

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)**  
**PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES**  
**Sunday 21 January 2024**  
**3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B.**

**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 Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

**In the Liturgy:**

24: St. Francis de Sales (Memorial)

25: The Conversion of St. Paul (Feast)

26: Australia Day

In New Zealand, Sts. Timothy and Titus are celebrated today, as a Memorial.

27: In Australia, Sts. Timothy and Titus are celebrated today as an Optional Memorial

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

21: New Zealand – Word of God Sunday

23: Hobart – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral in 1881.

26: Armidale – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Luc Mattys, 2021.

**In the Social Justice Calendar:**

27: Holocaust Memorial Day

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

**The readings are:**

Jonah 3:1-5 and vs. 10.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Mark 1:14-20

**Lectio:** Read the first text from the Prophet Jonah, chapter 3, verses 1-5 and vs. 10. Read it slowly. Be aware of the Holy Spirit placing unction on the message of this text. When your heart responds to a word or a line, or a phrase, this is the Holy Spirit touching your heart and calling forth your response.

**Meditatio:** A little background to the text will help us understand it and make a response.

In Hebrew, the name Jonah means ‘dove’. Jonah was the son of Amittai. He was from the “small village of Gath Hopher (2 Kings, 14:25) in the tribal district of Zebulun (Joshua 19:13), three miles north of Nazareth. It is worth noting that he was the only prophet of the Old Testament from the Galilean region, an area known even in pre-Christian times for its large non-Hebrew population (cf. Is. 9:1). Perhaps this is one reason why the Lord called him to minister to the pagan city of Nineveh, for if any prophet was suited for such a task, it should be one already familiar with foreign thought and customs.” (Cf. “The Complete Who’s Who in the Bible. An Exhaustive

Listing of all the Characters in the Bible”, Edited by Paul Gardner, and first published in the U.K. in 1995).

It took him three days to cross the city, because the city was so large. The number “three” in the Scriptures is significant. It sometimes symbolically represents fullness of testimony or manifestation.

And the number 40 is also significant. It denotes a time of probation. Here, Jonah tells them that in forty days’ time, Nineveh will be destroyed. (In plain language: “You’ve got forty days to clean up your act!”)

The people are believers. They listen to Jonah and repent. And so, God “did not inflict on them the disaster which he had threatened.”

Read the text again and spend time with it as you go about your work and leisure. If you have the time in your week, take your reflection to a seat where you can watch the ocean, the lake, the river, the mountains, your own garden. Just take time to respond. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio 1*.

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 24:4-9

**The response is:** TEACH ME YOUR WAYS O LORD.

Psalm 24 is a prayer for protection and forgiveness. The introduction in the Grail Psalter is rather to the point: “This Psalm does not try to stir up an emotional sorrow. It simply states the case, admits the guilt, and asks for mercy. Can anyone before God do more?”

**Lectio:** Read the Second Mass Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:29-32

**Meditatio:** A little background to help us understand the text and respond to it.

What it is not! This text is not about married couples living as if they are not married! This text is about a Christian’s attitude to relationships and possessions – everybody and everything that ties us to this world. The last line should be the first: “...the world as we know it, is passing away.”

In the light of this fact, we are advised not to become too attached to things. They are only things. Today we say: “You can’t take them with you.” We often buy what we don’t need and then clutter our lives. Being surrounded by clutter usually has a heavy effect on us. We can even become depressed.

Make your response in the days ahead. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

**The Gospel Verse is from Mark 1:15.2**

**THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR: BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS.**

We hear these words so often, and yet the kingdom of God is near only if I make it so. Fr. Thomas Keating says it differently: “The reign (kingdom) of God is not so much what we do under God’s inspiration as what the divine action does in us, with or without our cooperation. (“The Mystery of Christ, page 108).

**Lectio:** Now read the Gospel text from Mark 1:14-20.

**Meditatio:** Some background to the text which will help us respond.

There are three themes here:

1. The proclamation about the nearness of the Kingdom of God.
2. The call to repentance and faith in the Good News.
3. The call of the first disciples: Andrew, Simon, James and John.

Stand back and ponder on the text – every aspect of it – over a few days. Listen to the Holy Spirit praying within you. This is the true *oratio* of *Lectio Divina*. Allow your spirit to rest and be still. Finally, make your response to the text and keep it in your prayer journal, and in your heart.

**EVANGELIZATIO – this is one’s lived response to the texts given us by the Church each Sunday. It is about the evangelization of the “self” and pins me down to be who I am: A Christian who prays with the Word of God and responds to the call of the Word of God in my everyday life.**

1. My response is to focus on listening/attentiveness to the voice of the Lord. This is at the root of Jonah’s preaching. Speaking of listening and attentiveness today, Sr. Joan Chittister says: “...listening is a spiritual discipline, a step toward full moral maturity, a parallel path to the demands of tradition tried and true. Listening leads to attentiveness to others. Listening to another stands to change your own perspective on life.” (The Monastic Heart, chapter 28, pages 142-146). So, I ask myself: am I attentive to the way God calls me to speak on God’s behalf, the Good News that God is Love? A total stranger spoke to me of God recently, at Uniting Elanora, where Sr. Elizabeth is. I took two old friends to see Sr. Elizabeth, and God sent a total stranger to speak to me. She was a very dedicated nurse who spoke to me with great reverence of the ladies she nurses, and how it is a privilege to do the work she does. She spoke of their beauty and the joy they bring to her. And then she spoke of the other dedicated nurses. She didn’t utter one negative word, and I felt better afterwards. I realized that negative talk affects me more than I thought it did.
2. My response: I am aware that I am just passing through and that there will be many more who will come after me. When I entered the monastery there was a nun who, in the spirit of the Rule of Benedict treated all objects as one would treat the sacred vessels of the altar. She handled things so carefully – dusting and polishing and even restored an 1855 dinner table and six chairs. She was a great example to me, as was my mother and grandmother when I was young. They handled crystal glasses, a dinner service, and cutlery with such reverence. Much of it was given as wedding presents, and as long as it was treated as such, so were the memories kept alive.
3. I feel called to stay with the ‘nearness’ of the Kingdom of God and the realization of the Kingdom within me. Sr. Joan Chittister has something very challenging to say about “proclamation” which Jesus was doing in today’s Gospel and which we

do, because he is our Lord and Master: “The answer to the question of who is called to proclaim truth in a silent generation is an easy one: we all are. There is no part of following Jesus the prophet – of living the Gospels – from which any of us are exempt. Discipleship demands that we each take every Gospel seriously, that we use it to interrogate our own response and reaction to every issue, to every spiritual challenge there. Then and only then can we school ourselves in the mind of Christ. Steeped in the Word, Jesus sets out on the prophet’s journey to renew the faith, to protect the defenceless, to develop a vibrantly new theology of God. Therefore, so must we.” (The Time is Now, page 101). And Pope Francis has something to say to us about the realization of the Kingdom of God within us: “We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization (our proclamation). For it we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (*Evangelia Gaudium*).

*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.*

