

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

Sunday 19 February 2023

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 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 Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

February 22: Ash Wednesday.

In the Australian Church:

No Anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

February 20: World Day of Social Justice

February 22: Project Compassion begins.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Leviticus 19: 1-2 and 17-18

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Matthew 5:38-48.

Lectio: Read the first text from the Book of Leviticus, chapter 19:1-2, and 17-18.

Read it aloud. Read it slowly. Be 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: A little background to the text will help us understand it and make a response.

The Book of Leviticus is the Liturgical Handbook of the Levitical Priesthood. At the same time, it taught the Israelites the necessity of an untainted holiness (4:3).

19:1-37, contains the verses we are given for the first reading on this the 7th Sunday of the Year A. The introduction to chapter 19 is in verses 1-2. Verses 17 and 18 address charity, the virtue which is destroyed by: enmity, revenge and grudge-bearing. The text also teaches that fraternal correction should be made when necessary.

All of these issues will come to flower in the teaching of Jesus and in the centuries after the Resurrection and Ascension of the Lord. After 600 A.D. a collection of “sayings” was developed from Ligugé in France, influenced by Pope St. Gregory the Great and composed in an anthology of patristic texts with a predominantly ascetic flavour. This was and still is known as “The Book of Sparkling Sayings”. It had an enormous influence all through the Middle Ages in every country. One such “saying” was: “In vain do they who neglect being reconciled with their neighbours, seek to be reconciled with God.” Vengeance in human beings takes its place when one is injured and is indignant. If I take this seriously, I have work to do. Dwelling on how to get back at her or him will get us nowhere. When it comes to bearing a grudge, the word “grudge” is intertwined with the word “murmur”. To murmur is to utter secret and sullen discontent. Read Matt. 20:11; Luke 5:30; John 6:41 & 43; John 6:61.

Take time to ponder on this reading. Only after reflecting will you be in touch with the response that the Holy Spirit is calling forth from you.
I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 102

The response is: THE LORD IS KIND AND MERCIFUL.

102 is a Psalm in praise of God's love. There is a beautiful commentary in the Abbey psalters, originally the Grail Psalter: "The Christian lives joyfully in the paradox that our God is higher than the heavens, and yet is close to us in love and mercy. Our gratitude for his mercy to us merges naturally into a hymn of praise for his greatness; and when we think how great he is, it is not to think how far away he is but how much he loves us that he would come down to us."

Lectio: Read the Second Reading, from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 3, verses 16-23.

Meditatio: A little background on the text so we can best respond to it.

The main message is summed up accurately in the Glenstal Bible Lectionary: "It is not only hatred which can divide person from person. The will to belong together can also be destroyed by appeals to this or that person's philosophy of life. The Christian community will only find unity in a common reference to Christ, God's supreme wisdom."

As Paul says: "...you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God." The text begins with a question: "Didn't you realize that you were God's temple and that the Spirit of God was living among you? If anybody should destroy the temple of God, God will destroy that person, because the temple of God is sacred; and you are that temple. And yet again Paul remains focused: "There is nothing to boast about in anything human."

So, another powerful reading for us to take on board. Allow the Spirit to lead you into your heart as you ponder the text and make your response. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

**The Gospel Verse is from 1 John 2:5. WHOEVER
KEEPS THE WORD OF CHRIST, GROWS
PERFECT IN THE LOVE OF GOD.**

So, the first text from Leviticus tells us: not to bear hatred in our hearts; to be holy as God is holy. The second text from 1 Corinthians reminds us that we are God's temples and that the Spirit of God dwells within us. Now the Gospel verse reminds us that, in keeping the Word of Christ, we grow perfect in the love of God. The messages draw us onwards to embracing Christ's love above all else.

Lectio: Read the Gospel from Matthew 5:38-48.

Meditatio: Some background to the text which will help us respond.

I see a good title for this text: "Call their bluff!" What a shock it will be to the one who hits me on the right cheek, when I offer the left cheek as will. Chapter 5:38-42 addresses retaliation. "An eye for an eye is a legal rule of the Old Testament, regulating revenge and retaliation for damages." We are referred to Exodus 21:22-25; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21." It is interesting to learn that the same code is found in the Code of Hammurabi and

the 12 Tables of the Roman Law.” Was Jesus teaching the way of non-violence? Yes, and later, so did Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. The goal for Jesus was to shame the opponent into a change of heart.” (NJBC 42:34 & 35).

The textbooks don’t say what is obvious for some of us – WISDOM. The wisdom of God is at work in the teaching of the Son of God.

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. I am responding to the word “murmur”. We all have grievances, and we need to air them. It is unfortunate that much of the sexual abuse victims have not always told their story because there hasn’t been the forum and because they are ashamed and frightened. Murmuring is necessary, and to the right people, in the right fellowship. However, if we murmur about people and situations, day in day out, it becomes a way of life. Such a way of life is not life-giving. It will kill us in the end. It is toxic.
2. This text has always been written on my heart: “I am God’s temple...you are God’s temple”. We have been given a great gift in our bodies made as we are told, “in the image of God”. Bodies, temples, holders of the Spirit - what beautiful and powerful words and images to ponder. Two simple thoughts came to me as I reflected on these words: the first is the importance of honouring the gift of my body just as it is and nourishing it in every way I can with good food and thoughts, exercise and sleep, stillness and contemplation; the second is to honour one another’s bodies, minds and souls and treat each person as a temple of God. Somehow, I think the first is easier than the second, but that’s the rub!
3. My first response to this text is to wish that I could make a better effort and love my enemies, but a lot of the time, I can’t do it. A friend from my childhood who has become an ordained priest in the Anglican Church, shared with me, that yes, it is impossible, but at least try not to speak negatively of that person or persons. That is a start. And then, try not to put yourself in a situation where the person concerned is present. Removing oneself from situations where we clash outright with those whom we class as “enemies”, is a positive step, and gives us time to pray for God’s grace once again. Maximus the Confessor, in his “Centuries on Charity”, advises: “Do all you can to love everyone. If you are not yet able to, at the very least don’t hate anyone.” St. John Climacus in his “Stairway to Paradise” teaches us that the memory of insults is the residue of anger. It keeps sins alive, hates justice, ruins virtue, poisons the heart, rots the mind, defeats concentration, paralyses prayer, puts love at a distance, and is a nail driven into the soul.”

*Lectio Divina is Holy Reading,
that is, reading of the Sacred Scriptures.
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
It is about reading (and listening), reflecting and praying
in tune with the Holy Spirit within me,
resting in God and responding in the way I live.*