

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 26th November 2023
Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe
and final Sunday of the Liturgical Year.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Two

Before moving into prayer with the Sacred Scriptures, let us look at the week ahead in the Liturgy, the Social Justice Calendar, the Australian and New Zealand Church.

In the Liturgy:

30: St. Andrew (Feast)

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

29: Parramatta – Anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral, 2003.

In The Social Justice Calendar:

29: International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

30: Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Chemical Warfare

01: World AIDS Day

02: International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17.

1 Corinthians 15:20-26.

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46.

Lectio: Read the first text from the Prophet Ezekiel, chapter 34, verses 11-12 and 15-17.

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.

Ezekiel is one of the major prophets of the Old Testament, along with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel. As we know, he was a prophet of the Babylonian Captivity, taken into exile with his own people. His visions and predictions were about the fall of Jerusalem (586 B.C.), the punishment of other nations and the return of a remnant to Israel.

It is one of those beautiful texts which we don't want to leave – until we get to the last sentence: "As for you, my sheep, the Lord says this: I will judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and he-goats." It is suggested in one commentary that Matthew 25 (today's Gospel), is dependent on this text – the last judgment.

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 22

The response is: THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; THERE IS NOTHING I SHALL WANT.

Psalm 22 is described as a psalm of confidence in the Grail Psalter: “The trust of the Psalmist is so complete that one might think the New Testament had nothing to add. But in the course of years the Shepherd-Lord took flesh and died for his sheep – thus he led the way through a dark valley to pastures beyond. We follow without fear. And if we should falter, God takes us home in his arms (Luke 15:5). To such a shepherd we sing our hymn.” (Grail Psalter, 1973, page 48).

Lectio: Read the Second Reading from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 20-26 and 28.

Meditatio: In the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, the commentary for this Letter has been written by Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, an Irish Dominican priest, and author of seven books. Of the text we are given, he says: “Human logic here gives way to the passion of the prophet [Paul] proclaiming a conviction that transcends reason and experience. What was done for Christ can be done for others, and God’s goodness indicates that it will. The parallel between Adam and Christ is founded in the ideas of belonging (to Adam by nature; to Christ by decision) and causality (through Adam who infected society with sin and death; through Christ who gives life).

The general resurrection will take place at the second coming of Christ (1 Thess. 4:16). Having been exalted to the status of Lord through his Resurrection, Christ must continue his work by destroying the hostile powers who hold the living captive, and then death, the master of the dead.

Verse 28: Here we need to read between the lines: “Within history Christ exercises the sovereignty of God, but once history comes to its end, there will be no more struggle and so Christ will give into the hands of his Father, the authority given him for his mission of salvation. (Adapted from the New Jerome Bib. Comm. 49:68). It is called Paul’s Thesis.

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 *Evangelization 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Mark 11:10

BLESSINGS ON HIM WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!
BLESSINGS ON THE COMING KINGDOM OF OUR FATHER DAVID!

Lectio: The Gospel is from Matthew 25:31-46.

Meditatio: The patristic commentary this week is from the Roman priest, Hippolytus (c. 170-236). It is a beautiful and even subjective commentary, but nevertheless meaningful. “The Son of Man will gather together all nations. He will separate people one from another, as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The sheep he will place at his right hand, the goats at his left. Then he will say to those at his right: *Come, my father’s blessed ones...Come, you lovers of poor people and strangers. Come, you who fostered my love, for I am love. Come, you who shared peace, for I am peace. Come, you who kept the seal of faith unbroken, who were swift to assemble in the churches, who listened to my*

Scriptures, longed for my words, observed my law day and night, shared in my suffering, come and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

The second part of the Gospel we know well: those who wanted to know when they had done such good deeds heard the words: "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me."

The text finishes with Christ the King, dealing with those on his left! They go to eternal punishment, and those on the right go to eternal life.

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 recall the times of my life when I have been scattered, in the mist and darkness, and been rescued by someone whom God has obviously sent with the gift of kindness. Fr. Michael Casey comes first to mind for his interest and enthusiasm for my history of our community. Fr. Paul Gurr also comes to mind as another person who has been with me through a very dark time in the last five years. And then there is a Presentation Sister with whom I lived, and who brought me back from the brink of despair with a cup of tea and an Arnott's milk coffee biscuit! It was her kindness that saved me. She has since died from cancer, but she will live forever in my memory. God has surely shown me "where to rest", had bandaged my wounds, and made me strong through those family and friends who have been there for me in the mist and darkness.
2. This text restores hope within me. I have known a number of people who ask me if there is anything beyond death, is there anything to hope for? One friend (who writes scripts for films), said to me that he doesn't want to die unless all his dogs will be there with him, or will be there waiting for him. Another friend, one who had worked with us on the relocation and building of the Abbey, didn't believe that there is anything after death. When he came close to death (from cancer), he said to his wife one morning, "I don't know how to die." A few minutes after that, he passed away, with his wife by his side. One of our Easter antiphons helps me: "A flame burns within our hearts, Jesus Christ abides with us, His mystery dwells with us, death opens out into glory, alleluia." Of all the hymns of the Liturgical year, the Easter hymns are the most glorious. And we must not lose sight of the word "mystery". It is all MYSTERY.
3. I am always challenged by the fact that there is no in-between in this Gospel. There are those who go to eternal life, and those who go to eternal punishment. So, what I am called to is a permanent change of heart. The words of Julian of Norwich come to me: "Would you know your Lord's meaning...Learn it well. Love was his meaning. Who showed it to you? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did he show you? For love. Hold fast to this and you shall learn and know more about love, but you shall never know nor learn about anything except love for ever." St. John Chrysostom says: "Would you honour the Body of Christ? Then do not despise his nakedness; do not honour him here in church clothed in silk vestments and then pass him by unclothed and frozen outside. Remember that he who said, 'This is my Body' and made

good his words, also said, 'You saw me hungry and gave me no food', and 'in so far as you did it not to one of these, you did it not to me.'

*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.*

