

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 22nd October 2023
29th 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:

28: Sts. Simon and Jude (Feast)

In the Australian and New Zealand Catholic Church

27: Melbourne – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, 1897.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

22: World Mission Sunday

24: Blue Knot Day. Untangling the knot of complex trauma.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 45:1 and 4-6

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Matthew 22:15-21

Lectio: Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 45: v's 1 and v's 4-6. Read it slowly and pause for a while. Then read it a second time. In your prayer journal, note what has spoken to you in this text – a word, a phrase, a sentence.

Meditatio: Understanding the text so we can immerse ourselves in it and respond. Cyrus was King of Persia from 559-530 B.C. He is called by the Lord to free the Jews from their captivity in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon. It was in 605 that his army invaded Judah, captured Jerusalem and took captives to Babylon. We will remember that the Prophet Ezekiel was among those captured. He saw to the spiritual needs of the Jews taken into exile.

The Lord says of Cyrus that “he will subdue nations before him, strip the loins of kings, force open gateways.” The Lord explains to Cyrus that, “It is for the sake of my servant Jacob, of Israel my chosen one, that I have called you by name, conferring a title, though you do not know me.”

Then, the Lord reveals his identity: “I am the Lord unrivalled; there is no other God besides me.

The last three lines are powerful: “Though you do not know me, I arm you so that people will know [all day every day], from the rising to the setting of the sun that apart from me, all is nothing.”

Take time to ponder on this text in the days ahead as you go about your work, rest, recreation. Allow the Holy Spirit to work on the fibres of your heart and bring forth the melody of your response to this text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95

The response is: GIVE THE LORD GLORY AND HONOUR.

Psalm 95 is about the universal reign of God. It echoes the words of the Lord in the first text from Isaiah: "I am the Lord, unrivalled; there is no other God besides me." It is worthwhile praying Psalm 95 each day at prayer.

Lectio: Read the second text from 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5.

Meditatio: This part of *Lectio Divina*, is about explaining the text and reflecting as we hear the explanation (like the monks of the early centuries). Be aware, that we can easily read too quickly, or be distracted. Blessed Columba Marmion says: "We read under the eye of God until the heart is touched and leaps into flame."

Something about Thessalonica: "In 146 B.C., Thessalonica became the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. At the time of Paul, Thessalonica was an important city for economic, commercial and political reasons.

1 Thessalonians is the earliest written book of the New Testament. There are a few points about this letter which capture its essence:

- Our text is part of 1:2-2:12, the first thanksgiving period – thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' reception of the Gospel.
- Paul's thanksgiving is expressed in certain prayers.
- Paul loves them. The proof of the election of the Thessalonian church is their reception of the Gospel.
- Paul emphasizes that the power of the Gospel lies not in the force of his own rhetoric but in the power of the Spirit of God.

These notes are adapted from the New Jerome Biblical Commentary 46:14 and 46:2.

Read the text again slowly. While we are reading, pondering, listening to the Holy Spirit praying within us, we need to note what phrases, sentences or just single words are leaping out at us because the Holy Spirit is causing us to respond. What, in this text, is life-changing for us? I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Philippians 2:15-16.

SHINE ON THE WORLD LIKE BRIGHT STARS;
YOU ARE OFFERING IT THE WORD OF LIFE.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 22:15-21.

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: This Gospel is the first of four units containing controversies with various Jewish leaders – Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees.

“Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” The Jerome Biblical Commentary notes that “this would have been a true question of conscience for Pharisees, but not for Herodians. To pay meant to acknowledge a foreign pagan sovereignty over Israel. The coin in question had Caesar’s head on it – Tiberias Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, great high priest.”

So, Jesus has called their bluff and left the answer with them.

There is a particularly insightful commentary on this Gospel text by Lawrence of Brindisi. This was a man who entered the Capuchins in 1575. He was said to know the Scriptures by heart. From 1602, he served a term as minister general of the Capuchins. As chaplain to the Imperial troops, he led them into battle and to victory against the Turks on two occasions, armed only with a crucifix.

Of Matthew 22:15-21, he says: “In today’s gospel we find two questions: one put to Christ by the Pharisees, and the other put by Christ to them. The Pharisees’ question concerns this world alone, while Christ’s has an entirely heavenly and other-worldly sense. Their question derived from profound ignorance and perversity; his stemmed from perfect wisdom and goodness.”

Lawrence then goes on to talk about human beings made in the image and likeness of God: “If we really want to be God’s image, we must be like Christ, for his is the image of God’s goodness and the perfect copy of his nature.

In today’s gospel the reply, most wise and discreet, by which Christ sidestepped his enemies’ trap shows his great prudence.”

Read the text a number of times and listen to the Holy Spirit playing like a harpist on the fibres of your heart, to bring forth the melody of your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 3.

EVANGELIZATIO: My lived response to the texts with which the Church exhorts me to pray. St. James says, “Be doers of the Word.” And the Book of Deuteronomy tells us that the Word of God is in our hands to do it. The Word of God is life-changing for me when I respond to it in a practical way.

1. My response: I firmly believe that God can use any person, any situation, even one spoken word, to bring about my spiritual maturity – to make me a better Christian. But before that can happen, I need to live with an open mind and an open heart. After a medical appointment last Wednesday, I found myself sitting outside a coffee bar with a group of indigenous men and women. I admired their clothing – beautiful t-shirts designed with Indigenous art. We spoke for a while about the YES/NO vote and I learnt a lot – much more than I had been learning from the news or documentaries. It was a revelation to me that there were these other opinions, and other reasons being given. They spoke to me about the high rate of suicide among Indigenous youth. I was already aware of this, and because it was mental health week, I began to broaden my prayer to include victims of youth suicide, both Indigenous and white Australian. That encounter over coffee had been used by God to call me forth into deeper intercessory prayer.

2. The power of the Gospel lies not in Paul's rhetoric but in the power of the Spirit of God. Perhaps all of us who fancy ourselves as celebrities, or great teachers and preachers could take this truth on board. The power of our teaching and preaching comes from the Holy Spirit. Our task is to open our hearts to that Spirit and allow the fire to consume us. If the Gospel is to reach the hearts of others, it is because of the Spirit, not because of anything we might do. We tend to get ourselves out of proportion, feeling important because we are doing something in our parish or religious community. Cardinal Francis Xavier Van Thuan said: "If, when I preach the Gospel, it makes no impact, perhaps it is because I have not allowed the Holy Spirit to speak."

3. St. Irenaeus said: "The glory of God is humanity fully alive, and the destiny of humanity is the vision of God." I imagine that a human being fully alive is one who bears the image of Christ – the divine image. In her book, "Our Holy Yearnings", Sr. Joan Chittister says that "every one of us is hardwired for God...we live with a sense of continual desire and unending dissatisfaction." And that is because we are made in the image and likeness of God. Rabindranath Tagore said: "In all of our thoughts and actions, we must be conscious of the infinite." St. Irenaeus called it "the vision of God". Thomas Merton says: "The contemplative enters into God in order to be created."

*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.*

