

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 17 December 2023
Third Sunday of Advent, Year B – Gaudete Sunday
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 the Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

No Memorias, Feasts or Solemnities this week.

December 17 marks the beginning of the 'O' Antiphons for the Magnificat at Vespers.

The Australian and New Zealand Church:

17: Wagga Wagga – Episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. Mark Edwards (2014).

The Social Justice Calendar:

Nothing to note this week.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 61:1-2; 10-11

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8 and 19-28.

Lectio: Read the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 61, verses 1-2 and 10-11. Read the sacred text slowly and prayerfully, really listening as you read aloud. This is about our on-going conversion.

Meditatio: Understanding the text so that we can immerse ourselves in it and make our response.

This very rich text is from third Isaiah, also known as Trito Isaiah. 61:1-3 narrates the anointing of the Prophet. Cf. Luke 4:16-21. Here Jesus announces that the Messianic era had begun. There are many points of contact with the earlier major servant songs:

Soliloquy, (monologue) as in the second and third Song.

Spirit anointing (Is 42:1)

Mission of mercy (42:2-3 and 6-7)

Year of favour (49:8)

These contacts highlight the unique importance of the major servant songs.

The servant songs of Isaiah are: 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12.

It is enriching for *Lectio Divina* to take time and pray with each of these texts.

(I have made this summary from the New Jerome Biblical Commentary 21:59).

Read the text a few times over the week ahead and be aware of the Holy Spirit praying within you and bringing forth your response. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: The *Magnificat*.

The response is : MY SOUL REJOICES IN MY GOD.

Lectio: Read the second text from St. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, Ch. 5, v's 16-24.

Meditatio: There are some significant notes about this text:

Firstly, it consists of general exhortations on the Christian way of life.

Vs 16: Be happy at all times. (Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Read Galatians 5:22 & Romans 14:7).

Vs. 17: pray always. (Read Luke 18:1 and Ephesians 6:18. Prayer proceeds from the Spirit (Rom. 8:15-16).

Give thanks: thanksgiving and prayer are closely associated. (Read Philippians 4:6, Colossians 2:7 3:9-10 and 3:15-17).

19-22: these verses consist of exhortations on charisms and discernment.

The discernment of charisms is itself a charismatic activity.

Verse 23 begins a new section: closing wishes and greetings.

God of peace (vs. 23) is a traditional epithet (Judges 6:24) taken over by Paul. Read Romans 13:33 and 1 Cor. 14:33 to see how Paul has used this epithet.

All blessings come from God, including ultimate sanctification (4:1-8).

The second part of the prayer speaks of ultimate salvation (at the Parousia).

Spirit, soul and body designate the whole human person, under one or other aspect.

Verse 24 is an affirmation of God's fidelity. (Notes from the NJBC 36: 38-40.)

Take time to ponder on this text and all the associated texts. The Holy Spirit will draw us to certain words, phrases, sentences which call us forth and challenge us. Note these in your prayer journal. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Isaiah 61:1 (Luke 4:18).

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME;

HE SENT ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text: John 1:6-8 and 19-28.

Meditatio: Some background to help us respond.

This Sunday, the Commentary on the Gospel is by John Scotus Erigena (810-877).

He writes: "Into the theological plan of his gospel, John the Evangelist draws John the Baptist; deep calls to deep at the utterance of divine mysteries.

We hear the Evangelist relating the story of the forerunner, the man whose gift it was to know the Word as he was in the beginning, speaking to us of the one who was commissioned to go ahead of the Word made flesh.

He distinguished the witness from the one to whom he testified, the messenger from him who sent him, the lamp burning in the night, from the brilliant light that filled the whole world, the light that dispelled the darkness of death and sin from the entire human race."

It is a beautiful commentary by Erigena. His passion flows out of his words as he lights the fire and watches it envelop the world. The fire is the Divine fire of the Word made flesh on that first Christmas night.

Read the Gospel again. Take quiet time. 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 gives me each Sunday for my formation as a Christian. 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. My response: I am called to respond to the image of the earth and the garden and the fresh things. I am a gardener and I know that one does not plant seeds and leave it at that. The earth needs moisture and fertilizer and protection. And so does integrity and praise. Integrity is uprightness, honesty, truthfulness. If I say that someone is a person of integrity, I mean that person is honest, and someone I can trust and respect. Our text says: “for as the earth makes fresh things grow, and a garden makes seeds spring up, so will the Lord make both integrity and praise spring up in the sight of the nations.” I think it is honest to say that we don’t get much example of integrity from our politicians, from mining magnates and corporate giants. Is there any integrity? Is there any justice? Yes, there is integrity and justice in many good and kind people, those free of hatred and racial prejudice. Not everyone is out to trample on the needy and ignore the homeless. Recently I saw on the news some good people trying to save the homeless animals in Gaza. One puppy had been kicked so badly that it didn’t survive. War affects animals as well as humans. Human beings, animals – all are created by God, so all are deserving of respect. In Biblical literature, integrity means doing what is right by others. Justice includes care of the poor, namely widows and orphans. And at the end of the day, I know that the Lord depends on me to be a person of integrity and justice. If I don’t practice integrity and justice, I can’t expect it of anyone else.
2. I am called to respond to: “Be happy at all times.” And that happiness (joy) is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It doesn’t mean smiling, laughing, or making jokes incessantly. People who live like that may be blotting out real life! They may be pretending that the dark side of life doesn’t exist. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and it is most often accompanied by fidelity to prayer, and peace which comes from prayer. I recently shared in the joy of my oldest friend (we were at school together). She has become a grandmother. I received the photographs attached to emails, of her newly born granddaughter. In my little book of “joy” quotes, I found Caroline Norton’s words: “Of all the joys that lighten suffering earth, what joy is welcomed like a new-born child?” Soon we will be welcoming the Son of God as a new-born child and singing: “Joy to the world.”
3. My response: For me, Christmas is about Divine Light, and the power of Divine Light to dispel the darkness of the world. Teilhard de Chardin captures the power of light when he says: “Over there, on the horizon, the sun has just touched with light the outermost fringe of the eastern sky. Once again, beneath the moving sheet of fire, the living surface of the earth wakes and trembles, and once again begins its fearful travail...Grant me the remembrance and the mystic presence of all those whom the light is now awakening to the new day.” (Mass Upon the Altar of the World).

*Lectio Divina is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
We read the text from the sacred scriptures.
We take time to understand the text by way of a commentary.
We respond to the text and listen to the prayer of the Holy Spirit within us.
Such a response is taking place from the beginning of our prayer.
The Spirit will place unction on the word/words we are meant to hear.
We ponder as we go...
Like the Mother of God, we treasure all this in our hearts.*



Image by Susan Daily ibvm