

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 6 March 2022
First Sunday of Lent, Year C
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week One

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 & NZ Church.

In the Liturgy:

No feasts or memorias this week.

In the Australian Church:

09: Brisbane and Cairns – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. John Bathersby, 2020.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

06: New Zealand – Oranga Tamariki, Day of Prayer for Children.

08: International Women's Day

11: 2011 – Earthquake and tsunami in the Fukushima Prefecture, Japan, killing 18,500 people and causing widespread contamination.

12: 1913- Founding of Canberra as Australia's capital city.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Romans 10:8-13

Luke 4:1-13.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from Deuteronomy 26:4-10.**

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 a Law Book. The meaning of the word "Deuteronomy" is the second stating of the Law of Moses. Have we ever said, when reading Deuteronomy, "I'm sure I've read all this before." And we have – hence the name "Deuteronomy", a second reading, a second stating of the Law of Moses. This book also records some of the great speeches of Moses.

The key verse of this book is in chapter 30, verse 19: "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."

The text we are given for prayer is from chapter 26, verses 4-10.

There is a pattern to this text, as there is in many of the Psalms. The pattern is: oppression, a cry for help, divine action in response to the cry (prayer) for help. We are advised to read Judges 3:7-11, for a comparison. (New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 6:42).

Read the text again and spend time with it as you go about your work and leisure. If you have the time in your week, take your reflection to a seat where you can watch the ocean, the lake, the river, the mountains, your own garden. Just take time to respond. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm:

The response is: BE WITH ME LORD WHEN I AM IN TROUBLE.

Psalm 90, as described in the Grail Psalter, is about being “under the wing of God’s protection.

***Lectio:* Read the Second Mass Reading: Romans 10:8-13.**

***Meditatio:* A little background to help us understand the text and respond to it.**

Paul begins by quoting from the Book of Deuteronomy. He omits one whole verse, but it is this one whole verse which is one of the foundations of *Lectio Divina*: “The word is very near you, in your mouth, and in your heart, and in your hands to do it.” Paul says, “It is on your lips and in your heart.” And he goes to say: “if your lips confess that Jesus is Lord and if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved.” And further on, “...by confessing with your lips, you are saved.” And then Paul throws out the challenge: Everyone is included. There are no distinctions between nations and cultures. “All belong to the same Lord who is rich enough, however many ask for his help, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” There we have it!

Hold this text in your heart and take time to make your response. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Matthew 4:4.

NO ONE LIVES ON BREAD ALONE,
BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.

***Lectio:* Now read the Gospel text from Luke 4:1-13**

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

Fr. Thomas Keating has the best commentary on this Gospel. It is the best because it is spoken for our own times. It is the best because it is free of academic overtones.

It is the best because it nails us down. Fr. Thomas Keating says: “The Lenten Liturgy begins with the temptations of Jesus in the desert, which deal with three areas of instinctual need that every human being experiences in growing up. Jesus was tempted to satisfy his bodily hunger by seeking security in magic rather than in God; to jump off the pinnacle of the temple in order to make a name for himself as a wonderworker; and to fall down and worship Satan in order to receive in exchange absolute power over the nations of the world. Security, esteem, power – these are the three classic areas where temptation works on our false programs for happiness.”

Stand back and ponder on the text - every aspect of it - over a few days. Listen to the Holy Spirit praying within you. This is the true *oratio* of *Lectio Divina*. Allow your spirit to rest and be still. Finally, make your response to the text and keep it in your prayer journal, and your heart. I share my response to this reading 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. I am responding to the pattern: oppression, cry for help, divine action in response to the cry for help. Isn’t this the pattern for all the prayer of intercession we have ever prayed? The problem with “divine action in response to the cry for help” is that the divine action doesn’t come quickly enough, or, as we perceive it, doesn’t come at all. We are then more desperate, as day by day we are still oppressed. What do you do, when a friend comes to see you and tells you that s/he is in a desperate state? Divorce is the only answer. Will your friend accept prayer? Will your friend accept advice? What do you do if you are a social worker and are asked to make a visit to a house in a poor area of your town or city? You get there, knock on the door and there is no answer. You hear a child crying, and so you walk in and find the child, covered in bruises with a cut to the head. You ring through to your own offices and obtain permission to take action. Still no adults around, so you call an ambulance. You pray as you wait for help. When it seems like a long time waiting, you cry to God for help. Eventually divine action comes when an ambulance arrives. You travel with the child to hospital and wait in casualty. By this time, a female police officer has joined you. The police haven’t been able to find mother or father. During this week, look back over times in your life when you have been desperate. Whom did God send to you? God’s action won’t come with flashing lights, just through a friend, or spiritual director, or sibling. God uses whom God will. Who are the people who stand out for having been there when you were desperate?
2. The Lord’s love is all-inclusive. And it is for those we like and those we don’t like. One of our elderly sisters often says inappropriate things in a very loud whisper. Recently, when I was helping her to gather all her things on to her lap (in her

wheelchair), she said, “You know, I really don’t like sister X. But then, that’s wrong isn’t it, because Jesus died for all, and he died for her too.”

So, there is hope for all of us, if we can only hold on to this truth: Jesus died for all humanity. William Law says: “All religion is the Spirit of love; all its gifts and graces are the gifts and graces of love; it has no breath, no life, but the life of love.” Jesus died for all humanity. His sacrifice was the ultimate sacrifice of love.

3. I am called to respond to the way Fr. Keating describes the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Firstly, Jesus became human. We celebrated the Nativity in December, the Epiphany (manifestation to the Gentiles), early in January, then the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, where we met the two seniors who knew how to wait for God’s time, and in so doing we can imagine that they too were tempted – especially with insecurity, as they lived, prayed, aged, and waited for the coming of Christ. Now, we face the wilderness with Jesus, and confront our own false programs for happiness: security, esteem, power. I ask myself: Which false program for happiness do I dwell on: Security? Esteem? Power? We all have our moments, don’t we? For me, at this stage in life, it is “security”. Sr. Joan Chittister speaks about “leadership figures “caught in the grip of false grandeur, [and who] suffer from the idea that their ideas are the only and the best ideas in the group...the gifts of the rest of the group are smothered...” (page 111, “Happiness” by Sr. Joan Chittister). As for “power”, we’ve seen what it can do, and has done throughout the darker times of world history. In our own country, the Menzies Government kept truth from the Australian public: that what happened in Maralinga between 1952 and 1957 when nuclear testing by the British Government, scattered radiation (with all its consequences) all over Australia. How many Indigenous people in Central Australia lost their lives in a hideous and terribly painful way? How many native animals died? How contaminated did the desert become? We know that there were new experiments were carried out in 2020, and still radiation was there. Judy Nunn, in her book on Maralinga, writes on the front cover: “The **power** to love, the **power** to hate, the **power** to destroy human existence...is a deadly cocktail.”

*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.*

