

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 7 January 2024
Solemnity of the Epiphany, Year B
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week One

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:

08: The Baptism of the Lord.

10: St. Gregory of Nyssa (Optional Memorial)

11: St. Aelred of Rievaulx (Optional Memorial) It is a feast in some monastic communities.

13: St. Hilary (Memorial)

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

08: Chaldean Diocese (Aust) Episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. Amel Shamon Nona 2010.

10: Melbourne, Sydney: Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. George Pell 2023.

13: Anniversary of the first Mass celebrated in New Zealand by Bishop Pompallier 1838.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

There are no anniversaries this week.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

I have decided that for this Sunday, I will just share the depths of the Gospel with you. It is impossible to do every text this week because the Gospel is an education in itself. So, let us begin by reading it.

Lectio: Matthew 2:1-12.

History: Epiphany is from the Greek *επιφανεια*, meaning 'manifestation'. It was once a fixed date - January 6. It originated in the East, meaning the Eastern Orthodox Church, where it was celebrated in honour of our Lord's Baptism from the 3rd Century onwards. From the 4th century there is ample evidence that it ranked with Easter and Pentecost as one of the three principal feasts of the Church. It was introduced into the Western Church (the church of Rome), in the 4th century, but lost its character as a feast of the Baptism of Christ, which it has retained in the Eastern Church down to the present day. Instead, this feast became associated with the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles in the person of the Magi, as is clear in the homilies of Pope St. Leo on the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. 'Manifestation' was an alternative name of the feast.

The blessing of the water was dropped once it came to the Church of Rome, and that blessing became part of the Easter vigil. The Magi came from the East bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the baby Jesus, a King. They were at first called sages, and later kings. That they were kings became general from the 6th century, on the basis of the implied reference in Psalm 72:10. The New Testament account says nothing on their number. An early Church Father called Origen was the first to give it as three, probably on account of their three gifts and this has become the general tradition. Their names, Kaspar, Melchior and Balthasar are first mentioned in the 6th century. Their relics are now in Cologne

Cathedral. The Adoration of the Magi became one of the most popular subjects of representation in art. (Cf. Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church).

Meditatio: Some reflection material:

For Fr. Karl Rahner, the Epiphany is the blessed journey of the God-seeking person. He says that this feast, the manifestation of the Lord, closes the festive season: "It is the proclamation and manifestation of the Saviour and Redeemer to people beyond his own nation, to the 'Gentiles', that is, to all nations and all persons collectively. The message of this feast is that the grace of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ and his love for us has appeared. In effect, this feast speaks to us and says: 'Behold, God is present, still quiet and gentle, just as the spring remains in the tiny seed, quiet and certain of victory, hidden under the wintry earth, yet already more powerful than all the darkness and all the cold. Epiphany is the feast that announces "God is here". God has become human. God has entered into the poverty and the narrow confines of our life. God has so loved us that he has become one of us." (From the 'Great Church Year' by Fr. Karl Rahner).

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. My response to this Gospel text from Matthew, is to the Star. I've received a number of Christmas cards this year, and those with the journey of the Magi on the front have a bright star, brighter on some than on others. Fr. Karl Rahner says: "Why do you push clouds in front of the star - the clouds of bad temper, of disappointment, of bitterness, of refusal, of giving up - because your dreams and expectations have not been realized? Throw down your defences! The star is shining! Whether or not you make it the lodestar of your journey, it stands in your sky, and even your defiance and your weakness do not extinguish it...Why shouldn't we look to the star in the firmament of our hearts? Why not follow the light?" (The Great Church Year, page 106).
2. At other times of the year, particularly at Easter, we focus on Christ our Light, the light of the Resurrection, the Light of the Paschal Candle, and before that, the flames of the Easter Fire. From the beginning of Christ's life on earth, the Divine Light has been there for all humankind.
3. Of "flames", Cardinal Francis Xavier Van Thuan, wrote from his prison cell, "Jesus proclaimed that he had come to bring fire to the earth. By continuing his mission, I keep alive the flame that my hands received from Christ Jesus. Just as a runner descends Mount Olympus carrying the Olympic torch, I want to traverse the entire world in order to transmit the flame of Christ to others. The flame I bear is love, ...destined to inflame and consume sin and to renew all things...to feed this fire I must pour the oil of my daily prayer into others. I will prepare their torches so that the Holy Spirit will set them ablaze, dispelling their darkness and renewing the face of the earth." (Prayers of Hope, Words of Courage, page 50)
4. When I was young there was a beautiful and very powerful song about a STAR. It was called "To Dream the Impossible Dream". The lyrics are still there in my memory: "To dream the impossible dream, to fight the unbeatable foe, to bear with unbearable sorrow, to run where the brave dare not go. To right the

unrightable wrong, to try when your arms are too weary, to reach the unreachable star. This is my quest, to follow that star, no matter how hopeless, no matter how far, to fight for the right without question or pause, to be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause. And I know if I'll only be true to this glorious quest, that my heart will lie peaceful and calm when I'm laid to my rest. And the world will be better for this, that one man, scorned and covered with scars, still strove with his last ounce of courage to fight the unbeatable foe, to reach the unreachable star."

5. Jesus will make our arms strong when they are too weary. Jesus will carry us when the road is too long. Jesus will stand with us when we fight for what is right in this world.

***Lectio Divina is prayer with the Sacred Scriptures.
We read, we seek to understand with the help of a commentary,
we ponder, we take time for stillness, and we respond.
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
Take the Mother of God as your model,
the one who pondered the Word of God in her heart
and brought forth the Word made Flesh, our Saviour Jesus Christ.***

