

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)**  
**PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.**

**Sunday 3 December 2023**

**First Sunday of Advent, Year B**

**For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week One**

Advent comes from the Latin “adventus” meaning “coming”. The first clear references to the season in the West (Rome) came from the latter half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The First Sunday of Advent is also the day on which the new liturgical year begins.

The **Year B** Sunday cycle of readings begins today. The daily Mass readings are from **Year 2**.

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:**

7: St. Ambrose (Memorial. Evening Prayer 1 of the Immaculate Conception.

8: The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

**In the Australian and New Zealand Church:**

04: Brisbane – Anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral, 1989.

08: Perth: Anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral, 2009.

Port Pirie, Wellington – Patronal Feast.

Sale Episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. Gregory Bennet, 2020.

**In the Social Justice Calendar:**

03: International Day of People with Disabilities.

09: International Anti-corruption Day.

**LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS**

**The readings are:**

Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1,3-8.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9.

Mark 13:33-37.

**Lectio:** Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 63:16-17; 64:1,3-8.

Be aware of the way you handle your bible. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep awareness. This text is given to all of us on this particular Sunday for our formation as Christians. Think of the Sacred Scriptures as a school from which we never graduate. We are learners until the close of our lives on earth.

**Meditatio:** Some notes on the background of this text may help us to both understand it and make a response.

There is a lot of detail in the commentaries I have consulted, so I am opting for simplicity. The first six lines consist of proclamation, question, and a plea for the Lord’s return. The following six lines

contain that well-known verse of the Advent Liturgy: “Oh, that you would tear the heavens open and come down – at your Presence the mountains would melt.” Next there is a return to proclamation: “No ear has heard, no eye has seen any God but you act like this for those who trust him. (The emphasis would surely be on “trust”).

A statement begins the next section before a lament: “You guide those who act with integrity and keep your ways in mind. You were angry when we were sinners; we had long been rebels against you, we were all like unclean people, all that integrity of ours like filthy clothing.”

And then, in that sinful state: “We have all withered like leaves and our sins blew us away like the wind. No one invoked your name or kept vigil to catch hold of you. You gave us up to the power of our sins.

And in the light of all that, there is the proclamation of faith at the end: “And yet, Lord, you are our Father, we the clay, you the potter, we are all the work of your hands.”

Read the text again a couple of times. Stay with the text. Ponder on it for a day or more. However, if you are aware of the Holy Spirit calling forth your response to the text, note it down. When the Holy Spirit prays within you or pours unction on a text and calls you forth, this is the true “prayer” (*oratio*) of *Lectio Divina*. (*Lectio, oratio, meditatio, contemplatio, ruminatio, evangelizatio* – these Latin terms describe the prayer rooms of *lectio divina*. We move from one room to the other, spending as much time as we are called to spend in each room).

I share my response to the first text in *Evangelizatio 1*.

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 79:2-3, 15-16, 18-19.

**The response is:** LORD, MAKE US TURN TO YOU.

LET US SEE YOUR FACE AND WE SHALL WE WILL BE SAVED.

Psalm 79 is a plea for the return of God’s favour. There is a lot of interesting background in the Grail Psalter: “The theme is much the same as in the preceding psalm, but the scene shifts to the northern kingdom where the axe fell first. Samaria was overrun in 721 BC and colonized with a mixed population of idolatrous immigrants...so many weeds in the garden of God. What has God done to his vineyard?”

**Lectio:** Read the second text, from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, ch.1, verses 3-9.

**Meditatio:** Brief background to the text so that we can understand it and respond.

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 is the introduction to the letter, the greeting and thanksgiving. We don’t need a commentary to tell us that. One point is worth noting: “The Corinthians tended to focus on the excitement of the present, so Paul has to remind them that completeness is reserved to the future – the parousia, or second coming of Christ.

Take time to ponder, (ruminate) on this text. This is done as we go on with each day’s work, or rest. *Lectio Divina* is a way of life. Once it becomes so, then we can ponder anywhere. Write your response to the text. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

## **The Gospel Verse is from Psalm 84:8**

LORD, SHOW US YOUR MERCY AND LOVE, AND GRANT US YOUR SALVATION.

**Lectio:** Read the Gospel text from Mark 13:33-37.

**Meditatio:** About this text, the Glenstal Bible Missal says: “The night is this world of ours. The doorkeepers of the house are the Christians, and the Master of the house is Christ, always on the point of returning. The time of his return is not known to us: this does not cause us to sleep but rather teaches us the weight of eternity borne by every moment of time.

Fr. Thomas Keating taught that Christ’s coming in grace is “his birth within us. This coming emphasizes the primary thrust of the liturgy, which is the transmission of grace, not just the commemoration of an historical event. Thus, the liturgy communicates the graces commemorated in the liturgical seasons and feasts. These center around the three great theological ideas contained in the revelation of Jesus: (1) divine light (2) divine life (3) divine love.”

Advent is the season of divine light. The Gospel teaches us that the Master of divine light is the Master of the house, and is always on the point of returning, coming to us. We don’t know when Christ’s every visit will be, so we live with vigilance.

**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 drawn to the end of the text: “...we the clay, you the potter, we are all the work of your hand.” For me the powerful word is “hand”. Only one hand! The powerful hand of the Lord. The Lord doesn’t need two hands to form the clay vessel – just one hand to throw me on to the potter’s wheel and watch me take shape. It’s a painful process. I would be telling lies if I said I had enjoyed it. This week I will take this reality on board and get into touch with the hard times, the darkness which St. John of the Cross called the dark night of the soul. But then after the darkness comes the dawn – it always does. I will also spend time with the other “potter” texts: Jeremiah 18:4; Jeremiah 18:6; Lamentations 4:2; Zechariah 11:13; Romans 9:21; Revelation 2:27.
2. I am responding to “the present”. At many stages of life, I have been lost in the excitement of the present. I did not have a “Paul” to remind me that completeness is reserved for the future, there is a whole world beyond the “present”. The elderly sisters in my community are a constant reminder that the present won’t last. They often clean out their rooms, or the nurse helps them clean up clutter. They talk about dying and wonder what it will be like. They live in a “prepared” state, knowing that they could go to sleep and not wake tomorrow. They have experienced illness of one kind or another or have witnessed serious illness in the lives of their parents or siblings. They may be the only one left in their families. I spoke to a friend in Brisbane recently who said: “I’m the only one left! They’ve all gone.” She is 84. The last sister to die (in September), simply fell on the beach. Taken to hospital, it was found she had cancer through her bones. She was 93. May we enjoy the present and look beyond it to Beatific Vision.

3. I am called to respond to Christ's unexpected visits. The unexpected Jesus tends to upset my plans and I am not always patient about it. I'd rather relax and do my own thing instead of being available when Jesus calls me to help someone. Vigilance is a rather exhausting practice. Nevertheless, it is the call of this text. Wake up! Keep Vigil! Be ready when Christ calls.

*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.*



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