

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 5th November 2023
31st 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:

09: The Dedication of the Lateran Basilica (Feast)

10: St. Leo the Great, Memorial

11: St. Martin of Tours (Feast). It is also Armistice Day. We observe a minute's silence at 11.00 a.m. (The eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month – Lest We Forget).

In the Australian and New Zealand Catholic Church:

08: Rockhampton: Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Bernard Wallace, 1990.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

06: International Day for Preventing Environmental exploitation in War. We need this day more than ever!

10: World Science Day

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Malachi 1:14-2:2, 8-10.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-9, 13.

Matthew 23:1-12.

Lectio: Read the first text from the Prophet Malachi, chapter 1, verse 14 – chapter 2, verse 2 and verses 8-10.

Meditatio: Who was Malachi? Malachi was the last prophet of the restoration period, the period when the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem from Babylon. Malachi proclaims that the sufferings of God's people were the result of their unfaithfulness and he foresees the coming of the Messiah who would finally provide a passage from sin/death/darkness to the light of Easter morning.

The priests are the ones who receive the anger of God: "I will send the curse on you and curse your very blessing. You have strayed from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your teaching. You have destroyed the covenant of Levi... you have shown partiality in your administration." Perhaps this last accusation is the most serious. For, within the eyes of God all are equal – no single person is more important than another person. Showing partiality in administration is a form of class distinction, or religious distinction and snobbery. Jesus reprimanded the Scribes and Pharisees for thinking they were better than the rest of humankind.

Read the text again and maybe a third time. Read it slowly, marking some of the words, phrases, sentences which may cause you to stop and recognize that the Holy Spirit is calling you to a word, a phrase, a sentence, or to the whole text. Ponder for a while. Maybe a day or more! Make your response.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 130

The response is: IN YOU LORD, I HAVE FOUND MY PEACE.

In the Grail Psalter, Psalm 130 is marked as a song of serenity: a pilgrimage song. It is “a perfect expression of the childlike trust and peace which should be the attitude of the children of God.”

Lectio: Read the second text from 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9, 13.

Meditatio: Some background to help us understand the text and make a response. Paul’s tenderness towards the Thessalonian community is very evident: “Like a mother feeding and looking after her own children, we felt so devoted and protective towards you and had come to love you so much, that we were eager to hand over to you not only the Good News but our whole lives as well.”

He praises the Thessalonians for accepting God’s message, which “is still a living power among you who believe it.”

Gospel Verse: Matthew 23: 9 & 10.

YOU HAVE ONE FATHER, YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN;
YOU HAVE ONE TEACHER, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Lectio: Read the Gospel from Matthew 23:1-12.

Meditatio: Some background to the text to help us respond with understanding. The scribes and Pharisees get a verbal bashing from Jesus. They increase the religious obligations of the ordinary person while they don’t keep the same obligations. The Gospel of Matthew dwells on how the life and ministry of Jesus show him to be the Messiah, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. (Read the first text again – from Malachi).

This week, a commentary from the writings of Paschasius Radbertus is available for us. Who was Paschasius Radbertus (785-860)? He was brought up by the nuns of Notre Dame at Soissons, after being left abandoned on their doorstep. He received the monastic habit at Corbie and was the confidant of two successive abbots. He was a prolific writer and is noted especially for the part he played in establishing the Catholic doctrine on the Eucharist. He also wrote lengthy commentaries on Matthew and on the forty-fourth Psalm.

About this Gospel text, he writes: “Christ is called master, or teacher, by right of nature rather than by courtesy, for all things subsist through him. Through his Incarnation and life upon earth we are taught the way to eternal life. Our

reconciliation with God is dependent on the fact of his being greater than we are. Yet, having told his disciples not to allow themselves to be called master, or to love seats of honour and things of that kind, he himself set an example and was a model of humility. It is as though he said: "Even as I do not seek my own glory so neither must you love to be honoured above others, or to be called master. Look at me: *The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life for many.* The desire to be served comes from the supercilious attitude of the Pharisees; the desire to serve comes from the teaching of Christ. Those who canvass for positions of honour are the ones who exalt themselves; and similarly, it is those who of their own accord humble themselves, who will be exalted by the Lord."

Read the Gospel a few times. Take time for quiet and listening to the Holy Spirit praying within you. After a while (day or days), make your response to this text. I share mine 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.

1. I am responding to the very notion of "partiality" in the administration of the Catholic Church, other churches and religious associations. God loves the person next to me just as much as God loves me. It is hard to accept this at times. Homelessness within Australia has risen to greater statistics than ever before. Not even in the Great Depression were there as many women and men living on the streets as there are now. Can our churches do more? God comes down heavily on the priests of the Old Testament who have profaned the covenant of Levi and shown partiality in their administration. "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why then, do we break faith with one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?" In the early stages of my doctoral thesis, I was given the privilege of meeting Fr. Edmund Campion. It was a meeting which I will never forget. All his experience was cloaked in the simplicity of his humility. Later on, I read his book "A Place in the City", which I've read three times since then. When he lived at St. Mary's Cathedral Presbytery, it seems that the door was open to everyone who needed his care, wisdom, ministry, a drink or a meal. For Fr. Campion, those who called at the Cathedral Presbytery were God's children in need. There was certainly no partiality.
2. I am responding to the words "God's message which is still a living power among you who believe it. A living power! God's message is a living power within us when we believe it. What great things can be achieved with that "living power"! One of the paintings still for sale in our Fluid Art Gallery is called "I saw a River" and has been painted by Oblate Anne Fry. It has a 'living power' and transports me to a poem written by Kevin MaGuire, a monk of Downside Abbey, England: *Deep in the valleys the River is born. Yet the flame burns on with a holier light, for the flame is the flame that I found in my breast, and I have plunged*

into the River of Night, and the River will carry me into the West, and the waters have drowned every sorrow and care, and the surge of the River has set me free, for the rivers flow in from here and there and burn with a beauty beyond compare and a loveliness we can hardly bear...the River in Anne's painting is a 'living power'. And the river of life, the waters given to us by God are 'living power'. The living power of God's message is all around us. We only have to listen.

3. It seems that things in the 8th century were just as troublesome as they are today. Preferential treatment, bias, prejudice, nepotism, partiality, favouritism – none of these things should dominate in the life of a Christian. Radbertus wrote this commentary before 860. Nothing's changed. The homelessness and poverty in Australia today are surely caused by preferential treatment of some at the expense of others; favouritism of some and rejection of others; the preferential treatment of men over women; and the favouring of the rich over the poor.

Lectio Divina is about reading the Sacred Scriptures and reflecting on them from an informed background.

*It is allowing the Holy Spirit
to play on the fibres of my heart like a harpist,
and bring forth the beauty of my response.*

*In responding to the text,
my life is changed more and more into Christ.*

