

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)**  
**PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES**  
**Sunday 17 September 2023**  
**24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A.**  
**For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week FOur**

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:**

20: Sts Andrew Kim Tae-gon, Priest, martyr, Pal Chong Ha-sang and companions, martyrs. (Memorial)

21: St. Matthew, apostle, evangelist (Feast).

23: St. Pius of Pietrelcina, priest. (Memorial)

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

17: Maitland-Newcastle, Perpetual Day of Remembrance.

23: Sale: Anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral (1915).

**In the Social Justice Calendar:**

18: World Water Monitoring Day.

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

**The readings are:**

Sirach 27:30-28:7

Romans 14:7-9

Matthew 18:21-35.

**Lectio:** Read the First Reading from the Book of Sirach, chapter 27, verse 30 - chapter 28, verse 7.

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 playing on the fibres of your heart as you read. This is the true “oratio” (prayer) of *Lectio Divina*.

**Meditatio:** Some informed background so that we can honour the text in its original meaning.

In the introduction to the Commentary, Alexander Di Lella states: “...Sirach is one of the rare biblical works that was actually composed by the author to whom it is ascribed. One of the longest books of the bible, Sirach contains the most extensive portion of Israelite wisdom literature to come down to us. It also bears the title “Ecclesiasticus”, which probably means the ecclesiastical (or Church) [book]. This title is found in the New Jerusalem Bible the Revised Standard Version, and the New English Bible. The fact that the whole book was written by one author is strongly supported by scholars. The author was Ben Sira who lived during the third and early second centuries BC. He was a native of Jerusalem. He devoted his life to the study of the

Law, Prophets, and writings and became a highly respected scribe and teacher, who had an academy for young Jewish men. In his travels he came into contact with other cultures and wisdom traditions and acquired 'much cleverness'; he did not hesitate to utilize what he had learned as long as he could make it conformable to his Jewish heritage and tradition. (cf. 32:2 in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary).

The text we are given presents Haman as the victim of his own wrath and vengeance. Read Esther 5:9; Esther 7:9-10.

The duty to forgive others and not to hold grudges or to hate one's neighbour is also a Christian imperative. We know this all too well. We are encouraged to turn to the Gospels and read Matthew 6:12, 13, and 14; Matthew 18: 32-35; Matthew 19:19; Mark 11:25. And that dreadful letter of James chapter 2:13. The Letter of James is the letter that stirs us out of our comfort zones and challenges us more than we want to be challenged. The section on the tongue is particularly relevant!

Read the text a few times. After pondering over many hours or longer, you will want to make your response. Of course, the Holy Spirit may draw forth a response immediately. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 102

**The response is:** THE LORD IS KIND AND MERCIFUL; SLOW TO ANGER AND RICH IN COMPASSION.

Psalm 102 is a psalm in praise of God's love; "The Christian lives joyfully in the paradox that our God is higher than the heavens, and yet is close to us in love and mercy. Our gratitude for his mercy to us merges naturally into a hymn of praise for his greatness; and when we think how great God is, it is not to think how far away God is, but how much God loves us to come down to us [in the Mystery of the Incarnation]. (Grail Psalter, 1963 edition).

**Lectio:** Read the Second Text from the Letter to the Romans, chapter 14: verses 7-9.

**Meditatio:** Christ has set us free to live for God. Christ has enabled us to live for God. Christ has destroyed death. Because Christ became flesh and lived as one of us, our life is a life of service to the God who loves us. We belong to the Risen Lord. "Paul formulates the finality of the passion, death and exaltation of Christ, stressing his sovereignty over the dead and the living who became his as of the resurrection." It is a universal dominion proper to the Lord of all (Cf. 1 Thess 5:10 and Phil 2:11). The Christian, who shares in that redemption through faith and baptism, will eventually share the glory of the risen Lord himself (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:14-15). (Adap. New Jerome Bib. Comm., 51:123)

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

**The Gospel Verse is John 13:34**

I GIVE YOU A NEW COMMANDMENT: LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.

**Lectio:** Read the Gospel text from Matthew 18:21-35.

Pause and ponder.

**Meditatio:** Some helpful background in order to understand the text and make our response.

Of this Gospel text, St. Augustine says: "The Lord puts the parable of the unforgiving debtor before us that we may learn from it. He has no desire for us to die, so he warns us: *This is how your heavenly Father will deal with you, if any of you fail to forgive your brother or sister from your heart.* Take notice now, for clearly this is no idle warning. The fulfilment of this command calls for the most vigorous obedience. We are all in debt to God, just as other people are in debt to us.

There are two works of mercy which will set us free. They are briefly set down in the gospel in the Lord's own words: *Forgive and you will be forgiven, Give and you will receive.* The former concerns pardon, the latter generosity.

Stand back from this text. Later, read it again. Go to your "quiet" place. Allow the Holy Spirit to play on the fibres of your heart like a harpist in order to bring forth the most beautiful melody of your response to God. 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. If I am holding a grudge against someone else, this reading is for me. People who say to me: "Let it go and move on!" don't help me. I know that letting it go and moving on is only possible through the grace of God, through prayer and healing time. The impact of the end of the reading rather blasts out: "Remember the last things and stop hating. Remember dissolution and death and live by the commandments. Remember the commandments and do not bear your neighbour ill-will; remember the covenant of the Most High and overlook the offence."
2. We belong to the Lord. There's no need to wallow in self-pity. Someone is looking after us. We need to remember that. When we are weighed down with troubles and hurts, and persecutions, the Lord is there just beside us. Why not talk to the Lord? We don't have to be in a church to pray to the Lord. The Lord is everywhere: in the garden, the trees, the bush and the oceans and rivers – in all that lives. The Incarnation of Jesus Christ has made sure too that the Lord is in the faces of our sisters and brothers on planet earth.
3. This Gospel puts before me a terrible challenge because there are people who have hurt me on life's journey, and whom I haven't yet forgiven. There is an interesting episode of *Midsomer Murders* called "The Flying Club". The two elderly characters are, for me, the focus of the episode, not the murders: Douglas (Duggie) Wingate, and Molly Darnley, OBE. Duggie had a sister called Elanor, who was killed in 1942, on a stormy night, when her plane crashed. Elanor and Molly were members of the Air Transport Auxiliary, which was responsible to making sure the front lines were supplied with planes. Molly even boasts of flying a Lancaster bomber to its

destination. Duggie Wingate is certain that Molly murdered Elanor by sending her out into the air on a stormy night in 1942. Both women were in love with Henry Darnley which gave Molly an extra incentive for getting rid of Elanor. Duggie can't forgive. He wants the truth to be told, and to be told publicly. He has found an old tin full of Elanor's letters. These letters only strengthen his case. Towards the end, Molly is chosen to unveil a monument in memory of the ATA women pilots. Duggie is so angry he has to be escorted away. In the end, the truth comes out. Molly tells Chief inspector Barnaby what really happened. It was his sister who disobeyed the order to remain at base, and not fly. A meeting is made possible by John Barnaby. Molly attends with all medals and RAF gear. Duggie is also in uniform and decorated with medals. Molly places a medal on the monument in memory of Duggie's sister, and Duggie gives a full military salute out of respect for his sister. Unforgiveness runs deep in many families. And it is often the case that there is no memory of how it started and what it was about! We know one thing: it keeps us chained up. We study the Thirty Years War in European history: 1618-1648! In our family, two great uncles had a 30-year feud! It all begins in our own hearts.

*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.*

