

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 25 December 2022
Christmas Day
The Liturgy of the Hours is for the Octave of Christmas

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:

- 26: St. Stephen, the first Martyr.
- 27: St. John, apostle and evangelist.
- 28: The Holy Innocents, martyrs
- 29: 5th day in the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord.
- 30: The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph
- 31: 7th Day in the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord.
- Evening Prayer 1 of the Mother of God.

In the Australian and New Zealand Catholic Church

28: Australia, the Diocese of Sandhurst – Death of the Most Rev. Joseph Grech, 2010.
There are no other anniversaries listed for New Zealand or Australia.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

25: Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical "God is Love".

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

As Christmas Day this year is on a Sunday, there is the choice of a Vigil Mass, a Night Mass (formerly Midnight Mass), a dawn Mass and a Day Mass. Each has its own set of Readings. Lectio this week focuses on the Readings for the Dawn Mass:

Isaiah 62:11-12

Titus 3:4-7

Gospel: Luke 2:15-20

Lectio: Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 62:11-12.

Read it slowly and pause for a while. Then read it a second time. In your prayer journal, note what has spoken to you in this text – a word, a phrase, a sentence.

Meditatio: Understanding the text so that we can immerse ourselves in it and make a response.

This short text is a call to "Look, your savior comes, the prize of his victory with him, his trophies before him." There are a number of titles to describe the Lord's people: "The Holy People", "The Lord's Redeemed", "the-sought-after.", "City-not-forsaken". The Glenstal Bible Missal says of this text: "The prophet speaks to a people shut up in sin, despised and abandoned: this makes the divine promises all the more

wonderful.” It is the prophecy of Third Isaiah, whose message was to speak about the future glory of God’s people.

Take time to ponder on this text in the days ahead as you go about your work, rest, recreation. Allow the Holy Spirit to work on the fibres of your heart and bring forth the melody of your response to this text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 1.

The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 96

The response is: A LIGHT WILL SHINE ON US THIS DAY: THE LORD IS BORN FOR US.

This Psalm draws us more deeply into the mystery of the Incarnation: the skies proclaim his justice; all peoples see his glory. Light shines for the just, joy for the upright of heart. You just in the Lord, give glory to his holy name!

Lectio: Read the second text from Titus 3:4-7.

Meditatio: This part of *Lectio Divina*, is about explaining the text and reflecting as we hear the explanation (like the monks of the early centuries). Be aware, that we can easily read too quickly, or be distracted.

This very short text from the Letter to Titus, depicts Christ as the instrument of God. He is the kindness and love of God for humanity. The text is a reminder of what exactly has been done for us. And we need that reminder (more like a revision). We forget so easily.

Today, Christmas Day is the anniversary of Pope Benedict XVI’s Encyclical, GOD IS LOVE.

If we take only this from our Holy Reading over Christmas, we will have taken all the riches we need for this life. GOD IS LOVE.

While we are reading, pondering, listening to the Holy Spirit praying within us, we need to note what phrases, sentences or just single words are leaping out at us because the Holy Spirit is causing us to respond. What, in this text, is life-changing for us? I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

Lectio: The Gospel Verse is from Luke 2:14.

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST. PEACE TO HIS PEOPLE ON EARTH.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Luke 2:15-20.

Read it slowly and reflectively, and maybe a second time. Try to read aloud rather than with the mind. Listen to the text as you read.

Meditatio: Angels, shepherds, the nativity scene at Bethlehem. In “The Big Book of Angels”, Dr. William Webber says: “That first Christmas night, first a single angel, then a multitude of the heavenly host, broke through the consciousness of the wondering shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem. What did the shepherds see? Who can know? But it must have been awesome, since the first words the angel spoke to them were: ‘Fear not!’ Clearly there was something supernatural about their appearance that struck terror into the hearts of the shepherds.”

The shepherds were doing what they do best, minding the sheep. They didn’t know that John’s Gospel would one day talk about Jesus as the Good Shepherd. They didn’t know that in the Gospel of John, Jesus would say: “I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.” So, these outdoor men, braving the elements, keeping the wolves at bay were gifted with heavenly beings announcing to them the birth of Christ. Many a nativity scene pictures a lamb, or a lamb being carried by a shepherd, as a gift most probably. Once again, we can look to Christ the Lamb of God. But for now, let’s be in the present and take in all the elements of the nativity scene.

Read the text a number of times and listen to the Holy Spirit playing like a harpist on the fibres of your heart, to bring forth the melody of your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 3.

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. The Word of God is life-changing for me when I respond to it in a practical way.

1. I’m responding to something in the commentary: “The prophet speaks to a people shut up in sin, despised and abandoned”. Before I imagine that this is nothing to do with me, I’m looking at my own imprisonment, the things that keep me “shut up in sin, despised and abandoned”. I was talking to one of my younger sisters last week about an incident in the past, and the effect it had on me. It was a family incident that has always bothered me. Admittedly she was tired. She wants to retire but can’t. She has another four and a half years to retirement. So, she lost it with me, and more or less told me to “get a life!” or “Get over myself.” “It’s past.” “Our parents are dead.” Of course, for me they aren’t dead. They are with God. Anyway, I kept an open mind, and realized there was truth in her words. God used her fatigue and bad mood to set me on the right path again. No use in dwelling on past hurts. I need to “Look and see that my Saviour comes.” And because of this, I belong to a holy people. I am the Lord’s redeemed, and I am “the-sought-after.” What more could I want?
2. My response: If you are as old as I am, you will remember that the Latin word for love was (and still is) *caritas*. And you will remember that we sang the *Ubi Caritas* at Benediction or Forty Hours. It has been shortened to: “Where charity and love are found, God is there. We still have it (in English)

at a Solemn Profession Ceremony, during the solemn acceptance of each sister who has made her vows. Each one of us stretches out our arms and the sister puts her arms on ours and we exchange a greeting of welcome. Sr. Elizabeth, now 96, says often that this is the solemn moment for her. And she becomes very upset when a nun leaves after making solemn vows and being received so truly and sincerely by each member of the community. Sr. Elizabeth prays aloud each day at Vespers for all who have left our community after making solemn vows.

3. I am responding to the shepherds in this story from Luke's Gospel. The shepherds are hard workers, outdoor people who keep sheep for a living. I like to think that into their ordinary daily and nightly routine, God breaks through and gives them the gift of Christ. The words "Fear Not" have come to me as a reassurance at this time, because a number of Christmas cards I have opened so far have brought news of deaths or of friends being placed in care. It's of no use to me when people say: "Don't be sad. They are at peace now." The death of family, extended family, close friends and oblates always send me into a quiet grief. And I am going to pray in quiet grief. Part of me dies when they die. And I believe I have a right to quietly grieve, instead of pretending that it's all right.

*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.*



*This beautiful Australian image of the Nativity is by Austrian/Australian artist
Leopoldine Mimovich*