

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 24th September 2023
25th 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:

27: St. Vincent de Paul. (Memorial). Let us pray on this day for all the dedicated members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and all the volunteers who go to the shops several days a week, to sort through second-hand clothing, preparing it for sale.

29: Sts. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, archangels (Feast).

30: St. Jerome, (Memorial)

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

24: World Refugee and Migration Sunday

26: Darwin – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Charles Gauci, 2018.

29: Port Pirie – Episcopal Ordination of the most Rev. Karol Kulczycki, 2020.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

24: World Refugee and Migration Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 55:6-9

Philippians 1:20-24

Matthew 20:1-16

Lectio: Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 55:6-9.

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.

This text is found in the conclusion of the Book of Comfort, (Isaiah 40:1-55:13). Carroll Stuhlmueller draws on a group of great biblical scholars for his commentary on the Book of Comfort. He notes firstly that a radical change is taking place through the words: “Seek the Lord”. He says that “this phrase, which normally invited people to the sanctuary, exhorts them to find the Lord elsewhere.” (Commentary on Isaiah in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary and noted in other commentaries).

Spend time with the text. Ponder on it in the days ahead. Write your response in your prayer journal.
I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm Response: Psalm 144

The response is: THE LORD IS NEAR TO ALL WHO CALL HIM.

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 from Philippians 1:20-24

Meditatio: Some background to help us understand the text.

Paul wrote this letter from prison. He is in a dilemma. Instead of a word-by-word commentary, I am simply turning to the end of Brendan Byrne's analysis of the text: "The pragmatic, but no less worthy consideration of the demands of the apostolate overrides Paul's personal option for death. The conviction about what is 'more necessary' from a pastoral point of view turns into a confidence about survival." In other words, Paul wants to die and go home to God, but at the same time, realizes that there is much work to do yet. He can't just opt out.

And he sees that his situation (every part of it) can be used to preach the Gospel. We would say it differently: "God is in everything." Our life consists in finding God in everyone and every situation.

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 a prayer from Matthew 11:25.

OPEN OUR HEARTS O LORD, TO LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF YOUR SON. (CF ACTS 16:14).

Lectio: Read the Gospel text: Matthew 20:1-16.

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:

From a commentary by St. Augustine: "The denarius stands for eternal life, in which all will have the same share. Although through diversity of merit some will shine more brilliantly than others, in the possession of eternal life there will be equality. What is endless for all will not be longer for one and shorter for another. Where eternal life is concerned there can be no question of more or less for anyone. Whatever may be the individual's degree of glory, each one will live in it eternally. This is the meaning of the denarius." (Augustine was born in Thagaste in Africa and received a Christian education. His writings are voluminous and his influence on subsequent theology immense. He molded the thought of the Middle Ages down to the 13th century. Yet he was above all a pastor and great spiritual writer).

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. My response is to the radical new movement expressed in this text: God is everywhere and in everything. We don't have to seek a church. God is in my home, my garden, my daily walks, or in the good and sometimes bad things that happen to me. I once visited (when I was on our annual holiday), one of Sr. Elizabeth's cousins in Moruya. She had mobility problems, but could get around the house in her wheelchair, and her husband, before his death, had paid for a chairlift, so that she could go down to the front of the house in order to go out with her carers. In the course of my visit, she took me into her kitchen window and we looked out over the back yard where there was one tree at the end of the yard and a garden where her husband once grew vegetables. She said: "Isn't that the most beautiful view you've ever seen?" She was so grateful for what many of us would see as just an ordinary back yard with its one tree. The nurse who comes to me in the evenings told me that her daughter (studying to be a vet), and another student have given a dairy farmer and his wife, a fifteen-day holiday – the first in 25 years. The two young women are minding the dairy farm. They rise at 3.30 a.m. to get to work and they are there again at 4.00 in the afternoon. In the last ten days, they've had a number of mothers who couldn't give birth to their calves without help. It is heavy work to pull a calf out of the womb. I see God in their generosity. The Benedictine Rule says in one chapter that "the Presence of God is everywhere."
2. The message I hear in this reading, is to find Christ in every situation. I need to work harder on this. The prayer of St. Patrick says: "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me..." and so on. I need to make it mine: "Christ in the eyes of every person who looks at me, Christ in the carpark at Woolworths, Christ in the drive-thru at McDonald's, Christ in the girl at the window, who smiles and takes my money, and Christ in the young mother pushing the pram with twins inside. And as for me, I need to witness to Christ when someone is rude to me. Instead, I give them my angry look, or disdainful look. Yes, I have a lot of work to do. I must pray for the grace to help me be Christ in this world. It's no use condemning the leaders of the world who are at war, if I am giving someone close to home, the cold shoulder.
3. I am responding to St. Augustine's commentary. The reading, whenever it comes about, always seems unfair. Those who've worked in the hot sun all day, receive the same wage as the one whose been at it five minutes. Since "the denarius stands for eternal life, in which all will have the same share", that is a welcome outcome. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, in his Catecheses 5:8, says that faith is what guarantees our salvation. It is by the power of faith that we are saved. "Faith is the assent of the soul to a truth. If you want to know what advantage the soul gains from it, listen to what the Lord says: 'Whoever hears my word and believes the one who sent me, has eternal life...' How truly great is the goodness of God to the human race! The holy people of the Old Testament had to struggle for a long time to find favour with God. Jesus

grants it to us in an instant.” So, when I am tempted to act like a Pharisee, I need to remember that the Publican also was entitled to the “denarius”, the gift of eternal life.

*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.*

