

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 24 December 2023
Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year B – Gaudete Sunday
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Four

Monday, 25 December is the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, with an Octave. If you pray the Liturgy of the Hours, you will notice the elements which constitute the Octave of Christmas.

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:

26: St. Stephen

27: St. John the Evangelist

28: The Holy Innocents (

31: The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

In the Australian and New Zealand Catholic Church:

28: Sandhurst – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Joseph Grech, 2010

Social Justice Calendar:

I'm putting here, our responsibility to pray, on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, 28/12, for the children still in captivity in Gaza, for the children of the Ukraine and the children of Africa. Can we hear their cries because they are hungry, and weak? Can we hear the cries of the parents who have nothing to give them?

As we feast on family gatherings and Christmas dinner, may we be aware of the hungry and the injured.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

There are four Masses to choose from for Christmas:
Vigil, Night, Dawn, Day.

The readings for all these Masses offer us a Feast of Scripture:
Isaiah 62:1-5; Isaiah 9:1-7; Isaiah 62:11-12; Isaiah 52:7-10.
Psalm 88; Psalm 95; Psalm 96; Psalm 97.
Acts 13:16-17, 22-25; Titus 2:11-14; Titus 3:4-7; Hebrews 1:1-6
Matthew 1:1-25; Luke 2:1-14; Luke 2:15-20; John 1:1-18.

Take two texts from the feast of scriptures mentioned above. Read each text with deep reverence. Listen to the Holy Spirit placing the oil of anointing on a word or phrase or sentence and calling you to respond.

Lectio: I'm taking one from Isaiah, 62, verses 11-12. Your Saviour is born.
My second text is from John 1:1-18. "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

Meditatio: Isaiah is a major prophet of the Old Testament, along with Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel.

Isaiah 62:11-12 is part of chapters 54-66, which take the theme “the future glory of God’s people.”

He is known as the Messianic prophet because his message of future judgment and deliverance points towards the coming of Christ Jesus. Isaiah 60:1-62:12 is about the glorious new Zion. We are in Third Isaiah, or Trito-Isaiah.

These verses are called “a final reflection” by Carroll Stuhlmueller whose commentary on Deutero and Trito-Isaiah helps us to enter more fully into the text.

There are imperatives which echo the excitement of 40:1-11. The announcement of salvation concludes with a litany of titles for Zion in v. 12. It is called a “final reflection”, by Carroll Stuhlmueller, whose commentary can be found in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary.

The small introduction in the Glenstal Bible Missal says: “The prophet [Isaiah] speaks to a people closed up in sin [darkness], despised and abandoned; this makes the divine promises all the more wonderful.”

Look, your savior comes, the prize of his victory with him, his trophies before him.

And now, the scene changes – no more darkness and sin and death.

“They shall be called ‘the Holy People

‘the Lord’s Redeemed’.

‘The sought-after’.

‘City-not-forsaken’.

Read the text you have chosen, a second and 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

The Psalms are different for each of the Masses. We can pray with one or all of the following: 88, 95, 96, 97.

As you pray with each psalm, look at the way in which Christ is manifested in each one. The Question: Where is Christ in this Psalm? Try and relate the Psalm to the Gospels and writings of the New Testament.

Lectio: The next text I have chosen is John 1:1-18, also known as the Prologue to John’s Gospel.

Meditatio: Some background to help us understand the text and make a response

THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND LIVES AMONG US.

When John the Evangelist talks about the flesh, “he means first of all what scripture always means by this word. In Semitic usage it always means the whole human being, not just a part of him, not just what we nowadays in an almost medical sense refer to as our body in contradistinction to our spiritual soul. The flesh and the body mean the whole person, but especially the tangible person, that takes its place in this earthly environment, that can be touched, that has a meaningful reality when one touches it and says, “This is it,” that is, not merely spirit and concept and truth and abstract thought, but a concrete human being.” (Fr. Karl Rahner, “The Great Church Year”). One of the early Church Fathers, Theodoret, also expressed this greatest of Mysteries – the Incarnation, when he wrote: “To restore salvation to human beings he did not employ as his servants the angels and archangels, nor cause a piercing voice to resound from heaven. He preferred to build for himself a chamber in the womb of the Virgin and from there to come among us.” THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US.

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.

What is my response to all of this?

When I take my eyes off the Mystery of the Incarnation, and look away from the Word made flesh, then I move into non-Christian choices. While I keep my eyes on the Christ in others, I make Christian choices. And this is very hard. It is very hard to be a Christian. Christmas reminds me of how I should be living.

Thomas Merton once wrote: “To live ‘in Christ’ is to live in a mystery equal to that of the Incarnation and similar to it.”

Bl. Columba Marmion wrote: “There are those who seek God in Jesus Christ, who accept the humanity of Christ, but stop there. That is not sufficient. We must accept the Incarnation in all its consequences.” The baby in the manger is so beautiful, and then the baby is a child, a teenager, an adolescent, an adult, and looking around I see Christ is so many faces. And when I see Christ, I act differently – more compassionately, with kindness, thoughtfulness.

A Light shines upon us today; The Lord is born for us.
Will I allow the Lord to be born in me this Christmas.
Will I gift others with eyes that see Christ in them?

If I say “Happy Christmas” to someone, I am claiming Christ as the essence of Christmas. If I say “Seasons Greetings” I am not claiming Christ Jesus as the reason for this great season of joy and gladness.

***Happy Christmas to all our Oblates and friends!
May the Lord who became flesh and dwelt among us
bless you and your families this day
and bring peace to our fragile world.***

Mindful of so many people whose homes have been obliterated by bombs this year and all those forced to flee from their countries and seeking shelter in make-shift spaces in the rubble or tent cities, our image this year is by Icon writer Kelly Latimore and named "Tent City Nativity". It is used with permission from the artist.



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“Jesus was born in a makeshift shelter, too—
A place not really meant for human dwelling—
And yet it was there that he met us, in the lowliest refuge.

Two thousand years later, it's good to remember
That Christ is still being born, here and now,
Most especially in places we'd rather not go,
Places from which we'd rather look away.

God of illumination and incarnation,
Open not only our eyes, but our hearts,
That we may open, too, our hands
And make generous offerings of love,
As your holy light reflects from nylon tent flaps,
Your holy song rises from a crackling campfire,
Lit against the cold, against the night.
Amen.”

Prayer Written by Cameron Bellm