

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)**  
**PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES**  
**Sunday 10 September 2023**

**23<sup>rd</sup> 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 Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

**In the Liturgy:**

13: St. John Chrysostom

14: The Exaltation of the Holy Cross

15: Our Lady of Sorrows

16: Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian.

17: St. Hildegard. This feast gives way to the 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time.

**In the Australian and New Zealand Church:**

12: Maitland-Newcastle: Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, 1941.

14: Military Ordinariate of Australia – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Geoffrey Mayne, 2003.

16: Melkite Eparchy: Episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. Robert Rabbat, 2011

**In the Social Justice Calendar:**

10: Child Protection Sunday (Australia)

10: World Suicide Prevention Day

11: Terrorist Attacks on the U.S

15: International Day of Democracy.

16: International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer.

18: World Water Monitoring Day.

**LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS**

**The readings are:**

Ezekiel 33:7-9

Romans 13:8-10

Matthew 18:15-20

**Lectio:** Read the first text from the Prophet Ezekiel 33:7-9.

Read it slowly. Be aware of the Holy Spirit placing unction on the message of this text. When your heart responds to a word or a line, or a phrase, this is the Holy Spirit touching your heart and calling forth your response.

**Meditatio:** A little background to the text will help us understand it and make a response.

Ezekiel is one of the major prophets of the Old Testament. He was a prophet of the Babylonian captivity. This means that he was there with his people in captivity and lived through the reality of it. He spoke the word of God to those in captivity. He had visions and dreams about the return of a remnant from Babylon – how the remnant would save Israel. Chapters 33-48 speak about Israel and the last days.

Read the text again and spend time with it as you go about your work and leisure. If you have the time in your week, take your reflection to a seat where you can watch the ocean, the lake, the river, the mountains, your own garden. Just take time to respond. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio 1*.

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 94

**The response is:** O THAT TODAY YOU WOULD LISTEN TO HIS VOICE!  
HARDEN NOT YOUR HEART.

Psalm 94 is a call to praise and worship: a processional hymn. It is frequently used as the “invitation” (Invitatory) to prayer in the Office of Readings or the Monastic Office of Vigils in the very early morning. We all too easily harden our hearts to the word of God. We daydream, thinking of all we have to do, what we’ve forgotten to do, or we yawn and yawn because we are tired, and the Office of Readings is long. The message is clear: harden not your heart if you hear God speaking to you today. And God will not come, stand in front of us and tell us to pay attention. Most likely, God will speak through someone else, or some event, or something we witness.

**Lectio:** Read the Second Mass Reading: Romans 13:8-10

**Meditatio:** A little background to help us understand the text and respond.

Love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbour; that is why it is the answer to every one of the commandments. You must love your neighbour as yourself.

Love. A Gospel of love.

Romans 12:9-21 – “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.”

Let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation, and make justice and peace flourish. (Pope Francis)

Avoid getting into debt, except the debt of mutual love. If you love your brothers and sisters, you have carried out your obligations. (St. Paul).

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

**The Gospel Verse is from 2 Cor. 5:19.**

GOD WAS IN CHRIST, TO RECONCILE THE WORLD TO HIMSELF;  
AND THE GOOD NEWS OF RECONCILIATION HE HAS ENTRUSTED TO US.

**Lectio:** Now read the Gospel text from Matthew 18:15-20

**Meditatio:** Some background to the text which will help us respond.

St. John Chrysostom says of this text: “It is the Church’s pride, it is the Saviour’s command, not to be concerned only about our own welfare, but about our neighbour’s also.” He deepens the understanding of the text when he says: “Christ shed his own blood for our salvation; and Paul, speaking of those who give scandal and wound the consciences of people seeing them, cried out: *Because of your knowledge a weak brother or sister is destroyed – someone for whom Christ died!* So, if our Lord shed his blood for that person, surely it is right for each of us to offer at

least some words of encouragement and to extend a helping hand to those who through laxity have fallen into the snares of the devil.”

It sounds easy, but it isn't easy. And Matthew obviously found it difficult.

1. Have it out with him or her alone, between your two selves. If they listen you have won back your brother or sister.
2. If they do not listen, take two others along with you.
3. If the brother or sister still refuses to listen, take it to the community.
4. If they still don't listen, excommunicate them.

It surely sounds as if Matthew has experienced all this in his community, and he is speaking from experience.

Stand back and ponder on the text – every aspect of it – over a few days. Listen to the Holy Spirit praying within you. This is the true *oratio* of *Lectio Divina*. Allow your spirit to rest and be still. Finally, make your response to the text and keep it in your prayer journal, and in your heart.

**EVANGELIZATIO – this is one's lived response to the texts given us by the Church each Sunday. 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. Do we know what it is to be in exile? Have we ever put ourselves in exile? It happens. When in exile, has anyone spoken the word of God to us? A word of care and gentleness and love? Sr. Stan of Dublin, speaking about the exiled homeless reminds us that when people lose their homes, they lose much “more than an address and a place of comfort and safety; they lose their sense of belonging to a place, to a family and to a community. Since they no longer belong, the homeless feel uncared for. Does anybody care that I have no place to go tonight? Does anyone care that I am hungry or thirsty, does anyone care that I am cold and wet, does anyone care that I am sick? Does anybody care if I die tonight? The homeless person knows that the answer to all these questions is “no”, because they no longer belong and that is the greatest hardship of the homeless: not the cold or wet or violence of street culture, but the feeling of belonging nowhere, with no one to care about their needs.” As I'm sitting here reading this, I am picturing the homeless of the Ukraine - the elderly, the workers, the medical personnel, the children - homeless, exiled. Our prayer for them is our word to them.
2. The Glenstal Bible Missal says in the introduction to this reading: “Love, the new law given by Christ, knows no limits. So, Christians are never freed from the duties laid on them by love.” Love is not easy for any of us. It's hard enough to love those close to us, let alone strangers. Cardinal Basil Hume once exhorted his monks to avoid anything that might wound another, spoil a relationship, cloud mutual joy. And: “Remember that divine love is the prototype of human love; and so, we should have the same attitude towards others as God has towards each one of us.” (Searching for God, page 181).
3. We saw in the Responsorial Psalm that God may speak to us today through someone else. But none of us like a correction, even if it is disguised in flowery

words and irresistible emotional pressure. And we have to be very careful about calling others to turn back to God, unless we are close to them, and they know we love them. Otherwise, we will meet with resistance. St. John Chrysostom, whose feast day occurs this week, says that “...through the grace of God, you are able to admonish others with wisdom.” Wisdom and love are the main ingredients in this whole exercise. If we know that we are off course, it is wise to speak with our Confessors, or our Spiritual Directors. They will speak to us in the context of prayer.

*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.*

