

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 10 December 2023
Second Sunday of Advent, Year B
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Two

Before beginning prayer with the sacred texts, let us take a look at the week ahead in the Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

13: St. Lucy Memorial

14: St. John of the Cross (Memorial)

The Social Justice Calendar:

10: Human Rights Day

Anniversaries in the Australian and New Zealand Catholic Church

10: Palmerston North: Anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral, 1988.

12: Armidale – Anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral, 1919.

Hobart: Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Eric D’Arcy, 2005.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

Lectio: Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 40, verses 1-5 and 9-11.

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 that we can immerse ourselves in it and make our response to it.

In reading this text, we are reading the beginning of the Book of Comfort, also called Second Isaiah, or Deutero-Isaiah. According to the Biblical scholar Stuhlmueller, the theme of Deutero-Isaiah is the New Exodus. It is sustained throughout the text.

Chapter 40:1-11 is about the commissioning of the prophet. It is a pity the whole text hasn’t been left as a whole instead of deleting verses 6-8.

The very first sentence contains the command that the prophet must hear and obey: **CONSOLE MY PEOPLE.**

Stuhlmueller notes that: the opening lines of this text combine:

(a) the scene of God’s heavenly council. (1 Kings 22:19-23; Isaiah 6).

(b) The literary style of prophetic commissioning as in Isaiah 6 or Jeremiah 1.

(c) The religious motif of the new exodus; and

(d) preparations for the Babylonian New Year, with the paving of the *via sacra* (sacred road) and triumphant processions to the capital. (e) the messenger genre and the motif of God as Shepherd in vv. 9-11 (Cf. Jeremiah 31:10; Ezekiel 34; Psalm 2).

These notes have been summarized from Stuhlmüller's commentary in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 21:9.

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 84:9-14.

The response is: LORD, LET US SEE YOUR KINDNESS, AND GRANT US YOUR SALVATION.

Psalm 84 is a song of pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Verses 7-8 are the ones that "may envision the pilgrimage to Zion as a sort of 'new exodus' whose goal is Zion". We are referred to Isaiah 35:6-10, 41:18, 43:19-20.

Lectio: Read the second text from 2 Peter 3:8-14

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.

About *LECTIO DIVINA*, Blessed Columba Marmion says: "We read under the eye of God until the heart is touched and leaps into flame."

The author of this letter is dealing with scoffers! When is God coming? Why does God delay? Is God coming at all?

Verses 8 and 9 are what one might call overloaded with riches. The author says that God's delay should not be seen as an argument against theodicy, but a divine forbearance to sinners, a theme regularly found in the Scriptures (Wisdom 12:10; Romans 2:4). If God delays, God is allowing time for conversion. And, with God "a day can mean a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day." If God delays, it is because God doesn't want anyone to be lost. God wants all to be brought to change their ways. The author of this letter warns his people that the Lord will come unexpectedly and therefore they "should be living lives without spot or stain so that God will find you at peace."

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 Luke 3:4, 6.

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE STRAIGHT HIS PATHS:
ALL PEOPLE SHALL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Mark 1:1-8.

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: The focus of Mark's theology is the focus of Jesus' theology – the kingdom of God. (Daniel Harrington, S.J.). 1:1-11 is simply the Prologue of the Gospel.

Mark 1:1-3 "relates the promise of the Old Testament prophets to John the Baptist as the one who prepares the way (1:4-8), and to Jesus the Lord as the one who is to come (verses 9-15). Cf. Daniel Harrington, S.J. in 41:6 – Commentary in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary.

There is a Patristic Commentary by Origen (183-253), which might fill out the background a little more. Origen wrote: "Let us examine the scriptural texts foretelling the coming of Christ. One such prophecy begins with a reference to John the Baptist: *The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.* What follows however, applies directly to our Lord and Saviour, since it is by Jesus rather than by John that *every valley has been filled in.*

You have only to recall the kind of people you were before you put your faith in the Lord, to see yourselves as deep valleys, as pits plunging precipitously into the lowest depths. But now that the Lord Jesus has come and has sent the Holy Spirit in his name, all your valleys have been filled in with good works and the Holy Spirit's fruits. Love no longer tolerates the presence of valleys in your lives; if peace, patience, and goodness find a home in you, not only will each of you cease to be a valley but you will actually begin to be a mountain of God."

(Origen was considered to be one of the greatest thinkers of ancient times. He became head of the catechetical school of Alexandria at the age of eighteen. His life was entirely devoted to the study of Scripture, and he was also a great master of the spiritual life).

Cf. "Journey with the Fathers, Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels, Year B, edited by Edith Barnecut, O.S.B. page 13.

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 wish all those who are the recipients of hatred, revenge, violence, and torture, could hear the words of this text: "Console my people, console them, says your God." The whole world needs consoling at the moment. The hostages in Gaza, the Ukrainians in exile, the people of Palestine and Israel, who don't want this war (and there are many who don't want it). They need consoling. So, I will sit quietly each day and bring them all into my heart's prayer and give out the energy of God's consolation. And I will ask God to feed his flock in Gaza, Palestine, Israel, Ukraine and Russia, gathering the lambs in his arms, little lambs who are mere children, holding them against his breast and leading to rest their parents and grandparents.

2. People ask: Why doesn't God show His hand and stop the ceaseless killing of human beings? Where is God? What's the delay? Is God coming or isn't he? Fr. Kevin Ryan, who wrote a column in the Catholic Leader, from 1994 until his death in 2011, would say that this question is one of those painful questions. "No number of reasons why will make any sense, but I can help you to decide what to do now. The question which has been around since the beginning of the world is: Why suffering and imperfection? The continuing asking of the question "why" seldom brings answers that satisfy. The risk is that the next step is anger that can be driven deep. Anger can eventually flare into violence." And so, we are back doing what we abhor the most: revenge, violence, war and so on. The Day of the Lord is presented to us in this reading. Instead of waiting for all the violence to cease, why don't we await with eagerness the "Day of the Lord". In so doing, we will be much more prepared because of our *Lectio Divina* with the sacred scriptures. The Day of the Lord is usually the turning point in our lives. It is different for each one of us.

3. God is Love and "God no longer tolerates the presence of valleys." I have never heard this interpretation before. It fills me with joy. Peace, patience and goodness will make a mountain of me, not a valley. Brother John Venard once wrote: "It is quite possible that you are the only way God has of communicating with certain people...the love, inner peace, confidence and happiness that others see in you, will communicate God's message to them." He goes on to say that "Do you know that when you are with someone, 70% of communication is non-verbal. What you are comes across more than what you say. Thus, your aim is to become a God-person and help God" (to reveal his Divine love to others). (A Journey with a Battler's God, page 85).

*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.*

