

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)**  
**PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES**  
**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2023**  
**26th 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 Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

**In the Liturgy:**

02: The Holy Guardian Angels.

04: St. Francis of Assisi. Feast day: Pope Francis. World Animal Day.

07: Our Lady of the Rosary.

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

01: New Zealand – day of celebration for the Venerable Suzanne Aubert.

07: Armidale – Patronal Feast.

**In the Social Justice Calendar:**

01: International Day of Older Persons

02: International Day of Non-Violence.

04: World Animal Day

07: World Day for Decent Work.

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

**The readings are:**

Ezekiel 18:25-28

Philippians 2:1-11

Matthew 21:28-32.

**Lectio:** Read the First Reading from the Prophet Ezekiel chapter 18, verses 25-28. 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 shining light on the text 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.

This text is part of chapters 4 to 24, which contain Ezekiel’s prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem. Ezekiel was one of the captives taken to Babylon, hence he spoke the word of God to the Jews in captivity.

Chapter 25 is in “question and answer format, a lively rhetorical effect to imitate a real legal trial.” (Lawrence Boadt, writing in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 20:52). It is a direct hit at anyone, who tends to blame God for everything that goes wrong in their lives. “What the Lord does is unjust.” Have we ever said that? The text

is about people, not about God. People renounce integrity in order to commit sin: the sin of corporate greed, the sin of child molestation, the sin of fraud, the sin of violence.

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

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 24

**The response is:** REMEMBER YOUR MERCIES O LORD.

Psalm 24 is a prayer for protection and forgiveness. It is a psalm consisting of 22 verses. It would be enriching for our *Lectio Divina* if we prayed that Psalm each day throughout the coming week.

**Lectio:** Read the second text from Philippians 2:1-11.

**Meditatio:** Some background to this text.

We know from years and years of reading the scriptures that this text is a hymn used in the early churches, the churches founded by Paul and Barnabas, Peter and Philip. It belongs in Liturgy. Verses 6-11 were known as the Christ-hymn, a hymn about humility and selflessness. Verses 6-8 describe Christ's abasement. Verses 9-11 speak of Christ's exaltation.

Read the text a few times. After pondering over many hours or longer, you will want to make your response. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 2.

**The Gospel Verse is from John 10, verse 27.**

MY SHEEP LISTEN TO MY VOICE, SAYS THE LORD;  
I KNOW THEM AND THEY FOLLOW ME.

Do I recognize the voice of the Lord my shepherd? Or are there too many other false voices in my ear?

**Lectio:** Read the Gospel text from Matthew 21:28-32.

**Meditatio:** This week the Chief Priests and Elders of the people are challenged by Jesus because they do not practise what they preach. Jesus says, "Tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you." These words would have stirred up great anger within them. Jesus reminds them of John's preaching, and praises John for his righteousness (right-wiseness). Again, he presents the tax collectors and prostitutes as those who believed in John's prophecy. He reminds the religious leaders present before him that they did not believe in John, his forerunner.

Albert Nolan, in his classic work "Jesus Before Christianity", reminds us that "the people to whom Jesus turned his attention were: the poor, the blind, the lame, the crippled, the lepers, the hungry, the miserable, sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors, demoniacs, the persecuted and the downtrodden...all who labour and are overburdened, ...the least, the last, and the babes or the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Page 21).

He turns his attention in a different way, towards those who judge all these people, those who oppress all these people, and those who boast of being "better" than all of these. Of this latter group, he calls them hypocrites. Br. John Venard, in his book "Finally, the Battler's God", says it in a simpler way (that is, not so many words). "If we are chasing religious knowledge only to feel superior, to gain power, to get a promotion or a bigger pay packet, then we are heading in the opposite direction to the teachings of Jesus." Br. John refers us to 1 Corinthians 13:1 & 2. "If I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets, but if I have no love, I am nothing."

Read the Gospel text again slowly. Stand back from the text and the commentary and go about your work quietly ruminating. 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. I am responding to the Law as portrayed in the New Testament. For Jesus it is "moral conduct" which takes first place. The religious leaders of that time were imposing laws and rituals on the people, without keeping them in their own lives. Jesus reprimanded them for this. And Jesus took liberties on the Sabbath, allowing his disciples to pluck ears of corn because they were hungry. He set off a clarion call when he said: "The Sabbath is made for humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath." As a Benedictine nun, I have a regulated day with expectations that I will be where I am supposed to be, and to be there on time. The other day I was late for one Office, because I stopped to help an elderly nun who had dropped something and was trying to bend down and get it. In the same way, I am not expected to step over someone who has just had a heart attack, so that I can be on time for the Office. I believe wholly in the words of Jesus. We are not slaves to rules and regulations. They are there to serve us. We are not here to serve them.
2. My response to this text: This hymn is anchored in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Ronald Rolheiser, one of my favourite spiritual writers, quotes Rene Giraud as saying that "the cross of Jesus is 'the single most revolutionary moral event in all of history'." The world measures time by it. The cross of Jesus is a deep mystery and belongs with the deeper things in life: love, fidelity, morality and faith. These things are not mathematical or scientific. They are mysteries whose unfathomable depths always leave room for still more to be understood. We never quite arrive at an adequate

understanding of them.” And this is why the hymn from Philippians was used in the early Christian assemblies. The more the hymn was proclaimed, the more understanding was given to those who proclaimed it. One of our sisters told me recently that there’s a new book available with the title ‘Stop reading and start proclaiming’! Such a hymn as this from Philippians is just like that title – it’s for proclamation, not simply reading as a nice text.

3. My response is to ask myself: Am I like Jerusalem, outwardly observing religious practices, but carrying an inauthentic interior inside me? Mahatma Gandhi calls reverence of others the “golden way”. I have a relationship with him. He was assassinated the year I was born -1948. Reverence of others is about patience, kindness, and non-judgment. Maximus the Confessor, in his “Centuries on Charity”, teaches: “Do you maintain that you are keeping the commandment of love towards your neighbour? If so, why is there so much bitter ill-feeling in you against this or that person? If you are sad when you see someone’s face, that probably means that you are harbouring ill-feeling and we are in a bad way. Sitting quietly helps. Listening to music, having a rest, going to the garden. All these activities are restorative and enable us to start again.

*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.*

