

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 12 February 2023
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
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 Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

Feb 14: Saints Cyril, Monk, and Methodius, Bishop – memorial.

In the Australian Church:

Feb. 13: Syro-Malabar Eparchy – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Bosco Puthur, 2010.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

Feb. 13: Apology to the Stolen Generations by the Australian Government.

Feb. 13: Death of Faith Bandler AC, activist for Indigenous and South Sea Islander rights.

Feb.17: Murder of Iranian asylum-seeker Reza Barati in off-shore immigration detention on Manus Island.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Sirach 15:15-20

1 Corinthians 2:6-10

Matthew 5:17-37.

Lectio: Read the First Reading from the Book of Sirach, ch.15, verses 15-20.

Read it in a reverent way. 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: A little background to the text, so that we understand it and can make an informed response to it.

The Book of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus): Alexander di Lella’s commentary situates this book as being among the earliest of the OT Wisdom literature. “Sirach is one of the rare biblical works that was actually composed by the author to whom it is ascribed. One of the longest books of the bible, it contains the most extensive wisdom literature to come down to us.” (Cf. new Jerome Bib. Commentary, 32:2).

The text we are given for *Lectio Divina* comes from part four of the book: free will and responsibility.

The “heart of the argument” is that each individual has the radical freedom to choose life by obeying the law, or to choose death, by refusing to obey. It is appropriate for us to read Deuteronomy chapter 30, and see first-hand, how the wisdom literature upholds the law. The text we are given is just as relevant today as it was in ancient Israel. We ARE the choices we make.

Read the text again and ponder. In the days ahead you may feel called to a number of responses. This is the Holy Spirit at work within us. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 118

The response is: HAPPY ARE THEY WHO FOLLOW THE LAW OF THE LORD.
(THOSE WHO HAVE MADE CHOICES FOR LIFE, NOT DEATH).

Psalm 118 is the longest psalm in the Psalter with 176 verses. It is an alphabetical psalm, with every letter of the Hebrew alphabet, at the head of seven couplets.

Lectio: Read the Second Reading, from the first Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 2:6-10.

PAUSE. Read it again. 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...

Meditatio: Understanding the text, so that we can make an informed response. This text fits neatly into the wisdom theme. The Holy Spirit teaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God. Paul writes: “We have a wisdom to offer those who have reached maturity: not a philosophy of our age.” The more acceptable interpretation (among many) is that “Paul...turns against his opponents their own ideas and terminology. They were influenced ...by the Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom speculation associated with Philo*, which Apollos (Acts 18:24-28) may have introduced into Corinth.” (NJBC 49:18). We might say that “there is nothing new under the sun!” Paul is dealing with some members of the Church in Corinth who believed they “possessed a wisdom that made them mature or perfect and gave them the right to look down on others as children.” These trouble-some people were soul-people concerned only with the body and its needs, whereas the real perfect people (those they looked down upon) were spirit-people who speculated on Christ as ‘the Lord of Glory’...(NJBC 49:180).

*Philo was a Jewish thinker and exegete. He belonged to a prosperous priestly family of Alexandria. He was the most important figure among Hellenistic Jews. These were the Jews of the diaspora. (Jews living away from their homeland).

Take time over the text before making your response to it in the days ahead.

I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from Matthew 11:25.

BLESSED ARE YOU, FATHER, LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH;
YOU HAVE REVEALED TO LITTLE ONES THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 5:17-37.

Meditatio: A little background to the text, so that we may gain an understanding, and make an informed response.

Chapter 5, 17-20 gives the basic legal principles of the sermon.

A few other facts may help us: Jesus probably did not break the law but remained in principle with the Torah. He did stand against the Pharisaic Halaka. The term “halaka” leads us to the main bodies of rabbinic literature and tells us that this literature contains more than what we would normally call law. A traditional way of describing the content is “halaka” which refers to legal material, and “haggada” or “agada” which covers the nonlegal, homiletical materials such as stories, exhortations. Most rabbinic literature contains both kinds of material. (67:133, Rabbinic Literature). Jesus was a free spirit who directly confronted and resolved life’s situations in his healings and parables. Matthew remains in the same line of basic fidelity to the Torah, but with a concentration on the more important values and with the concern of a lawyer to provide textual support for innovations. Paul prefers an ethics of values like faith, hope, love, and a walking in the Spirit rather than a legal ethics. But he does cite the Decalogue. This is one of the Gospel citations which refers to Jesus as the new Moses.

The rest of the text this Sunday, and the following Sunday, opens out the issues of anger, adultery, divorce and oaths, and takes the letter of the law from a legal phenomenon to a heart phenomenon. It begins within the human heart. Come to terms with one’s opponent before you bring your gifts to the altar. Reconciliation is called for. And this is the fulfilment of the law, not the exact letter. This is the understanding in 5:21-26. The letter of the law is quoted. The fulfilment of the law is opened out and explained by Jesus. The following sections of this Gospel text challenge us beyond the limitations of the Letter of the Law. One can’t profess to be Christian and be angry with others.

5:21-26 – Anger; 5:27-30 – Adultery; 5:31-32 – Divorce; 5:33-37 – Oaths

Take time every day for *Lectio Divina*: a line or word, or more. 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. My response to this text is mixed. I know that those of us who make choices for life, are usually in a position to do so. We have had the stability of family, a good education, and everything going for us. Those who make choices for death, are probably not as blessed. Life may have gone wrong for them from their early childhood. I believe we all know one or more persons who have made choices for death over life. A sibling, or a friend. Perhaps we could think about this seriously in the coming week, and even make contact with someone in this situation.

2. The Holy Spirit has placed unction on this text, which leads me to reflect on and respond to, how easy it is to move away from the wisdom of God, from Jesus, the manifestation of the wisdom of God, and take up any number of non-Christian novelties. I have friends who try this and that, moving from one novelty to another. St. Augustine did the “this and that” thing. It was his mother who tried to teach him that the “this and that thing” is not the answer. And it was his mother who reared his illegitimate child Adeodatus. Augustine can help us. He’s given us words to lead us to rest in God: *“Too late have I loved you, O beauty ever ancient ever new, too late have I loved you. I sought for you abroad, but you were within me. Then you touched me, and I longed for your peace, and now all my hope is only in your great mercy. You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”* Our peace and stability are found within the heart. St. Gertrud of Helfta, in her Spiritual Exercises says: *“When I return into my heart, I find You there.”*

3. The Gospel text for this Sunday is long, and we can’t pray with it all at once. I have been led by the Spirit to look again at my angry nature. Situations anger me and sometimes people anger me. “If anyone is angry with brother or sister, they will answer for it before the court.” If I call my sister or brother a fool, a renegade, and proceed to worship at the altar of God, – Jesus says, “Don’t bother. Forget it!” I must come to terms with my anger, apologize to those I have hurt before I proceed to the altar of God. There is some Desert Wisdom too which has helped me over many years, to stay on the firm footing of the Gospel of Jesus: “A brother said to an old Abba, ‘There are two brothers. One of them stays in his cell quietly, fasting for six days at a time, and imposing on himself a good deal of discipline, and the other serves the sick. Which one of them is more acceptable to God?’ The old Abba replied, ‘even if the brother who fasts six days at a time were to hang himself by the nose, he could not equal the one who serves the sick.’” We could say that the first brother stands for the letter of the law, and the second brother is a true follower of Jesus.

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.