

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 3 April 2022
Fifth 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:

There are no Solemnities, Feasts or Memorias this week.

In the Australian and New Zealand Church.

07: Melbourne Australia: Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Francis Little,

In The Social Justice Calendar:

04: International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action.

05: Australia – Publication, in 1997, of “Bringing Them Home”, the report of the National inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families.

06: World Day of Sport for Development and Peace.

07: International Day of Reflection on the Genocide in Rwanda. It is also World Health Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 43:16-21

Philippians 3:8-14

John 8:1-11.

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, 43:16-21.**

Read it slowly and prayerfully, 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.**

This text is from the Book of Comfort, Isaiah 40:1 – 53:13. Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. does the commentary on this text in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary and says that the Prophet continues a “favourite theme, the new exodus.” In verses 15-17, he notes that a series of participles answers the question Who is Yahweh? The first answer is found in the portrayal of the exodus out of Egypt. The final scene portrays the defeat of the Egyptians. The Lord led his people out of Egypt, through the sea of reeds. He snuffed out the Egyptians like a candle wick. But there is no need to recall all that because something new is happening. A new deed: a road in the

wilderness, paths in the wilds, water in the wilderness, rivers in the wild, drink for the Lord's chosen people. "The people I have formed for myself, will sing my praises."

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 125

The response is: THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US,
WE ARE FILLED WITH JOY.

Psalm 125 takes the same theme as the first text. "Deliver us O Lord from our bondage." And that is exactly what the Lord does for them and for us who have faith: a new deed!

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading, from **Philippians 3:8-14**.

Meditatio: Background to help us understand the text and make our response.

While one could do a verse-by-verse commentary, I would rather select a few verses that are especially significant for us. Verse 10, for example, "that I may know him." Paul is teaching that to know Christ is to be in conscious union with him, both as our crucified and risen Lord. Read 2 Corinthians 4, verses 10 and 11, and 2 Corinthians 13, verses 4 and 5. Compare these with Phil. 3:10. Paul places the resurrection first, because Paul came to know the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus. Paul does want to share the sufferings of Christ by reproducing the pattern of his death. In the spirit of the first text from Isaiah, Paul says that he forgets the past and strains ahead for what is still to come.

Then we have Paul running in the Olympics. He hasn't yet won but is not giving up until he gains the prize to which "God calls us upwards to receive in Christ Jesus."

Ponder on the text and make your response. If you are not called to respond, then move on to the Gospel. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Joel 2:12-13.

WITH ALL YOUR HEART TURN TO ME, FOR I AM TENDER AND COMPASSIONATE.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from John 8:1-11.

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

The text is as it says: a law for married women caught in the act of adultery. Death by stoning is a terrible death to imagine. It could take hours. What Jesus does is a "new deed". Jesus changes a terrible law by turning it upside down and making it rebound onto the heads of the accusers.

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. My response is to ask: Why don't I trust the Lord? I have been given everything to help me. During this Lent, we have been given every Sunday as a day of retreat. We are taking the theme of mindfulness, inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh and other Contemplatives. One of the most recent teachings was: "We are very good at preparing to live, but not very good at living. We know how to sacrifice ten years for a diploma, and we are willing to work very hard to get a job, a car, a house, and so on. But we have difficulty remembering that we are alive in the present moment, the only moment there is for us to be alive." If we begin to live mindfully, then we will know the "new deed" the Lord is doing. "When we are mindful, deeply in touch with the present moment, our understanding of what is going on deepens, and we begin to be filled with acceptance, joy, peace and love." The call is to live in the present and experience the Lord's "new deed" in the present. The Dalai Lama says: "There are only two days in the year that nothing can be done. One is called yesterday and the other is called tomorrow, so today is the right day to love, believe, do and mostly live." Today is the day to trust. Today is the day to leave anxiety at the feet of Jesus and get into touch with the "new deed".
2. My response is to the fact that Paul says he wants to reproduce in his life, the pattern of Christ's death. I have a friend from school of fifty or more years. We used to go to daily Mass in our parish. We grew up in the faith, but she would never commit herself to words similar to those of St Paul. She didn't want the commitment and was terribly fearful of what God might do. When in the 1970s, the Prayer of Abandonment was fashionable, and recorded by Fr. Paul Gurr. she would never sing it. Again, she was afraid God would take her at her word and ask terribly demanding things of her. We had a book launch at the abbey recently. "The Woman of Many Names" was written by Br. Rory Higgins, a De la Salle brother. It was the life story of one of our early nuns who entered in 1851. The research took him 25 years along with all his other commitments in his ministry. For me, his most important commitment that he shared with us was to work for a time at Mother Teresa's Hospital for the Dying in Calcutta. He went, he worked and he stayed. I have known more than three people who made the commitment and couldn't do the work. What is needed in work of that kind is a giant injection of faith in the Mystery of the Incarnation. Every dying person is Christ. He washed and looked after the dying Christ, who was picked up in the streets. Our Lady's

Nurses for the Poor (in Sydney and Brisbane) did the same work from 1913 when they were founded. They nursed the poor in their own homes. That kind of nursing is a call from God. One can't do it otherwise. Br. Higgins said "yes" to God and went in faith.

3. In response to this Gospel text, I go back to the wisdom of the Desert and the story of Abba Pior: "There was a meeting at Scetis about a monk who had sinned. The Fathers spoke, but Abba Pior kept silence. Later he got up and went out; he took a sack, filled it with sand and carried it on his shoulder. He put a little sand also into a small bag which he carried in front of him. When the Fathers asked him what this meant, he said, 'In this sack which contains much sand, are my sins which are many; I have put them behind me so as not to be troubled about them and so as not to weep; and see here are the little sins of my brother which are in front of me and I spend my time judging them. This is not right. I ought rather to carry my sins in front of me and concern myself with them, begging God to forgive for them.' The Fathers stood up and said, 'Truly, this is the way of salvation.'

*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.*

