

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 18 December 2022
Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Four

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:

This week, we are celebrating the Greater Advent Ferias. The 'O' Antiphons are sung each day at Vespers, with the *Magnificat*. In some Monasteries, such as ours, the church bell is rung throughout the 'O' Antiphon and the *Magnificat*.

17: O Wisdom, you come forth from the mouth of the Most High,
you fill the universe and hold all things together in a strong yet gentle manner.

O come to teach us the way of truth.

18 O Adonai and leader of Israel, you appeared to Moses in a burning bush and you gave him the Law on Sinai. O come and save us with your mighty power.

19: O root of Jesse, you stand as a signal for the nations; kings fall silent before you whom the peoples acclaim.

O come to deliver us, and do not delay.

20: O key of David and scepter of Israel, what you open no one else can close again; what you close no one can open. O come to lead the captive from prison; free those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

21: O Morning Star, Radiance of eternal light, Sun of Justice:
come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.

22: O King of the peoples and goal of their desire,
cornerstone uniting Jew and Gentile:

Come and save us, whom you made from the dust of the earth.

23: O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, long awaited Saviour of the nations:
Come and save us, O Lord our God.

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

No anniversaries are listed for this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

18: International Migrants Day.

20: International Human Solidarity Day

21: On this day in 1993, the Passage of Native Title Bill by the Australian Senate.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 7:10-14

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-24

Lectio: Read the first text from Isaiah 7:10-14.

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 Sunday 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 may help us to both understand it and make a response.

Isaiah 7:10-14 is a Messianic prophecy. The background appears to be straightforward. However, we must read chapter 7:1-9 if we are to understand the historical setting for this text. Now, as we plunge into 10-14, we will make sense of it. It is about a new encounter between Ahaz and Isaiah. King Ahaz may have been undecided, with the prophet urging one course, his advisers another course, and this occasions Isaiah's offer of a sign. Ahaz asks for the confirmation of the prophet's promise. Ahaz's refusal probably indicates that his mind is already closed. The sign now to be given is no longer to persuade Ahaz, but will, in the future, confirm the truth of what the prophet has spoken.

Who is the young woman? The term in Hebrew, does not indicate a virgin, and she is best understood as a wife of Ahaz.

The child? This child will guarantee the dynasty's future and for this reason can be called Immanuel (with us is God).

It pays not to jump to conclusions and apply this text to the Mother of God, and the Son of God.

But it **is** a Messianic prophecy, and can be understood as a sign, not just to Ahaz, but to all the world. (Cf. The New Jerome Biblical Commentary 15:19)

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 89

The response is: LET THE LORD ENTER; HE IS KING OF GLORY.

Psalm 89 is a psalm which ponders on the shortness of life. The Psalm was most likely sung in a community at prayer.

Lectio: Read the second text, from the Letter to the Romans 1:1-7.

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

Most commentaries tell us that this letter of Paul is written to a church with whom he is not yet acquainted. Therefore chapter 1, verses 1-15 is the text where Paul introduces himself and his preaching: "From Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus who has

been called to be an apostle, and specially chosen to preach the Good News that God promised long ago through his prophets in the Scriptures.”

Then he goes on to describe the news and situate it within history and most importantly within the Trinity.

The news is about the Son of God made flesh, that the spirit of holiness was with him, that he was proclaimed Son of God...through the resurrection from the dead. Paul calls the people who form the church in Rome, “God’s beloved”, and “called to be saints” (meaning Christians). Paul ends with a prayer: “...may God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send grace and peace.”

Take time to ponder, (ruminate) on this text. 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: Matthew 1:23.

A VIRGIN WILL GIVE BIRTH TO A SON;
HIS NAME WILL BE EMMANUEL: GOD IS WITH US.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 1:18-24.

Meditatio: It doesn’t take much to spot the prophecy of Isaiah, the prophecy of our first reading this Sunday. But there is another medium which is used in the scriptures to convey messages from God: the dream.

Poor Joseph. He must have been desperate. What will I do? My wife-to-be is pregnant! And in the Jewish culture of that time, it was a terrible thing for both of them. And God steps in and sends an angel to comfort Joseph.

Again, the name Emmanuel appears: God is with us.

Do we take enough notice of Joseph? He was always there, so much part of the nativity scene. He walks to their destination, while Mary sits on the donkey. She is well on in her pregnancy – soon to give birth. Joseph must be tender and patient.

Raymond Brown (Reading the Gospels with the Church) says that the Gospel of Matthew gives a picture wherein Mary and Joseph live at Bethlehem and have a house there. The coming of the Magi guided by the star causes Herod to slay children at Bethlehem and the Holy Family to flee to Egypt. The fact that Herod’s son Archelaus rules in Judea after him, makes Joseph afraid to return to Bethlehem, and so he takes the child and his mother to Nazareth in Galilee – obviously for the first time. Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph lived at Nazareth and went to Bethlehem only because they had to register there during a Roman census. The statement that Mary gave birth to her child and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in “the inn” implies that they had no house of their own in Bethlehem. And Luke’s account of the peaceful return of the Holy Family from Bethlehem through Jerusalem to Nazareth leaves no room for the coming of the Magi or a struggle with Herod. So, where does all this leave us at Christmas? Exactly where we always go – to the nativity scene where we adore Christ in the manger.

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 the “sign”. I am in the privileged place where I don’t need a sign or signs that I will be gifted with salvation. I know I will. The sign of Christmas is a star. Both the shepherds and the wise men are attracted by a star. And every Christmas, I too am attracted by the star of Bethlehem. I know that my Saviour is “God-With-Me”. Of the Birth of Jesus, Meister Eckhart says: “What good is it for us if the eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within [me]? I pray for this miracle.
2. My response is to “God’s beloved”. It took me many years to believe that God loved me, or that I was “God’s beloved”. I did not understand when I was young that God’s love was manifest in those who loved me: great-grand-parents, grand-parents and parents. Since my brother had a stroke on Christmas Eve, 2016, we his siblings are loving one another in a way we hadn’t done so before that. We communicate more with one another and at a very deep level. And each time one says to me, “I love you”, I know that I am “God’s beloved” because God is love. Let’s keep saying that: “God is Love”.
3. My favourite theologian is Fr. Karl Rahner. Of Joseph he says: “The pages of the bible tell us enough to know something of our heavenly patron...he spoke little, so little that these words did not have to be transmitted to posterity. We know that he was a descendant of the noble lineage of David, the greatest in his nation’s history. But that was the past, which the present, in its sober poverty, had yet to make perceptible. This present, however, was the hard life of one insignificant carpenter in a tiny village in one corner of the world. For the poor, this meant paying taxes and standing in line.” The 18 December is International Migrants’ Day. The Holy Family were not migrants, but they were certainly refugees when they fled from Herod’s cruelty and lived in Egypt.

*Lectio Divina is about reading the Sacred Scriptures and reflecting on them from an informed background.
It is allowing the Holy Spirit to play on the fibres of my heart like a harpist, and bring forth the beauty of my response.
In responding to the text, my life is changed more and more into Christ.*

