

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.**

Sunday 1 January 2023

**Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother God, and the World Day of Peace.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Two**

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:

02: Sts Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen. (Memorial)

3-7 January are days before the Epiphany.

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

01: World Day of Peace, and Emancipation Proclamation Day.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

06: Birthday – Penny Lernoux. (Cf. Evangelizatio 3, for information on Penny Lernoux).

07: Birthday – Sasaki Sadako. Sasaki Sadako was born on 7 January 1943 and was 2 when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan by the Americans. She is remembered for the one thousand cranes she folded at the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital. She died aged 12 from leukemia.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Numbers 6:22-27

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:16-21.

Lectio: Read the first reading from the Book of Numbers 6:22-27. This blessing is a well-established liturgical formula. (Bauer – Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology, Volume 1). Read the sacred text slowly and prayerfully, really listening as you read aloud. This is about our on-going conversion.

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

Bauer has the most extensive material on this blessing and on blessings in general. In the Old Testament, “blessing” is the opposite of “cursing”. Both a blessing and a curse are forces which bring about what the words signify. One can possess a blessing (Gen 27:38). One can be filled with a blessing. (Deut. 33:23). A blessing can be on a house Ezek. 44:30 or laid on a place (Deut. 11:29). It can be poured out. (Is. 44:3). The blessing of the pious person benefits the town where that person lives. (Prov. 11:11) and where that person establishes roots. (Sirach 3:9). The blessing, once pronounced, releases a force which is no longer under the control of the one who said it. Cf. Gen 27:33-35 and Numbers 22:6.

This background and much more can be found in “The Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology, by J. B. Bauer, Volume 1, entry under “blessing”.

Read the text a few times over the week ahead and be aware of the Holy Spirit praying within you and bringing forth your response. I share mine in Evangelizatio 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 66.

The response is: MAY GOD BLESS US IN HIS MERCY.

Psalm 66 is a harvest song.

We are challenged by the commentary in the Grail Psalter to think of places where the harvest fails, or at present, to think of Australian farmers who can't plant crops because of excessive rain and terrible floods. Scientists call it a "wet" drought.

Lectio: Read the second text: St. Paul to the Galatians 4:4-7.

Meditatio: This text is surely meant to reawaken us to the part Mary played in the love of God for humanity. The "yes" of Mary and the birth of Jesus have enabled us to be adopted as children of God.

Take time to ponder on this text from the Letter to the Galatians. May we all allow the Holy Spirit to work on the fibres of our hearts and bring forth the melody of our response to this text. When the Holy Spirit is working on our hearts, we will be drawn to certain words, phrases, sentences which draw us forth and challenge us. Note these in your prayer journal. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Hebrews 1:1-2.

IN THE PAST GOD SPOKE TO OUR ANCESTORS THROUGH THE PROPHETS;
NOW HE SPEAKS TO US THROUGH HIS SON.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text: Luke 2:16-21.

Meditatio: Some background to help us respond to it.

Guerric of Igny, who, was once the Abbot of the Cistercian Abbey of Igny, in 1138, produced 54 sermons preached on Sundays and feast days. One of the most memorable is that on "Mary, Mother of God".

His approach is one of help – in the sense that it explains something about Mary's motherhood in regard to us. He says: "One and unique was Mary's child, the only Son of his Father in heaven and the only son of his mother on earth. Mary alone was virgin-mother, and it is her glory to have borne the Father's only Son. But now she embraces that only son of hers in all his members. She is not ashamed to be called the mother of all those in whom she recognizes that Christ her Son has been, or is, on the point of being formed."

Holy Mother of God, in you we all find our home.

Read the Gospel again. Take quiet time. 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 gives me each Sunday for my formation as a Christian. 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 theology of blessing. Fr. Karl Rahner says of January 1: "We are beginning a new year in secular life, not a new Church year. But the earthly year, everyday

life, the life of work and worry, is of course, the field in which our salvation has to be worked out in God's sight. And so, we have every reason to begin this year...in God's name. Let us in God's name...begin once more, honestly and un-wearied." (The Great Church Year, page 88). And why not begin with a blessing for someone with whom we have difficulty. This is the field of everyday life. There's no getting out of it.

2. My response is to Mary's "yes". It is not mentioned in this text, but her pregnancy began with her "yes" and her "yes" was the foundation of her earthly life. Her "yes" brought forth the Saviour of the world. My response is also to the words "at the appointed time..." Have we noticed that meaningful encounters take place in our lives at JUST THE RIGHT TIME – God's time – the appointed time? Just before Christmas I had a visit from a friend – a school friend. Now in our 70s, we had gone our separate ways – hers into marriage and mine into a monastery. There was always a certain strain between us, but this time it seemed to evaporate and at a time appointed by God, we met in complete freedom. We need to be aware of "the appointed time", not my time, but God's time.
3. I am responding to the words of Guerric of Igny: that Mary is mother of all those in whom she recognizes that Christ her Son has been...formed. And so, we immerse ourselves once more in the mystery of the Incarnation. It is not hard to see the Mother of God as the Mother of all those who are made in the image and likeness of God. And it is not hard to understand that there is no sister, brother, friend, colleague, boss, bishop, - there is only Christ. This is our faith. There is an anniversary this week in the Social Justice Calendar, the birthday of Penny Lernoux, January 6. Penny Lernoux wrote about political and economic conditions in Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Venezuela, and Central America. She wrote of corruption and violence, torture and oppression. She visited those who were filthy from poverty and gaunt from hunger. She saw in their faces, the face of Christ.

Lectio divina is a way of life, not a method of prayer.

We read the text from the sacred scriptures.

We take time to understand the text by way of a commentary.

We respond to the text and listen to the prayer of the Holy Spirit within us.

We ponder as we go...

Like the Mother of God, we treasure all this in our hearts.



This beautiful image of the Mary and Jesus is by Austrian/Australian artist Leopoldine Mimovich