

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

Sunday 26 February 2023 First

Sunday of Lent, Year A.

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week One.

Today in the RCIA, it is the Rite of Election (Enrolment of Names)

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:

No Memorias, Feasts or Solemnities this week.

In the Australian Church:

March 1: Port Pirie – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (1953).

In the Social Justice Calendar:

March 1: Zero Discrimination Day.; Nuclear and Independent Pacific Day

1999: Entry into force of international Treaty to Ban Landmines.

March 3: World Wildlife Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Genesis 2:7-9; and 3:1-7

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11.

Lectio: Read the first text from the Book of Genesis, chapter 2:7-9 and 3:1-7.

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 day in the Church's Liturgical Year, for our formation as Christians. It is not information we need, but formation.

Meditatio: Some background to the text will help us to both understand it, and make a response.

The Glenstal Bible Missal introduces us to this Sunday, and indeed to all the Sundays of Lent as follows: "During Lent the readings from the Old Testament recall the history of salvation, marking out five significant stages. It all began with [the first stage], man's breaking his friendship with God, emancipating himself from the creator at the tempter's suggestion. Adam finds himself shut off from God; will it be possible, should we wish, to return to God, and what way shall we take?"

There is another translation of the text which is more insightful than the one in our Missals. It is the text in the Septuagint Bible, which is the earliest version of the Old Testament: "And God formed the man of dust of the earth, and breathed upon his face the breath of life, and the man became a living soul. And God planted a garden eastward in Eden and placed there the man whom he had formed. And God made to

spring up also out of the earth every tree beautiful to the eye and good for food, and the tree of life in the midst of the garden, and the tree of learning the knowledge of good and evil.”

The second part of the text is 3:1-7, mentions both man and woman, without any mention of the creation of woman: “And the two were naked, both Adam and his wife, and they were not ashamed. Now the serpent was the most crafty of all the brutes on the earth, which the Lord God made, and the serpent now” goes to work to destroy the innocence of the first created human beings. The temptation is to be like God, to know the difference between good and evil to be as powerful as God.

Read the text again a couple of times. Stay with it. 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 50

The response is: BE MERCIFUL LORD, FOR WE HAVE SINNED.

Psalm 50 is a prayer of contrition. We can pray it anytime throughout Lent. We can memorize it. “Have mercy on me God in your kindness. In your compassion blot out my offence.”

Lectio: Read the second text, from the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans: 5:12-19

Meditatio: Brief background to the text helps us to understand it and respond.

“Sin entered the world through one man!” Adam is that man. Sin has brought death. I have prayed with the shorter version of this text, as it is marked in the Sunday missal. It is clearer in the comparison between the first man as bringing death and sin, and the New Man, Jesus Christ who took upon himself the sins of all humanity, to open the way to the Kingdom of God. We could recall here the plea of the Good Thief: “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And the reply of Jesus: “This day you will be with me in paradise.”

Take time to ponder on this reading. This is done as we go on with each day’s work, or rest, or travelling to work on the train and bus. We don’t need perfect conditions. *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 is from Matthew 4:4.

NO ONE LIVES ON BREAD ALONE,
BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 4:1-11

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. Stand back from it and ponder.

Meditatio: Some background to help us understand the text and respond to it. This is the classic temptation story! Most commentaries highlight the words: "If you are..." Doubt? "If you are the Son of God" you can do this. Show us what you're made of. The devil kicks Jesus when he is down! He is hungry and weary after a long and vigorous fast - a prime time for Satan to begin his dirty work, to attempt to bring Jesus to breaking point. Hunger (under stress); fame - a temptation to test his courage and strength; greed for worldly possessions and the kingdoms of the world.

Spend time reading this text and pondering over it until you are called to respond. My response is 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.

1. I understand this text in a kind of brutal way. As the Septuagint Old Testament says: "The serpent is the most crafty of all the beasts on earth." We are never free of his schemes, seductive powers, novelties, possessiveness, cheating, telling lies, - just a little lie to begin with and then a second and third, and then we find it is easy, so we are locked into it. Gluttony is one of the devil's tools, as is discouragement. A Bishop I met in Santa Fe many years ago, shared that he experiences "discouragement" as the most subtle of all the weapons of Satan. And we can't rule out fear. When it takes hold of us and paralyses us, it is often too powerful for us to overcome fear, another weapon of Satan. In this life we need to keep alert, be vigilant and stay loyal to family and friends. We can depend on family and friends to cause us not to fall headlong into temptation. If we try to go it alone, it doesn't work. Cardinal Newman says: "We often hear it said, that the true way of serving God is to serve one another, as if religion consisted merely in acting well our part in life, not in direct faith, obedience and worship. How different is the spirit of the Lord's Prayer. Evil round about him, enemies and persecutors in his path, temptation in prospect, help for the day, sin to be expiated, God's will in his heart, God's name on his lips, God's kingdom in his hopes: this is the view it gives us of a Christian." (Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman: "The Lord's Prayer is a summary of the whole Gospel").
2. I am helped again by going over the equation: Adam sinned and brought death and hell. Jesus, the New Man destroyed sin and death by taking upon himself the sins of all humanity – and in so doing opened the way for humanity to return to God and conquer Adams' weakness.

Columba Marmion says that the crucifix is the most vivid portrayal of sin. Christ is hanging, nails through his hands, bloodied and suffocating. He would have had to lift himself up to breathe. And the agony of this would have been unbearable. But he did bear it! His Mother may have wiped him with a cloth and minister to him as she did when he was born. We must not sanitize the crucifixion. The crucifixion is not pretty, nor is it something which will go away and leave us alone. For Christians it's here to stay.

3. My response is to the devil kicking Jesus when Jesus could bear no more. Perhaps that has happened to us: I know it has happened to me. Unfortunately, it does happen at some stage, to all of us. The temptation I always fall headlong into, is talking negatively about others. I stop and resolve to change. I do this for a while, then I go back to it. Three sources have been active in changing negative to positive: The Gospel of Jesus: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." And "Love one another as I have loved you." The sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, and Walt Disney's film "Bambi". There is a scene where Thumper is saying negative things. His father says: "Thumper, what did your mother tell you this morning? Thumper replies with a long face: "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." Walt Disney is a great teacher of human nature.

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.

