

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 8th October 2023
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A.

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Three

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:

11: St. John XXIII, Optional Memorial.

In The Social Justice Calendar:

10: World Mental Health Day.

World Day Against the Death Penalty

The Australian and New Zealand Church:

8: New Zealand - Day of Prayer to Support Life.

12: Wagga Wagga – Anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral, 1928.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 5:1-7

Philippians 4:6-9

Matthew 21:33-43

Lectio: Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter five, verses 1-7.

Read it slowly and prayerfully, 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 help us understand the text and respond to it.

This text is clear in its meaning, right from the start. The vineyard is the house of Israel. Nigel Hepper informs us that “no biblical plant so typifies the land and its people as does the vine. The first vineyard encountered is that planted by Noah, after the flood (Gen. 9:20).” See Heppers book page 96 – “Illustrated Encyclopedia of Bible Plants”. Isaiah often referred to vineyards. Zechariah saw a fruiting vine as a symbol of peace. A vineyard was a place where one could sit peacefully. (Zechariah 3:10). There is not much sitting in peace in this reading from Isaiah, a text which admonishes Israel for yielding only sour grapes, even though God has done everything possible to make the grapes sweet, to make Israel a flourishing people. God expected justice, but found bloodshed, integrity, but found only a cry of distress.

Read the text over a couple of times, and you will hear the Holy Spirit prompting you to respond. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 79:9, 12-16, 19-20.

The response is: THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD IS THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL.

Psalm 79 is a plea for the return of God's favour.

Lectio: Read the Second Reading from the Letter to the Philippians, ch. 4, verses 6-9.

Meditatio: This text is probably the first text ever written on positive thinking. Thinking is an act. We can choose our thoughts. Marcus Aurelius writing sometime between 162 and 180 said, 'The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts.' St. Paul preceded him.

Stay with this text (forever!) and be aware of the Holy Spirit's unction (anointing) on certain words, phrases, sentences. And if your heart is moved to respond, then note your response in your prayer journal. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse: Cf. John 15:15

I CALL YOU FRIENDS, SAYS THE LORD, BECAUSE I HAVE MADE KNOWN TO YOU EVERYTHING I HAVE LEARNT FROM MY FATHER.

Lectio: Read the Gospel from Matthew 21:33-43.

Meditatio: The message is clear: The vineyard is the house of Israel. The tenants are the people of Israel. The servants are the Prophets of the Old Testament. The "son" is Jesus. They treated Jesus in the same way as they had treated the prophets. They crucified him on Calvary. Jesus asked them: "Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They answered him: "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him when the season arrives." And then, we have the well-known text from Psalm 117: "It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone." (Jesus is the keystone).

And finally: "I tell you then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit." The same message as was in the first reading from Isaiah.

St. Basil the Great says of this text: "...the Lord has raised our thoughts to heaven by the examples of saints of past ages. He has kept them from sinking to the earth where they would deserve to be trampled on, and he wills that the bonds of love, like the tendrils of a vine, should attach us to our neighbours...so that climbing upward like vines growing on trees, we may reach the loftiest heights. He also requires us to allow ourselves to be weeded. Then, freed from the profitless burden of earthly aspirations, that person can breathe again."

Listen for the message you are to hear in this Gospel text, and be still, as you receive the visitation of God into your life through God's Sacred Word. When you feel called to do so, make your response to the text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 3.

EVANGELIZATIO. *Evangelizatio* is about the evangelization of the "self". It is that part of *Lectio Divina* where we make our lived response to the text. First of all, we pray with the text, take time to ponder and understand the text, be still with the text and listen to the response we are being called to make.

1. My response is to see myself as Israel. God took hold of me before I was born and enabled me to grow up in a Christian family, a family full of faith. Now, as a woman in my 70s, I still struggle with negative thoughts and feelings. My spiritual director explained to me that often this negativity is on the surface, and deep down, where choices are made, I am still a follower of Christ – a Christian. I hope she is right. The thing I don't want in my life is hypocrisy. There **are** hypocrites, and they are intolerable. Maximus the Confessor wrote that: 'Do we ...require others to carry crushing weights while we do not touch them even with a finger? Is it not possibly true that we too look for the best seats at banquets, the front places in meetings and like to be called experts?' I was at a financial meeting three days ago, and one woman seemed to be quite the expert on roof tiles and roofing. People love being called experts! So, this reading is for me and for all who are turning our backs on Christ, by yielding sour grapes. And we know what the outcome of this will be. Are we sure we want to continue like this?
2. Our friend William Shakespeare, in Hamlet, wrote: "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." How true. How very true. The English poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, who died in 1822, wrote in defence of poetry: "A single word even may be a spark of inextinguishable thought." So, a single negative word may be the spark which fuels inextinguishable [negative] thought, and vice versa. William James (1842-1910) shares: 'A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices. If someone says to you, "Let me think about that, and I'll get back to you", beware! That person has time to rearrange his or her prejudices, or to get his or her way.'
3. I am responding to the need to allow myself to be weeded (by God!). Weeds grow by night and by day. I despise onion weed. It is so hard to get rid of, and one has to be able to get down on one's knees to dig it out. For me, onion weed is what Wayne Simsic calls "unwelcome chaos". (Garden Prayers, page 41). He sees weeds as "the parts of my life that are a source of frustration, guilt, discomfort, and embarrassment." If I can be rid of these, I can breathe freely. First of all, I need to pray for God's grace to wet the soil of my heart, so that they are more easily pulled out.

*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.*

