

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday, 21 May, is the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, Year A.
The Psalter takes Week Three

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:

24: Our Lady Help of Christians, Australia's National Patronal Feast.

25: St. Bede the Venerable.

26: St. Philip Neri

Anniversaries in the Australian and New Zealand Catholic Church

21: New Zealand celebrates the World Communications Day.

Australia and New Zealand begin a week of prayer for Christian Unity.

22: Rockhampton – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (1982).

24: Australia's National Patronal Feast.

Patronal Feast for Broome, Bunbury, Canberra-Goulburn, Military Ordinariate of Australia, Sydney, Townsville.

25: Australia – Maronite Diocese, Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Antoine Tarabay, OLM, (2013).

In the Social Justice Calendar:

25: Pope Benedict XVI's Encyclical "God is Love"

26: National Sorry Day

27: Reconciliation Week begins

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Acts 1:1-11

Eph. 1:17-23

Matthew 28:16-20.

Lectio: Read the first text from the Acts of the Apostles 1:1-11.

Read it slowly and pause for a while. Then read it a second time. In your prayer journal, note what has spoken to you in this text – a word, a phrase, a sentence.

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

This text relates the withdrawal of Christ into heaven, witnessed by the Apostles.

Take time to read Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9 (one verse of the text we are given for Lectio). According to tradition it took place on the Mount of Olives. Luke 24:50-53 has been held to imply that the Ascension happened on the evening day of the Resurrection, but according to Acts 1:3, it occurred 40 days later. The Ascension marked the solemn close of the post-Resurrection appearances and the exaltation of

Christ to the heavenly life after he had spoken to His Apostles of the things concerning the Kingdom of God.

Ascension Day is one of the major feasts of the Christian year. It used to be kept on the 5th Thursday after Easter, that is, exactly 40 days. For Pastoral reasons and social change, it was moved to the next Sunday in Australia and some other countries.

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 46

The response is: GOD MOUNTS HIS THRONE TO SHOUTS OF JOY;
A BLARE OF TRUMPETS FOR THE LORD.

Psalm 46 is linked to the understanding of kinship in the Old Testament. There is no doubt that “this psalm refers to the procession with the Ark of the Covenant up the hill to the Temple. But for us there is another Ascension. The glorified Body of Christ has thrown off the chains of place and time and he has power to lead us always and everywhere. This is surely a psalm for the feast of the Ascension. (Grail Psalter ,1981)

Lectio: Read the second text from Ephesians 1:17-23

Meditatio: This part of *Lectio Divina*, is about explaining the text and reflecting as we hear the explanation (like the monks of the early centuries). Be aware, that we can easily read too quickly, or be distracted.

About *LECTIO DIVINA*, Blessed Columba Marmion says: “We read under the eye of God until the heart is touched and leaps into flame.”

There is no doubt that this text from Ephesians is a powerful prayer, a prayer that God will give us a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring us to full knowledge of him.

St. Clement 1, in his Letter to the Corinthians says that: “it is by Christ, that we look up to the heights of heaven. In his face, exalted and without blemish we see ourselves reflected. By him the eyes of our hearts are opened. By him our foolish and darkened understanding blossoms up anew towards his marvelous light.” It is all a revelation of the Mystery of the Ascension.

By Christ we are set free. The Carthusian Miscellany, from Advent to Pentecost, speaks of our freedom, a Christian’s freedom, gifted to us by Christ who has conquered sin and death. Our emancipation is personal and interior, a fruit of the Spirit of Christ in us.

While we are reading, pondering, listening to the Holy Spirit praying within us, we need to note what phrases, sentences or just single words are leaping out at us because the Holy Spirit is causing us to respond. What, in this text, is life-changing for us? I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Matthew chapter 28.

GO AND TEACH ALL PEOPLE MY GOSPEL.

I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, YES, TO THE END OF TIME.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew Luke 28:16-20.

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: Of this Gospel, the deeply spiritual commentary of St. Gregory of Nyssa says: "Now the mystery of Christ's death is fulfilled, victory is won, and the cross, the sign of triumph, is raised on high. He who gives us the noble gifts of life and a kingdom has ascended into heaven, leading captivity (those who once were captives of sin and death) captive, (captured by Christ into freedom. (Commentary on Matthew 28:16-20 by St. Gregory of Nyssa) We recall here the words of the Carthusian monk: "The Christian's freedom is emancipation with regard to sin, to the law and to death. It is personal and interior.

Read the text a number of times and 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 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. The Word of God is life-changing for me when I respond to it in a practical way.

1. I am not interested in the various artistic portrayals of the Ascension – in fact some of them are comical. Rather, I am alert to the fact that from the 5th Sunday of Easter, the Liturgy "turns our attention distinctly towards the coming of the Spirit, who alone can realize the mystery of Christ in our inner being. The absence of Christ is revealed as a mystery of presence: The going of Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit. (John 16:7 – adap. "From Advent to Pentecost", Carthusian Novice Conferences, chap. 29, page 186. Jesus said: "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." We need to give quality time this week to the great Mystery of the Ascension, and we will not be able to do that if we are tied to cheap images of Christ's ascension, probably painted or arranged by those who do not understand the depths of Christ's indwelling presence. For this going and coming is about Divine Presence.
2. My response: Because of Jesus Christ my darkened and foolish understanding blossoms up anew towards his marvelous light." (St. Clement 1). Looking back to the Easter Vigil, we remember that we followed in procession behind the Easter Candle. The Priest intoned: "Christ our Light", and we responded: "Thanks be to God." The Encounter with the Light of Christ can't be

described. Fr. Michael Casey says in his book “Grace on the Journey to God”, that “we do not possess the vocabulary to describe a spiritual encounter”, much less a Mystery of Christ such as the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Ascension. Fr. Michael speaks, in chapter 11, of a strange sense of divine love entering into us. PRESENCE. This is realized within us. There are no words to describe it. It is sacred – sacred ground.

3. My response: Instead of just basking in the comfort of the words from the Gospels: “And behold I am with you always. Yes, to the end of time”, we have work to do! We have been set free by Christ’s death and resurrection, yes, and Christ has promised to remain with us forever, but, as Fr. Michael Casey says: “Until we have identified the shadows and found ways to prevent their secret influence on the choices by which we shape our lives, we cannot even begin to ponder ways of liberating our spiritual energies to do their transforming work within us.” (page 75, “Grace on the Journey to God”). This interior work is about as hard as it gets! In fact, we can’t do it without Lectio Divina and all manner of prayer. Christ has gifted us with freedom, but we have to do our part in return.

*Lectio Divina is prayer with the Sacred Scriptures.
We read, we seek to understand with the help of a commentary,
we ponder, we take time for stillness and we respond.
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
Take the Mother of God as your model,
the one who pondered the Word of God in her heart
and brought forth the Word made Flesh, our Saviour Jesus Christ.*



The Ascension of Jesus by Nathan Mark Phillips