

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 27 August 2023
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, 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 Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

28: St. Augustine (Memorial).

29: The Passion of John the Baptist (Memorial).

In the Australian Catholic Church

30: Bathurst: Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Patrick Dougherty, 2010.

Geraldton: Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, (1988).

31: Wagga Wagga: Anniversary of death of the Most Rev. William Brennan (2013)

01 Sept: Toowoomba, and Personal Ordinariate: Patronal Feast, Mary of the Southern Cross, Solemnity.

02: Toowoomba: Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Edward Kelly, 1994.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

27: Social Justice Sunday: *Listen, Learn, Love: A new engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.*

29: International day against Nuclear Testing.

01 Sept: World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation and National Wattle Day.

02: Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act passed by Parliament, 1991.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 22:19-23

Romans 11:33-36

Matthew 16:13-20

***Lectio:* Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 22, verses 19-23.**

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 from first Isaiah has been taken out of a longer text, verses 15-25.

We are presented with two men: Shebna and Eliakim. Shebna was the secretary to King Hezekiah, when those living in Judah were threatened by captivity of death.

Shebna was one of the three persons sent first to communicate with Sennacherib and then with Isaiah. Isaiah assured the messenger that Sennacherib would not

defeat Hezekiah's army. Sennacherib reigned over Assyria and Babylonia from 705-681 B.C. Eliakim held a prominent position in King Hezekiah's kingdom.

He held the key of the house of David.

He was delighted to speak to the commander of the Assyrian forces who were besieging Jerusalem in 701 B.C. They could not reach an agreement for peace. The Assyrians sent a message to Hezekiah claiming that the Lord was on the side of Assyria and sarcastically emphasized the weakness of the position in which Hezekiah now found himself. The hard lesson learnt by Hezekiah was that their only security and source of peace lay in a total dependence upon the Lord of their Covenant.

(These background notes have been summarized from the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, and Paul Gardner's List of all Bible characters).

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 137

The response is: LORD, YOUR LOVE IS ETERNAL,
DO NOT FORSAKE THE WORK OF YOUR HANDS.

Psalm 137 is a prayer of thanksgiving to a faithful God.

Lectio: Read the second text from the Letter to the Romans, Ch. 11 verses 33-36.

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.

This text from Romans is a hymn to the merciful wisdom of God, not just the wisdom of God, but the merciful wisdom of God. Paul exclaims in wonder and gratitude, at the boundless providence of God in arranging the mutual assistance of Jews and Gentiles in attaining salvation. Paul joins Isaiah 40:13 to stress that God is no one's debtor. All comes to us from God's gracious bounty; he needs neither consultants nor research assistants. God is all in all.

In this brief text, what phrases, what sentences, what words are to change your life? I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is Matthew 16:18.

YOU ARE PETER AND ON THIS ROCK, I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 16:13-20

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: This text is Peter's confession of faith. Peter the impetuous disciple! He thought he could walk on water but began to sink beneath the waves and had to cry out to be saved. His faith had failed him. When during the Passion someone recognized Peter as being a follower of Jesus, he denied him three times. This text is linked to the first reading from Isaiah, by one key: *I place the key of the House of David on his shoulder; should he open, no one shall close; should he close, no one shall open. I drive him like a peg into a firm place; he will become a throne of glory for his father's house.*

This text points to Christ, who pitched his tent among us (N.T.Greek), who became a throne of glory for his Father's house.

Let Peter have the last word – You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Peter got it right this time.!

As we read, may we listen to the Holy Spirit playing like a harpist on the fibres of our heart to bring forth the melody of our response. 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. The Word of God is life-changing for me when I respond to it in a practical way.

1. My response is to the hard lesson learnt by Hezekiah, who put his trust in foreign powers and negotiation with foreign powers instead of placing his trust in the God of the Covenant. St. Ambrose of Milan encourages his disciples to prove their faith by their trust in God. Praying with Luke 12:24, he opens out the meaning, with exhortative words: *The fruits of the earth were given to feed all without distinction and nobody can claim any particular rights. He says that: The birds [of] the air do not know famine because they do not claim anything especially for themselves and neither do they have any envy of others. Nothing is more persuasive than a glance at unthinking creatures who have received such a beautiful dress from Providence. Surely, we should be all the more ready to believe that human beings, if they entrust themselves completely to God and free themselves of all their worries, will not lack anything.* (Ambrose of Milan, on the Gospel of Luke). It still remains a challenge – hour by hour, day by day TRUST IN GOD.
2. The merciful wisdom of God is what calls me to respond to this text. Some of the saints who have gone before us and lived in the light of faith, have imbibed the wisdom of God and the mercy it brings. St. John Climacus (3rd century A.D.) offers the following wisdom: *The memory of insults is the residue of anger. It keeps sins alive, hates justice, ruins virtue, poisons the heart, rots the mind, defeats concentration, paralyzes prayer, puts love at a distance and is a nail driven into the soul.* However, if we go down this road, God is waiting at the end of the road and will set us free – his mercy will take us away from such a condition.

3. This is a text that comes to me with mixed emotions. A confession of faith is a serious commitment: You are the Christ the Son of the Living God. If we go back to the Mystery of the Incarnation, we are faced with the fact that Jesus took on our humanity, carrying our sicknesses and sufferings. He became human in order to be there for us, to lead us home. If we take this seriously, then those around us who are followers of Jesus, need to practise deep reverence for other persons who are also followers of Jesus. They too, bear the image of Jesus. *We are going to discover that Jesus has come to completely change our vision, to give us a new vision of the world. The message of Jesus is to announce who God is. Jesus also came to announce that, whatever their culture, whatever their abilities or disabilities, whatever their gender, whatever their religion, every person is precious. Every person is unique, and each is important to God and to humanity. Jesus came to reveal the true face of God; he came to reveal the love of God for every person.* Every face I look at is the face of Christ – that’s a huge challenge and one to contemplate more deeply on this Social Justice Sunday when we are invited by the Australia Bishops to Listen, Learn, Love! We can read their Statement at this link: <https://css.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2023-24-Social-Justice-Statement-Listen-Learn-Love-FINAL96.pdf>

*Lectio Divina is about reading the Sacred Scriptures and reflecting on them from an informed background.
It is allowing the Holy Spirit to play on the fibres of my heart like a harpist, and bring forth the beauty of my response.
In responding to the text, my life is changed more and more into Christ.*

