

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 11 December 2022
Third Sunday of Advent, Year A**

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Three

Before beginning prayer with the sacred texts, let us take a look at the week ahead in the Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

13: St. Lucy (Memorial)

14: St. John of the Cross.

17: The beginning of the "O" Antiphons – the countdown to Christmas.

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

12: Armidale – Anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral in 1919.

12: Hobart – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Eric D'Arcy, 2005

17: Wagga Wagga - Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Mark Edwards, 2014.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 35:1-6, 10

James 5:7-10

Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11

Lectio: Read the first text from the prophet Isaiah 35:1-6 and vs. 10.

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: The predominant message is one of joy.

- Exult
- Rejoice and bloom
- Let it rejoice and sing for joy
- The tongues of the dumb will sing for joy
- They will come to Zion shouting for joy
- Everlasting joy on their faces
- Joy and gladness will go with them.

Most of the commentaries point us to "the flowering of the southern desert". The text is "a promise of salvation, which depicts the flowering of that same desert where Edom lay..." If we stop and read Numbers 20:14-21, we will see that the Israelites had negotiations with the kings of Edom. The mountainous plateau of Edom is over 5,000 ft. high, about 70 miles long (N-S) and about 15 miles wide. Psalm 108:10 and 2 Kings 14:7-10 "reflect the respect of the Israelites for the

formidable character of Edomite strongholds.” (Cf. New Jerome Biblical Commentary 73: 40-42).

The prophet prophecies freedom from fear, strength for the weary, courage for the faint of heart. The prophecy is about the promise of salvation, meaning a return from exile and a life of joy.

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 145

The response is: LORD, COME AND SAVE US.

Psalm 145 is a psalm in praise of God’s fidelity.

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading from the Letter of James, 5:7-10.

Meditatio: This text from James is about patience and waiting. It is appropriate for Advent, leading up to the Nativity of the Lord. A pregnant woman waits nine months before giving birth to her child. So did Mary wait for the birth of Jesus. James gives firstly, the example of the farmer – how he waits for the precious fruit of the ground until it has had the autumn rains and spring rains. James emphasized this example in order to explain what our waiting means. “You too have to be patient; do not lose heart, because the Lord’s coming will be soon.” James is talking about the second coming of Christ which Christians believed to be immanent.

Then, in the direct way of James he says: “Do not make complaints against one another...so as not to be brought to judgment yourselves.” James doesn’t mince words. He says it as it is meant to be said, leaving no ambiguity on his part.

Stay with this text and if the Holy Spirit moves your heart to respond, then note your response in your prayer journal. I note mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Isaiah 61:1. It is also found in Luke 4:18.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME.

HE SENT ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.

Lectio: The Gospel is from Matthew 11:2-11.

Meditatio: John the Baptist is in prison. From his prison dungeon, he hears about the work that Christ is doing. He sends his disciples to ask Jesus: “Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?” This episode indicates that John must have had the freedom of visits from his own disciples, or that a prison guard may have taken the care to get out the message. The answer Jesus gives comes in six rhetorical questions and three positive assertions about Him. (Cf. 42:73 in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary). The answers Jesus gives are the

prophecies from Isaiah 35:1-6: the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor.” But it doesn’t end here. Jesus adds, “...and happy are those who do not lose faith in me.”

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. On those short and relevant episodes of ABC news, I tuned into the one where Ian Thorpe was talking about young people with mental health issues and how he and others respond to these people and help them come in from exile (if we put it like that). These people need strength, courage and freedom from fear in order to be healed. Ian was explaining that the help he and others provide is often given by texting. In this way they can talk to another person and be comforted. On the same evening, I watched an episode from “Gardening Australia”, dated 2017. There was a young mother who had two little ones. After the birth of the second child, she was distressed about the future of her two children in a world like ours and went into post-natal depression. Coming back from the exile of post-natal depression was a long journey until her psychologist introduced her to gardening. She became passionate about growing fresh vegetables for her family and eating fruit and vegetables which are free of pesticides and all the other nasties. Gardening healed her, as it does for many of us: fresh air, sunlight, the singing of the birds, and our hands in the earth.
2. My response is to patience and waiting. A well-known actress wrote in “A Wreath of Roses”, 1950, “It is very strange...that the years teach us patience; that the shorter our time, the greater our capacity for waiting.” And William Shakespeare wrote in Othello, II iii: “How poor are they that have not patience!” What wound did ever heal but by degrees? Most of us carry wounds of one kind or another. Only time heals these wounds – time and someone to talk to. The more we talk about our wounds, the sooner they will heal. It is a process that can’t be rushed.
3. I want to respond to this text from the perspective of the mission of John the Baptist. John the Baptist was a messenger who said: “He [Jesus] must increase and I must decrease.” Jesus had the way prepared for him by John. What if we all became messengers of Jesus? That is, what if we lived our Christian vocation as a messenger, preparing the way for Jesus by our lived Christianity? What if we decided this week to bring one person from exile,

into the Light of Jesus? Is there just one person who needs to come home, via the flowered desert (first text from Isaiah)? Many of us are blind, deaf, lame, and dumb. Our hands are weary, our hearts are faint. We could do with a helping hand. If a friend tries to bring us home from our exile, it's best we don't resist and be stubborn. May our hearts be filled with gratitude, gratitude that someone cares about us.

*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.*



Rejoice for the Lord is very near!