

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 20 August 2023
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Four

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:

21: St. Pius X (Memorial)

22: The Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Memorial).

24: St. Bartholomew (Feast)

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

20: Darwin – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, 1972.

21: Cairns – Episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. James Foley, 1992.

23: Bunbury – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Peter Quinn, 2008.

24: Broken Bay – Episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. Anthony Randazzo, 2016.

23: Broken Bay – Anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral, 1991.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

No anniversaries to mark this week.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7.

Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

Matthew 15:21-28.

Lectio: Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 56, verse 1 and verses 6-7.

Meditatio: Some background so that we understand the text and can make a response.

Chapter 56:1-8 is an oracle spelling out just how freely outsiders can come and worship in the Lord's house. The great biblical scholar, Stuhlmüller, notes that "foreigners living within Palestine were granted limited rights and protection." We are referred to Exodus 22:20, and Deuteronomy 10:19. "Third Isaiah (Isaiah 55:14 to the end) extends full privileges to those living outside the boundaries of the promised land." (cf. New Jerome Biblical Commentary 56:51).

Read the text again, or even a third time, and listen to the Holy Spirit prompting you to respond. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 66

The response is: O GOD, LET ALL THE NATIONS PRAISE YOU.

Psalm 66 is a harvest song, and as usual, I am quoting from the Grail Psalter, 1981 edition: "A thin coating we call the soil covers the whole earth; it binds all nations together in a

common interest; from this they all get their living. But the triumph of a good harvest – or industrial prosperity – should make one think of places where the harvest fails: God is the same God there, and human beings no less his image.” I would add that because of the war in Ukraine, the fruits of the harvest cannot be sent to those who need it. It’s a plentiful harvest blocked by human sinfulness: war!

Lectio: Read the second text, from the Letter of Paul to the Romans, Ch. 11:13-15, 29-32.

Meditatio: Some background to help us understand the text and respond to it.

In chapter 11, verses 1-36, Paul presents Israel’s failure as being partial and temporary.

Verse 13 is important: The Gentiles are not to be presumptuous or haughty because they have accepted Christ; they have no right to look down on Israel. Paul is a Jew and is known as the apostle of the Gentiles (cf. Galatians 2:7-8).

Verses 29-32 reinforce that “the election of Israel is irrevocable in human history, manifested in the favour shown to the Patriarchs.”

Verse 32 confirms that all Jews and Greeks have as groups been unfaithful to God, who makes use of such infidelity to manifest to all of them his bounty and mercy, revealing just what kind of God they have. (cf. 51:110-111).

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

The Gospel Verse is from Matthew 4:23.

JESUS PREACHED THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM
AND HEALED ALL WHO WERE SICK.

Lectio: Read now, the Gospel from Matthew 15:21-28.

Meditatio: Benedict Viviano, O.P. notes that “the woman is doubly marginal: a woman alone in a man’s world; a Gentile and hence unclean.” New Jerome Biblical Comm. 42:100). And so, once again we have the Jews and the foreigners.

The mission of the historical Jesus was to gather all Israel for the end-time events.

Jesus’ reply to the woman’s pleading is terrible: ‘It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the husedogs.’

The Canaanite woman “is quick to pick up the imagery of Jesus reply and twist it to her advantage, yet without arrogance.” She is humble and bold. (Cf. 42:100).

Read the Gospel again and mark words, phrases or sentences to which the Holy Spirit prompts you to respond. I share mine 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 am responding to the call to justice, acting with integrity, and the welcoming of foreigners into the temple of the Lord. The question is: Who do we keep out of our churches, assemblies, prayer groups? When I lived and worked on the

Capricorn Coast (Queensland), there was one man (of German origin), who had an eye for newcomers, and a welcoming heart. More often than not, these newcomers would be there when we met for prayer, and supper afterwards. I remember one lady from Sydney who was broken because her husband had left her and her small daughter. My German friend had offered her accommodation and she accepted it. She remained with him and his family for some time, until she could access financial help and get her daughter into the Catholic Primary School. Our Chaplain here at the Abbey, Fr. Wayne Stanhope, O.Carm., told us in a homily one Sunday, that in Timor-Leste, when Christians gather for prayer, the question they ask is: "Who's not here?" The meaning is, of course, that whoever is not here, is important too. Instead of asking "Who's here?" and counting heads, they ask: "Who's not here?" Let's look at our hearts this week. Who do we shut out, and keep out, by locking the door? Who do we frown upon for daring to come into our church? A mother sitting down the back of the church, was breast-feeding her baby, and was scowled at by another much older woman. The older woman moved to the middle of the church. Same-sex couples are singled out as not being welcome in some parish churches. Yes, we need to call to mind all those who are not welcome in our hearts, in the hearts of our close friends and prayer companions, and in the hearts of our parishioners.

2. My response is to the call not to look down on anyone, no matter what religious persuasion is theirs. Catholics used to use the term "non-Catholic" for anyone who didn't worship in the Catholic Church. When my great-grandmother married a Catholic (she was Church of England), the marriage took place in the presbytery at Glen Innes. She wasn't considered worthy of standing at the altar of the Catholic Church. She was one of millions. We used to call them "mixed marriages". I find it hard to accept that this happened to her. When my mother's best friend's daughter was getting married in an Anglican church, we had to get permission from a Catholic Bishop to go to the wedding. They didn't have to get permission to come to the Catholic church. It always felt as if we were the superior religious race and everyone else was second best. St. Paul says: "God never takes back his gifts or revokes his choice." God shows "mercy to all humankind." Our sister Elizabeth is in a Nursing Home at Shellharbour, a Uniting Church Home. It is just magnificent in its care of all the residents, no matter what religious background they come from.
3. I hate the way Jesus speaks to this poor woman. And whenever I hear this text, I find it abhorrent. With all the commentaries that are available, I still feel indignant towards Jesus. There she is kneeling at his feet, and he says she is just a house dog! How terrible. Matthew has borrowed this from Mark, but Mark softens it with, "Let the children first be fed." I have learnt a hard lesson from this story: Don't give up on Jesus. Be bold in your requests. But always be humble. It's hard to be bold and humble at the same time, but that is the way we must pray. Fr. Kevin Ryan, once the columnist for the Catholic Leader cites Cardinal Basil Hume as a monk with great humility, adding, "To be humble we must be close to the earth, our feet on the ground, being aware of and not afraid of, our own humanity or the humanity of others. Hume made his mark as a man of God. The rector of the Muslim College in London recognized his real humility when he said, 'his diocese is all humanity'. Lord Deedes, a man close to Queen Elizabeth II said that much of his authority is derived from his humility.

*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.*



Then Jesus said to her,
"Woman, you have great faith!
Your request is granted."
And her daughter was
healed at that moment.

Matthew 15:28