

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 16 July 2023
15th 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 and New Zealand Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

22: St. Mary Magdalene (Feast).

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

No anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

No Anniversaries this week.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 55:10-11

Romans 8:18-23

Matthew 13:1-23.

Lectio: Read the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 55:10-11.

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.

This text is from third Isaiah, chapters 54-66, and has as its message, the future glory of God’s people. A more detailed analysis is given in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, and it is worthwhile to take note: “Chapter 55:1-13, is the conclusion to the Book of Comfort. Almost every major theme within chapters 40-54 is blended into this glorious finale. Chapter 55 forms an ‘inclusio’ with chapter 40, repeating many key words and themes.

New Exodus (40:1-11; 55:12-13).

The Way (40:3, 27; 55:7-9)

Call to Pasture or to Eat: (40:11; 55:1-2).

Word of the Lord: (40:8; 55:11).

King: (Yahweh, 40:10,23); (David, 55:3-5).

Heaven and Earth: (40:12, 58:1-11).

Disputation with Israel: (40:12-31; 55:6-11).

Forgiveness: (40:2, 55:6-7).

There are a few more examples, but there is enough here to read and cross-reference in your bible. In verses 10-11 “the word comes gently from God, never intended to remain suspended like clouds in mid-air, but to soak the earth and to be drawn back toward God like plants and trees. God’s spirit is infused within human beings where it brings forth divine fruits.” (NJBC 21:49)

Take time over the text before making your response to it in the days ahead.
I share mine in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 64

The response is: THE SEED THAT FALLS ON THE GOOD GROUND
WILL YIELD A FRUITFUL HARVEST.

Psalm 64 is a song of springtime. “Learning from the Exodus, Israel knew God as Saviour. When she changed her way of life from that of a semi-nomadic people to that of settled agriculture, the recurrence of sowing and harvest, of early rain and summer ripening, enable her to see God as the giver of life and as Creator. The vision was unclouded and immediate; no technicality of modern farming was there to blunt the edge of wonder. For Israel it was God alone who dressed the flowers. Perhaps we should try to recapture this sense of God working through the winter to bring new life and new colour: this same power raised Christ’s body and it will raise our own, working throughout the winter of our lives.” (Grail Psalter, page 115, Commentary on Psalm 64).

Lectio: Read the second text from Romans 8:18-23.

Meditatio: The background to this text:

“Paul discloses his view of the created world, which in its chaos, manifests its cosmic striving toward the very goal set for humanity itself.”

We can become involved in a very long and detailed commentary, or we can go straight to the bottom line: “Material creation is...not to be a mere spectator of humanity’s triumphant glory and freedom but is to share in it. When the children of God are finally revealed in glory, the material world will also be emancipated from the last enemy (1 Corinthians 15:23-28).”

Make your response in the days ahead. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is as follows:

THE SEED IS THE WORD OF GOD, CHRIST IS THE SOWER.
ALL WHO COME TO HIM WILL LIVE FOREVER.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 13:1-23

Meditatio: This Gospel has so much to it, that it is hard to know where to start and how to respond. So, let us revise the definition of a parable. We haven’t done that

for a few years: “It is one thing to communicate to others conclusions and admonitions based on one’s profound spiritual experience...it is quite another thing to try to communicate that experience itself, or better, to assist people to find their own ultimate encounter. This is what the parables of Jesus seek to do – to help others into their own experience of the Reign of God and to draw from that experience their own way of life.’ (John Crossan, “In Parables”, page 52). A commentary by St. Gregory the Great takes us further into prayer: “Dearly beloved, the reading from the holy gospel about the sower requires no explanation. Store up in your minds the Lord’s words which you receive through your ears, for the word of the Lord is the nourishment of the mind. When the Lord’s word is heard but not stored away in the memory, it is like food which has been eaten and then rejected by an upset stomach. A one’s life is despaired of if one cannot retain food. Be careful then, that the word you have received through your ears remains in your heart. Be careful that the seed does not fall along the path or is received on stony ground.

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. This text is strongly anchored in the prayer of *Lectio Divina*. The Word comes gently from God, soaks the earth of my heart and brings forth life according to my capacity. The kind of person I am, with my natural and spiritual gifts topped up with the grace of God will give new life to others and make the world a better place for others. There is a small book called “Garden Prayers, Planting the Seeds of Your Inner Life”, by Wayne Simsic. He is the author of five books including “Praying with Thomas Merton”. On page 19 of “Garden Prayers”, there is a beautiful prayer: “Lord, let me apply the energy of my heart to this [inner] work. You are the source of life, you who guide the task [of this inner work]. It is often laborious and the results not immediately evident. As I bend my knee to the earth, I bend my heart to you as well. Let me make this slow work a labour of love.” For that is what the inner garden needs – a labour of love.
2. My response to this text is to throw in something fairly radical. We cannot but be challenged by the words: “From the beginning until now the entire creation...has been groaning in one great act of giving birth; and not only creation, but all of us who possess the first fruits of the Spirit...” None of this can happen until Australians unite and live in harmony. Meredith Lake says that understanding the bible is not a step in the WHITE direction. With the YES to Parliament, it would be profitable for all of us to stop and think about the fact that “the bible was brought to Australia by European Christians whose understandings and interpretations of it reflected an exclusively European way of thinking, including a focus on colonialism and what they saw as a right to Indigenous land.” So, Paul’s view of the created world and

humanity within that world is a harmonious view. We are moving forward, not backwards. We are sisters and brothers on a journey to freedom and divine glory.

3. I am a gardener and am responding to this text as a gardener. In fact, I am so dedicated to Lectio Divina and the garden of the heart that I embarked upon a course in gardening and landscaping over the first few years of the 21st century. I learnt a lot of very good lessons for spiritual growth, but the one thing not mentioned was the community garden or gardens that involve a coming together of local persons who tend a vegetable garden and make fresh vegetables available to those who tend it and those in need. Sometimes "Gardening Australia" shines the spotlight on a community garden, and it is such a positive exercise just to see the way people work together. The same happens in prayer groups that meet for *Lectio Divina*. It is life-giving because the word of God nourishes one's spirit.

*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.*

