, sometimes taking a different approach, but not always. When we think about it, this is what we do in the Liturgy: “Year by year we reverently celebrate the mystery of the divine incarnation, the supreme sacrament of our reconciliation, for the commemoration of so great an act of kindness shows how much has been expended on us, unworthy as we are, and reminds us of our debt to his great glory. The more fully we realize how the Lord Jesus was in his mercy, humbled for us, the more we should acknowledge him as inexpressibly glorious.” (From a homily for Christmastide by an ancient African writer).
3. Fr. Keating’s summary of this great mystery has captured for me the essence of Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. For many years I did not relate to this feast, most probably because I didn’t understand its meaning. But, putting it into context, and explaining it, as Fr. Keating has done, made all the difference. It is the coming up out of the water that is glorious. When you are next at the beach or a river, watch the exhilaration of someone coming up out of the water as if everything has been accomplished! Many artists have captured this moment when Jesus rose up out of the River Jordan.

*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,
praying in tune with the Holy Spirit within me,
resting in God and responding in the way I live.
May we imitate the Mother of God who pondered all things in her heart.*



Image by Daniel Bonnell