

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 26 March 2023
Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year A
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week One

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:

28 March: Townsville - Anniversary of the death of Most Rev. Michael Putney, 2014.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

29 March: Death of William Cooper, Aboriginal activist & community leader. (1941). 1 April: 1897 - Death of Jandamarra, Aboriginal resistance leader of the Bunuba people, Western Australia.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Ezekiel 37: 12-14

Romans 8:8-11

John 11:1-45

Lectio: Read the first reading from the Prophet Ezekiel 37:12-14.

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 that we can immerse ourselves in it and make our response.

Ezekiel is one of the major prophets of the Old Testament who lived during the Babylonian exile. In fact, he was one of the captives taken into exile. He spoke God's word to the exiled Jews. The word 'prophet' as we know well, means 'God's mouthpiece.' The primary message of Ezekiel is expressed in chapter 37: 12 & 14.

O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. I will put my spirit in you and you will live.

This text from Ezekiel presents the fifth stage of Salvation history. The first was Adam. The second was Abraham. The Third was Moses. The fourth was David. And now we are at the fifth stage. It is heavy with the presence of the Lord, with promises of freedom, renewal, resurrection and resettlement on the land (soil) of their ancestors.

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*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 129

The response is: WITH THE LORD THERE IS MERCY,
AND FULLNESS OF REDEMPTION.

Psalm 129 is a Psalm of repentance and trust. There is a long commentary on this beautiful Psalm in the Grail Psalter. A brief summary: "...the return from exile was not yet 'full redemption'. Israel waited and prayed. Israel was still waiting when Simeon took a child in his arms and said: 'My eyes have seen thy salvation' (Luke 2:30). He held the infant Son of God who came to give his life for the redemption of all (Mark 10:45).

Lectio: Read the second text from Romans 8:8-11.

Meditatio: Some background to the text so that we understand it better and can then make our response.

Paul wrote this letter probably before 45 A.D. He was imprisoned in Rome from 57- 59 A.D. His second imprisonment was in 66 A.D. What is the meaning of the text?

It takes as its theme:

- We are all sinners. We need God's salvation. God sent his Son into the world to be our Saviour.
- Israel turned away from the Messiah sent by God. God, the all-faithful will be faithful to his promise, and will restore a remnant.
- Our obedience to God is the result of our love for God.
- Peace and power come through the grace of God and the Spirit of God.

Read the text again and allow the Holy Spirit to work on your heart. Listen to the Holy Spirit praying within you and prompting you to respond to words, phrases, sentences which call you forth and challenge you. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from John 11:23 and 26.

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE, SAYS THE LORD;
WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME, WILL NOT DIE FOREVER.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from John 11:1-45

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: What is it about?

This Gospel text takes up the theme of resurrection once more. First of all, there is Lazarus - Jesus raises him from the dead. Lazarus was a close friend of Jesus. The message

he received was: 'Lord the man you love is ill.' Jesus answers the message with: 'This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified.' And: 'Our friend Lazarus is resting. I am going to wake him.' Everyone appears to be obstructing Jesus in his pursuit of life and light, not death and darkness. Even Martha goes out to meet him, to have her say - 'my brother would not have died if you'd been here, but even now, you could help!' Mary also goes out to meet him, with the same words as Martha. Moved by their sorrow, the compassion of Jesus brings their brother back to life. Jesus first prays - prays to his Father, so that the deed he is about to do will proclaim to the witnesses who had gathered, that he is the Son of God. There are three main characters: Martha, Mary and Lazarus, and the one we could easily forget - the messenger. Perhaps the messenger is the most important of all. Then there were the crowds who gathered to watch - maybe even watching to catch him out. This long text from John continues the theme of resurrection which began in the first text from the Prophet Ezekiel. Resurrection from the dead, in both stories is about returning from exile. In Ezekiel, it was all of Israel. In John it is focused on one household, with three persons who loved Jesus. And so, because of his love for these his friends he would proclaim in a loud voice: "Lazarus here! Come out!"

Read the Gospel text a number of times during the week. Sit with the text for many "quiet" times. 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. I am responding to the main message of this prophet: "O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them." I am applying this message to me personally, and I ask myself, "Do I want to be brought up from my grave, or my many graves?" The text is a beautiful one, and I love it. But in reality, it is sometimes more comfortable to be left alone than to be taken from my comfort zone. "Just leave me alone!" I may even wall myself in, so that my privacy, my ideas and ideals, my precious memories are all walled in – I am completely safe. The other side of this is that situations which cripple us, often send us into a grave. If so, may we hear the words of God through the Prophet: "I will put my spirit in you and you will live, and I shall resettle you on your own soil; and you will know that I, the Lord, have said and done this..."
2. I am responding to: "Your interests are not in unspiritual things, but in spiritual things, because the Spirit of God has made his home in you. This text frightens me, with its truth. The Spirit of God has made his home in you. On 28 June 2013, not long after his election, Pope Francis spoke of the freedom of the Holy Spirit, saying: "...never, never let us involve ourselves in things that, in the long run, bring us to become closed in ourselves. In this closed-ness, there is neither the fruit nor the freedom of the Holy Spirit."

3. My response to this miracle is to the words: “Unbind him, let him go free!” As an individual, I want that miracle so much. I do not want to be bound to anything which will keep me enslaved. It is so easily done - all of a sudden, I hear myself saying: I do ‘such and such’ once a week on a Sunday afternoon and I dare anyone to get in my way! A better approach is to try to do this once a week on a Sunday afternoon, but if anything else more important comes my way, I go with it. We can start breaking free by changing our language. We all have things we do, at whatever age life finds us. And then the time comes that these things are replaced by other things less physically taxing as we begin to age. We can watch younger people doing the things we used to do. And if we become resentful, then we are once again in a “bind”, like Lazarus bound in our grave clothes. We may respond to God’s grace and come forth from our tombs, and yet stand there in our grave cloths. “And the dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face.” Couldn’t get much worse! There is so much to ponder on this week, and we will need the grace of God to help us meet the challenge of the sacred texts.

*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.*



The Raising of Lazarus by Watanabe Sadao