

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES

Sunday 3 September 2023

22nd 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:

05: St. Teresa of Kolkata

08: The Nativity of the Mother of God.

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

03: New Zealand – Social Justice Week begins.

03: Hobart – Episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. Julian Porteous, 2003.

03: Sydney – Episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. Anthony Fisher, OP, 2003.

05: Bunbury – Episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. Gerard Holohan, 2001.

06: Hamilton: Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Edward Gaines, 1994.

07: Wilcannia-Forbes: Anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral, 1960.

08: Broome: Anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral, 1963.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

05: International Day of Charity

08: International Literacy Day

09: Anniversary of the Enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27

Lectio: Read the first text from the Prophet Jeremiah, chapter 20, verses 7-9.

As always, it is best to read the Word of God 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: Some background to the text to help us understand it and make a response.

The purpose of this book is to record Jeremiah's unsuccessful exhortations for Judah to repent of idolatry and immorality, in order to avoid Babylonian captivity. Chapter 20 is part of chapters 1-38, which record the time before the fall of Jerusalem.

The few verses we have been given for prayer fit into a longer unit (20:7-18) and speak of Jeremiah's most dramatic interior crisis. Verses 7-10 is an individual lament. Verse 9 presents the prophetic inspiration, - the urge to speak on behalf of God is

irresistible. God is said to be a consuming fire. We are directed to read Exodus 24:17; Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Isaiah 33:14.

(Summarized from the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 18:61 – Jeremiah).

Make your response in the days ahead. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 62

The response is: MY SOUL IS THIRSTING FOR YOU, O LORD MY GOD.

Psalm 62 is a prayer of longing for God. "It is perhaps the warmest and most intimate of the expressions of love for God in the entire Psalter." (Grail Psalter, 1983 edition).

Lectio: Read the Second Reading, from the Letter to the Romans, Ch. 12, Verses 1-2.

Meditatio: A brief explanation to help us understand this text.

This short reading is one of the more well-understood sections of the Letter to the Romans. We can take on board in our own living what is being written to the Romans: "Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do."

It is like opening the door into one text, and watching the new space expand. Changed behaviour. Modelled by your new mind. "This is the only way to discover what God wants" It seems awfully simple. But, is it simple? What do we understand as the behaviour of the world?

Make your response to this text during the coming week.

I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 2.

Gospel Verse: Cf. Ephesians 1:17, 18.

MAY THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ENLIGHTEN THE EYES OF OUR HEART,
THAT WE MIGHT SEE HOW GREAT IS THE HOPE TO WHICH WE ARE CALLED.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 16:21-27.

Meditatio: St. Augustine's commentary on this Gospel text is a very powerful one: *Those who wish to follow me, let them renounce self and take up their cross and come after me.* "Our Lord's command seems hard and heavy, that anyone who wants to follow him must renounce self. But no command is hard and heavy when it comes from one who helps to carry it out. That other saying of Jesus is true: *My yoke is easy and my burden light.* Whatever is hard in his commands is made easy by love. What we love indicates the sort of people we are, and therefore making a decision about this should be our one concern in choosing a way of life. Why be surprised if people who set their hearts on Christ and want to follow him renounce themselves out of love? Who would not wish to follow Christ to supreme happiness, perfect peace, and lasting security? We shall do well to follow him there, but we need to

know the way. The Lord Jesus had not yet risen from the dead when he gave this invitation. His passion was still before him; he had still to endure the cross, to face outrages, reproaches, scourging; to be pierced by thorns, wounded, insulted, taunted, and put to death. The road seems rough, you draw back, you do not want to follow Christ. Follow him just the same. The road we made for ourselves is rough, but Christ has levelled it by passing over it himself.”

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. My response: When I was younger, I loved this reading – all the passion and the fire. Now, I see another side: the cost of speaking the truth. In any organization, there are truth-tellers. We use the term “whistle-blower”. They do what a lot of us would like to do, but we don’t have the courage. Many people suffer for telling the truth. Prophets of our own age suffer for proclaiming the truth and challenging the establishment. The establishment (in whatever institution) is a comfortable place. One contemporary prophet we know of is Sr. Joan Chittister. She has suffered greatly for challenging the established church and encountered much opposition in our own country. And then, there is Pope Francis, with *Laudato Si*, and his inauguration of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. There are many outstanding people in Australia, who have shown us the way of the Gospel, putting their own fears aside and stepping forth as prophets. People who go out into the streets of our towns and cities, bringing comfort of whatever kind to the homeless, are prophetic people, especially if they are following the Gospel of Jesus. One of my sisters looks after a woman with two small children. They live in their car. My sister makes sure they are warm, and cooks for them when she can. They go into her home for a warm shower. These are prophetic actions. They speak of the love of Christ.
2. We each can answer this question differently: what do we understand is the behaviour of the world around us? When we answer that, we will be able to behave differently, with the courtesy of Jesus, the respect for others, service to our neighbours. God wills good for us. God wants fullness of life for us. I read a story recently from a woman who visits a 70-year-old lady called Françoise who is blind and can no longer walk. “All she can do is to cry out a little”, she says. “Most of the time, she lies in her bed. The assistants enter into a relationship with her by giving her a bath and by feeding her. Each time I go into that home, I love to spend a few minutes with her. Her greatest cry is for a relationship. The relationship is not about giving her food or washing her body; it is in the way we give her food and the way we touch her body. We touch her with respect and love. We touch her body because she is the temple of the Holy Spirit...we touch her body as the body of Christ, with respect.” This is the behaviour we are called to: Christ-like behaviour.
3. Many years ago, Fr. Ronan Kilgannon, the hermit of the Kangaroo Valley, preached a homily in our church with the title: pierced are the feet that

follow me. Listening to that homily was life-changing for me. It echoes what St. Augustine has said in his commentary on the Gospel. Fr. Ronan has had cancer since then, but recently gave the annual retreat to the priests of the Wollongong Diocese. I still go back to that homily sometimes at Lectio Divina. "Pierced are the feet that follow me." This is surely the meaning of today's Gospel.

*Lectio Divina is a way of life,
- carrying the Word of God within you as you work or take leisure.
It begins with reading the Word,
then seeking to understand what you have read,
listening to the Holy Spirit praying within you,
allowing God to lead you into divine rest,
and responding in action to what you have
read and prayed over.*



If you want to be a follower of mine, renounce yourself, take up your cross and follow me...