

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

Sunday 9 July 2023

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Two

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:

11: St Benedict.

15: St. Bonaventure

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

09: Australia: Apostleship of the Sea.

New Zealand: Day of Prayer for Seafarers.

11: Adelaide celebrates the anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral (1996).

Toowoomba celebrates the episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. Robert McGuckin (2012).

Parramatta celebrates the anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (2003).

In the Social Justice Calendar:

09: NAIDOC Week concludes.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Zechariah 9:9-10

Romans 8:9, 11-13

Matthew 11:25-30.

Lectio: Read the first text from the Prophet Zechariah 9:9-10. Let us read it slowly, in order to prepare the soil of our hearts for new seeds and new growth. 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: Some further background to enrich our reading, reflection and response.

The prophet Zechariah, like the prophet Haggai, encouraged the Jews in the rebuilding of the Temple. The main verse of this book is within our text. 9:9 proclaims: “Shout, daughter of Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The king is victorious, triumphant and humble.

Another reference book sums up 9:9-10 as being about the King of peace: “The king is an earthly king of the future, able to inaugurate his peaceful reign because of the divine victory announced in the preceding verses.” (New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 22:39 – Commentary by Aelred Cody, OSB).

Spend time with the text. Ponder on it in the days ahead.

Write your response in your prayer journal. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 144

The response is: I WILL PRAISE YOUR NAME FOREVER, MY KING AND MY GOD.

Psalm 144 is a psalm in praise of God's grandeur: "When we reflect on what God has done for us, we remember that this is what God has always done; our lives are borne along on the unending stream of divine love. To the eternal God, eternal praise be given." (Grail Psalter, 1963).

Lectio: Read the Second Text Romans 8:9, 11-13.

Meditatio: Some background to help us understand the text.

Romans 8:1-13, is summed up by Joseph Fitzmyer as "Christian life empowered by the Spirit." Verse 9, speaks of the Spirit as the new principle of Christian vitality, derived from salvation. Verse 11 tells us that the power vivifying the Christian is traced to its ultimate source, for the Spirit is the manifestation of the Father's presence and power in the world since the resurrection of Christ, and through it will give life to us. (51:83 – New Jerome Biblical Commentary).

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

The Gospel Verse is a prayer from Matthew 11:25.

BLESSED ARE YOU FATHER, LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH;
YOU HAVE REVEALED TO LITTLE ONES THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 11:25-30.

Meditatio: Some helpful background in order to understand the text and make our response. From a commentary by St. John Chrysostom: "Our Master is always the same, gentle and benevolent. In his constantly concern for our salvation, he says explicitly in the gospel – [given] to us: *Come, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.*

Come, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. I do not make a show of words; I have left you the proof of my deeds. You can see that I am gentle and humble in heart from what I have become. Consider my nature, reflect upon my dignity. Heaven is my throne, yet I talk to you standing on the earth!

Gentleness and humility don't come easily to a lot of us. We prefer to be the boss, and proud of it.

Read the text a number of times, making a note of what speaks clearly to you. Listen to the Holy Spirit within you, placing unction on a word, phrase, line of the text. Stay with it and ponder. Finally, make your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 3*.

Evangelizatio: This is one's lived response to the texts given to us in each Sunday's Liturgy of the Word. It is about the evangelization of the "self" and pins me down to be who I am: A Christian who prays with the Word of God and responds to the call of the Word of God in my everyday life.

1. I am responding to the donkey! We are told that the king is victorious, and yet riding on the foal of a donkey. Donkeys are special animals. Horses and chariots were associated with the Roman Circus or war, but donkeys were mostly used at home for carrying burdens on their backs. But here, a donkey is carrying a king. On the day we call Palm Sunday, a donkey carries Jesus into Jerusalem and the people lay palms and olive branches ahead of him. And before that, a donkey carried Mary (when she was pregnant) to Bethlehem. Joseph led the donkey. While most donkeys are burden-bearers, the donkeys which carried Mary and later Jesus, were the privileged animals. There is another donkey in the Sacred Scriptures which should not be overlooked. This donkey is Balaam's donkey: "According to Numbers 22, Balaam was summoned by King Balak of Moab. God intervened in his journey by sending an angel to block his way. The donkey recognized the angel and God's intervention, but Balaam did not! The story of Balaam is best remembered by the words of his donkey, which seemed to show greater wisdom than its master and utter wiser oracles." (The Complete Who's Who in the Bible. An exhaustive listing of all the characters in the Bible, edited by Paul Gardner).
2. I am responding to "Christian life empowered by the Spirit" – for if it isn't empowered by the Spirit, what hope do we have? Christian life empowered by the Spirit must be maintained. A priest told me the other day that whenever he takes over a parish, he puts maintenance program into action. He said that if this isn't done, parish churches and presbyteries become too hard to restore or renovate. It's a bit like the old saying: "A stitch in time saves nine." So – what about the maintenance of Christian life empowered by the Spirit. What do we do daily, or weekly or monthly to guarantee that we remain close to Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Daily prayer is a start. And it doesn't matter what kind of prayer we choose. We are all so different. A morning offering, a psalm at midday, night prayer before bed, a prayer meeting on Friday evenings – all these and more nourish our spirits!
3. There are many synonyms of "gentle", and these open out and show us that gentleness is within our reach, for we can be: calm, kind, tender, moderate, soft, quiet, light, soothing, peaceful and restful. All these meanings of gentle, or gentleness can give us confidence that we are following Jesus, who is gentle and humble in heart. Recently I received a photograph of two people in love. My friend of sixty years sent it to me by email. Her son was gently resting his left arm on the shoulder of his fiancée manifesting the strength of gentleness. For gentleness is a strength in human beings who are brave enough to manifest this virtue by being calm, kind, soothing, peaceful or restful. We know so well Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd; fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me rest; near restful waters he leads me, to revive my drooping spirit; surely goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life. Calm and kind, tender and soft, quiet, peaceful, soothing and restful. This is the portrait of Jesus, and we are the followers of Jesus.

*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.*