

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 23 January 2022**

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

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:

24: St. Francis de Sales (Patron of Journalists)

25: The Conversion of St. Paul.

26: Australia Day

26: In New Zealand: Sts. Timothy and Titus.

28: St. Thomas Aquinas.

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

23: Hobart – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, (1881).

26: Armidale – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Matthys. (2021).

29: Wellington – Anniversary of the death of Cardinal Reginald Delargey (1979)

In the Social Justice Calendar:

28: Data Privacy Day

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Nehemiah 8:2-6 & 8-10

1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Luke 1:1-4 & 4:14-21.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Book of Nehemiah, Ch. 8, verses 2-6 & 8-10.**

Be aware of the way you handle your bible. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep awareness. This text is given to all of us on this particular day in the Church's Liturgical Year, for our formation as Christians. Think of the Sacred Scriptures as a school from which we never graduate. We are learners until the close of our lives on earth.

***Meditatio:* Some notes on the background of this text will help us to both understand it and make a response.**

Some background on "law" as it was understood by Ezra and responded to by the listeners: they wept, they prostrated. In the Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology, Bauer calls on Rabbi Hanna, who taught that: "when two sit together and pronounce the words of the Law, the Shekinah (divine presence) is among them. (Page 480, Law in the Old Testament).

About Nehemiah. The name means: “The Lord has compassion”. The “Nehemiah” who features in the Book of Nehemiah is a post-exilic governor of Judah. Nehemiah rose to high standing and was later designated the “cupbearer to the king” (Nehemiah 1:1). It was a position of honour – wine taster for the king meant tasting the wine first to check that it wasn’t poisoned. Nehemiah enjoyed a position close enough to the king that he was able to communicate freely with him (2:1-10). (Gardiner, ed., “The Complete Who’s Who in the Bible”.) There is much more information on Nehemiah, but our text is focused on Nehemiah, as His Excellency, the Governor, working with Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people.

Back to Rabbi Hanna: “Wherever two sit together to pronounce the words of the law, the divine presence is among them.” So, as we read this text, we too will experience the divine presence among us, and we too can weep or prostrate at the power of the Word of God.

Read the text again a couple of times. Stay with the text. Ponder on it for a day or more. However, if you are aware of the Holy Spirit calling forth your response to the text, note it down. When the Holy Spirit prays within you or pours unction on a text and calls you forth, this is the true “prayer” (*oratio*) of *Lectio Divina*. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 18

The response is: YOUR WORDS LORD, ARE SPIRIT AND LIFE.

This is a direct response to the first text and to the prayer of the listeners who wept and prostrated. YOUR WORDS LORD, ARE SPIRIT AND LIFE.

Psalm 18 is a prayer praise: of God as Creator and Lawgiver.

Lectio: Read the second text, from 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Meditatio: Brief background to the text or brief explanation of the text, so that we can understand it and respond.

We can understand the text more simply if we say that a weak member of the body is not an unnecessary member. Such parts which lack natural dignity have their needs supplied. The body is a unity. There can be no schism. Everyone else shares in the suffering or the honour which comes to any other one member. All of this applies to Christ’s body the Church. (Summarized and adapted from the commentary for each New Testament Letter, edited by Charles Gore).

Take time to ponder on what Christ Jesus has done for us, not collectedly, but personally. This is done as we go on with each day’s work, or rest. *Lectio Divina* is a way of life. Once it becomes so, then we can ponder anywhere. Write your response to the text. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from Mark 5:3

THE LORD SENT ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR
AND FREEDOM TO PRISONERS (CF. LUKE 4:18).

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 1:1-4 and 4:14-21.

Meditatio: Luke 1:1-4:13 gives an account of the early life of Jesus. It is suggested in one source that Theophilus may have been a Roman official, and Theophilus was his real name. It was a common name among Jews and Gentiles. Having established the fact that he wished to give this man in particular, a more certain knowledge of the truth about Jesus, he also has a view to a wider audience. So, it is a teaching for Christians, while at the same time being addressed to one influential Roman. (Cf. Charles Gore, ed.). Chapter 4:14-21 gives the episode of Jesus in the synagogue, repeating the words of the Old Testament prophecy about himself, the Messiah - Isaiah 42:1-18, The Book of Comfort.

Read the text slowly and reflectively, and maybe a second time. Try to read aloud rather than with the mind. Listen to the text as you read. Stand back from it and ponder. Make your response in the days ahead. I share mine in Evangelizatio 3.

EVANGELIZATIO: My lived response to the texts with which the Church exhorts me to pray. St. James says, “Be doers of the Word.” And the Book of Deuteronomy tells us that the Word of God is in our hands to do it.

1. My response is to listen carefully to this text which is also one of the foundation texts for *Lectio Divina*. In regard to listening, Sr. Joan Chittister says honestly: “I must find in myself what this word, this sentence, this situation is asking of me. Here, in this place, and at this time.” (“Illuminated Life”, 76). Sr. Joan refers to this as “soul wrestling”. If we do it honestly, it really is soul-wrestling. Our 2021 Senior Australian of the Year was Miriam-Rose Ungunmeier-Baumann AM. Her teaching on listening is life changing. She says that Indigenous people practise deep listening, a spiritual skill based on respect. She adds that “deep listening is inner, quiet, still awareness, waiting and available to everyone.” The last three words may cause us to run away. But of course, that’s not what it means. The door is not always open, and the house is not always full of people. She is talking about our hearts. You may want to look on her website and watch the video on “Dadirri”.
2. In the present international climate, we are fighting chemicals in our food, poisons on the earth, global warming causing forest fires. In Australia, our term is “bushfires”. After the bushfires of 2019-2020, there was a long period of recovery. Local governments made available counsellors and other qualified people who would sit and talk with beautiful hard-working people who had lost everything. Added to this was the bonding of local people in an effort to rebuild homes and gardens. Community gardens sprang up and all who contributed had

a part to play. I remember one photograph with a girl of about 9 and a boy of 8. With them was a small girl of 4, who mostly chased the grasshoppers. But she was smiling because she was needed. It seems that those who made even a small contribution were needed to complete the unity. The restoration on Kangaroo Island was engineered by one woman, who managed an army of volunteers. The point I'm making is that everyone had a part to play. Everyone was needed. Age was no barrier. Everyone's energy was fueled by compassion for others.

3. This text is a comfort for all of us in the "now" of International and national issues. Like the first text today, this text from Luke calls us to listen. As we listen, what within us is most in need of healing? Am I a captive, blind, or downtrodden? Then I can take comfort in the healing power of Jesus. But first I must recognize that I have a need. This requires honesty, and that's the hard part. If you had a parent who did not give you affirmation and encouragement, then you might spend your whole life seeking affirmation and encouragement from others. If you don't get it, you might also become depressed. We have to do this kind of inner work, and it is best done with a friend or spouse, or partner. Why do I always react negatively to a situation whenever it arises? What happened in my past to cause this? A book was published in 1852 called "Self-Dependence", by Matthew Arnold. There is something worthwhile repeating from this work: "Resolve to be yourself; and know that the one who finds self, loses misery." If we are honest about our inner selves, we do lose misery. And if there is something in my past that is weighing me down, there are a number of friends surely, on whom we can off-load. God has also given us doctors and psychologists and counsellors. But above and beyond all their help is the help of Jesus. As the rest of this week unfolds, may we open our wounded hearts to Jesus, who took upon Himself our sicknesses. (Isaiah).

*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.*

