

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 29 May 2022
Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord 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 & NZ Church.

In the Liturgy:

31: Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (feast)

June:

01: St Justin, Martyr (Memorial)

03: Sts Charles Lwanga & Companions, martyrs (Memorial)

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

29: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

31: Diocese of Broken Bay - Patronal Feast, Mary Star of the Sea.

Wellington - Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. John Dew (1995)

June:

01: Dunedin: Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Leonard Boyle (2016).

03: Maitland-Newcastle – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Leo Clarke (2006)

In the Social Justice Calendar:

29: International day of UN Peacekeepers.

29: Australia – Launch of the Torres Strait Islander Flag

June:

03: The High Court's Decision in the Mabo Case

Catholic and Anglican martyrs of Uganda

04: International day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression

04: 1989 – anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre, Beijing

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 1:17-23

Luke 24:46-53.

Lectio: Read the First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles 1:1-11.

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: Some informed background so that we can honour the text in its original meaning.

This text recounts the historical event which we know as the Ascension of the Lord. It is one of Christ's mysteries - his withdrawal into heaven. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church notes that "Luke 24:50-53 has been held to imply that the Ascension happened on the evening of the day of resurrection." But according to Acts 1:3, it occurred 40 days later.

The manner in which the feast has been kept has changed over many centuries. Once it was celebrated on what we called "Ascension Thursday", 40 days after Easter.

Of interest only: There is also the Ascension of Isaiah, the second Jewish/Christian narrative. It was compiled out of "The Martyrdom of Isaiah (Jewish), the "Vision of Isaiah" (Christian), and the "testament of Hezekiah (Christian). In its original form it is written in Ethiopic and part of it in Latin. It is the oldest document which refers explicitly to the martyrdom of St. Peter.

For pastoral reasons the Ascension is no longer celebrated on a Thursday in Australia, but on a Sunday, a day which will enable most people to attend Mass. The Ascension of the Lord used to be a holy day of obligation for Catholics.

After pondering over many hours or longer, you will want to make your response. Of course, the Holy Spirit may draw forth a response immediately. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 46

The response is:

GOD MOUNTS HIS THRONE TO SHOUTS OF JOY; A BLARE OF TRUMPETS FOR THE LORD.

There is no doubt that this psalm "refers to the procession with the ark up to the Temple Hill, but for us there is another 'ascension' - the glorified body of Christ has thrown off the chains of time and place and he has power to lead us always and everywhere. Verse 10b is probably the verse that places people and rulers (earthly kings) where they belong: "The rulers of the earth belong to God, to God who reigns over all."

Lectio: Read the Second Text from the Letter to the Ephesians, chapter 1, verses 17-23.

Meditatio: Some background: Ephesians 1:3-3:21 presents God's plan and its accomplishment. 1:17-23 is a prayer of thanksgiving and intercession. The sources are: Eph 4:8-10; Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 4:14; 1 Peter 3:22; 1 Tim. 3:16.

It is suggested in the New Jerome Bib. Comm., that the thanksgiving and beginning of the prayer have been composed in imitation of Phlm 1-4. (Cf. Col 1:3-4, 9-10). The rest of the prayer draws freely on the vocabulary of Colossians and of the blessing in Ephesians. (Cf. Eph 1:18; Col. 1:12, and 27; Eps 1:20; Col 2:10, 12; Eph 1:21 and Col. 1:16. Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18-19:24. We need to note the ideas incorporated from Psalms 110 and 8 – distinctive statements about the exaltation of Christ and of the Church.

Verses 20 and 23: God's might is revealed in the resurrection and ascension of Christ – over all angelic forces.

Verse 22: God appointed Christ as "head". The author announces an important metaphor that will pervade this letter: Christ is the head of the body the Church and this is a development of 1 Cor. 12:12-17. (NJBC 55:19)

Pause. Read. Spend time on one or more of the texts mentioned here. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist, in order to bring forth the most authentic melody of your response. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is From Matthew 28:19&20.

GO AND TEACH ALL PEOPLE MY GOSPEL;

I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from Luke 24:46-53.**

Pause and ponder.

Meditatio: Some helpful background in order to understand the text and make our response.

Of the Ascension of the Lord, Fr. Karl Rahner writes: “The Ascension is the universal event of salvation history that must recur in each individual, in our personal salvation history through grace. When we become poor, then we become rich. When the lights of the world grow dark, then we are bathed in light. When we think we feel only a waste and emptiness of the heart, when all the joy of celebrating appears to be only official fuss, because the real truth around us cannot yet be admitted, then we are in truth better prepared for the feast of the Ascension than we might suppose. (The Great Church Year, page 207).

Fr. Thomas Keating also sheds light on this feast: “The grace bestowed on us by the Ascension of Jesus is the divinization of our humanity. Our individuality is permeated by the Spirit of God through the grace of the Ascension and more specifically, through the grace of Pentecost.”

And: “the grace of the Ascension enables us to perceive the irresistible power of the Spirit, transforming everything into Christ, despite any and all appearances to the contrary. In the misery of the ghetto, the battlefield, the concentration camp, in the family torn by dissension; in the loneliness of the orphanage, the old-age home, or hospital ward – whatever we see that seems to be disintegrating into grosser forms of evil – the light of the Ascension is burning with irresistible power.” (The Mystery of Christ, pages 87-88).

Stand back from this text. Later, read it again. Go to your “quiet” place. 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. I am responding to “looking into the sky” – “looking up”. At the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mt. Tabor, Moses and Elijah appeared in glory with Jesus and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep, but kept awake, and they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. (Luke 9:28-36). Matthew’s version reads: “Out of the cloud came a voice which said, ‘This is my beloved Son on whom my favour rests. Listen to him.’ When they heard this the disciples fell forward on the ground, overcome with fear. Jesus came toward them and laying his hand on them, said, ‘Get up! Do not be afraid.’ They looked up they did not see

anyone but Jesus.” (Matthew 17:1-9). This is surely where our eyes should land. We see Jesus, and Jesus is such a powerful light, that we are blinded to the negativity we see in others: “The grace of the Ascension enables us to perceive the irresistible power of the Spirit transforming everything into Christ.”

2. My response is to refer again to Fr. Keating’s insights and spiritual beauty: “At this very moment we too have the grace to see Christ’s light shining in our hearts, to feel his absorbing presence within us and to perceive in every created thing – even in the most disconcerting – the presence of his light, love and glory.” As one of Christ’s mysteries, I have never been drawn to it in the same way as I am, for example, drawn to the Mystery of the Eucharist. I know that it is a matter of faith. Believe, and one will be given the grace to perceive the depths of the mystery. I love the phrase of Fr. Keating: “to feel His absorbing presence within me. Christ’s absorbing presence is different from Christ’s embracing presence, powerful presence, loving presence. Christ has absorbed me and made it possible for me to be like him.
3. My response is to the words of Fr. Karl Rahner (The Great church Year, 207). If you can’t identify with these words, perhaps you are already a saint. I can identify with his words. I have been as empty as this. And I believe even Pope Francis has. I wondered when the world media was watching Midnight Mass at Christmas, or the Easter Vigil at the Vatican, did we notice the weariness on his face, as he walked to the altar – a walk which must have been far too long for him. I watched the funeral of the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip, and marvelled at the simplicity and beauty of the event, - an event which was authentic in its truth, and without a lot of fuss. Rahner gets it right when he says, “when the lights of the world grow dark, then we are bathed in light . . . and better prepared for the feast of the Ascension than we might suppose.”

*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 ~ The Ascension by Ed du Guzman