

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 28 January 2024
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B.

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Four

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:

31: St. John Bosco. John Bosco was a 19th Century Italian who dedicated his life to the street children of Northern Italy who were suffering from the effects of industrialisation and urbanization.

02: Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple. Jamberoo Abbey bears the title, 'The Abbey of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple'. There is one stained glass window picturing this, with characters Mary, Joseph, Jesus, Simeon and Anna.

February 2 is also the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life.

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

28: New Zealand – Word of God Sunday.

29: New Zealand **Wellington** – Anniversary of the death of Cardinal Reginald Delargey, 1979

In the Social Justice Calendar:

No significant anniversaries this week.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

Mark 1:21-28.

Lectio: Read the First Reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 18, verses 15-20.

The Word of God is sacred. Let us give ourselves to the sacred text and open our hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit calling us forth to respond. Be aware of the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart as you read. This is the true “oratio” (prayer) of *Lectio Divina*.

Meditatio: Some informed background so that we can honour the text in its original meaning.

The Book of Deuteronomy is one of the Law books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. These books are also called the “Pentateuch”. Roland Murphy, in his introduction to the Pentateuch, says that “these books are still shrouded in mystery.” That doesn’t help us. We like things clear. And one thing is clear: Moses did not write the Pentateuch.

The text we are given for prayer is about prophecy. “Prophecy is Israel’s form of mediation. The true prophet is called by the Lord, is a native Israelite, and is a continuator of the prophecy of Moses. (Cf. Exodus 33:11; Numbers 12:1-8; Hosea 12:13.) Prophecy originated in the request for mediation at Horeb.” (Deut. 5: 5:23-28). (Summarized from 16:18, New Jerome Biblical Commentary).

Read the text a few times. After pondering over many hours or longer, you will want to make your response. Of course, the Holy Spirit may draw forth a response immediately. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 94:1-2, 6-9

The response is: IF TODAY YOU HEAR HIS VOICE/ HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS.

Psalm 94 is a call to praise and worship: a processional hymn. This psalm is tied in closely with the exodus which saw God's people divinely led from Egypt. But, they disputed with Moses, and complained against God, testing God's patience. "It was at Rephidim in Sinai that the testing took place, so that place came to be called 'Massah and Meribah' – 'Trial and Dispute' (Cf. Exodus 17:1-7). Now these things were written for our correction (1 Cor 10:11); we may still thwart the grace of our call – it does not inevitably blossom into the glory of final choice. But how much higher than Israel's calling is our calling, and how much more sublime the election which, from humanity's point of view, we call perseverance! Not Moses but Jesus is our leader now and the 'rest he would take us to is not Palestine but a land which the meek inherit, a rest which is the eternal sabbath of God (Heb 4:10)." (Grail Psalter, 1973 edition, introduction to Psalm 94).

Lectio: Read the Second Text from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, Ch. 7, v's 32-35.

Meditatio: *A little background to help us respond.*

Chapter 7:1 – 14:40 consists of responses to Corinthian Questions. Chapter 7, verses 32-35 is very near the beginning of such a long section. We need to understand that "anxious concern is a characteristic of unredeemed existence." Verse 33 needs a little explanation. "Paul does not have in mind the love of husband and wife (Gal 5:13-14), but the complete absorption in one another of the newly married. Since the married are members of a community of love, husband and wife have the first but not the only claim on each other's affection. We need to understand the nature of these first churches founded by Paul. The sense of community was strong, unlike certain parishes in our own times. Social shifting over many centuries has brought us (in the West) to an age where elderly/sick people are cared for in nursing homes, where Social Services take care of orphans and other neglected children, and various Christian and humanitarian organizations tend the homeless, the poor and victims of domestic violence. In Paul's time, it was about a local church, and local assemblies. The unit we used to call parish is strong in some places but weak or non-existent in other places. Some Catholics tend to choose their own parish for Sunday Mass – somewhere that suits them. Others stay with their traditional parish. In the Catholic Church, there is a choice of Masses on weekends: a youth Mass, a Vigil Mass (Saturday evening), an early morning Mass on Sunday. Not so in the time of Paul. There was one church, one assembly,

Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist, in order to bring forth the most authentic melody of your response...

I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Matthew 4:16.

A PEOPLE IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT:

A RADIANT DAWN SHINES ON THOSE LOST IN DEATH.

If you notice that this is a Christmas/Epiphany text, you are on course, because Christmastide used to end on February 2, the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple, not on the Feast of the Baptism.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from Mark 1:21-28.

Pause and ponder.

Meditatio: Some helpful background in order to understand the text and make our response.

Let us listen to some of the sermon preached for this Sunday by Bl. John Henry (Cardinal) Newman: “Mark draws a contrast between Moses and Christ to our comfort. *The Law*, he says, *was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*. In him God is fully and truly seen, so that he is absolutely the way, and the truth, and the life. All our duties are summed up for us in the message he brings us. Those who look towards him for teaching, who worship and obey him, will by degrees see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in his face, and will be changed into the same image from glory to glory. And thus it happens that people of the lowest class and the humblest education may know fully the ways and works of God; fully, that is, as human beings can know them; far better and more truly than the most sagacious of this world from whom the gospel is hidden....Moses had much toil to gain from the great God, but Christ has brought from his Father for all of us the full and perfect way of life.” (Parochial and Plain Sermon vs, 7).

Stand back from this text. Later, read it again. Go to your “quiet” place. Allow the Holy Spirit to play on the fibres of your heart like a harpist in order to bring forth the most beautiful melody of your response to God. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 3.

***Evangelizatio* is my LIVED RESPONSE to the sacred scriptures given to me each week by the Church for my formation as a Christian. If I don't respond, they are merely texts on a page. When I do respond, they are my life.**

1. While this is the ideal situation – that is, that a prophet will be raised up from within the ranks, we are not always ready to heed and respond to what we consider are not words of life, but rather, just more nonsense. In the wider Church, Cardinals and Bishops are appointed by the Pope, after other clergy and religious make suggestions. In the time of St. Paul, these leaders were elected from the people and by the people. The senior disciples prepared them for evangelization, and performed any necessary rituals, such a circumcision. In an emerging church, Timothy was, for example, young and very capable. Paul kept an eye to him and encouraged him and the people under him to respect him and his teaching. Back to me! I'm not always ready to accept anything that is asked of me, when a prophetic character has asked it. I still tend to cling to my opinions. One of the prophets of the 19th century, was Frederick Faber of the Oratory. Of Kindness and kind thoughts, he said: “The interior beauty of a soul through habitual kindness of thought is greater than our words can tell. To such a person, life is a perpetual bright evening, with all calm, and fragrant, and restful. The dust of life is laid, and its fever cool. The sounds are softer, as is the way of evening, and all sights are fairer, and the golden light makes our enjoyment of earth a happily

pensive preparation for heaven.” Another 19th century prophet was Bl. Columba Marmion, who taught that “Nothing matters but God and what is done for God. All other things are trifles, trifles, trifles.” And “Each of us is like a grain of incense, which seems nothing in itself, but when thrown on the [Divine] fire becomes a fragrant perfume.”

2. “Anxious concern is a characteristic of unredeemed existence.” That’s hard to swallow. I’m always anxious or anxiously concerned about something. Why don’t I see all these “somethings” as a means of education? It was Benjamin Disraeli who said that there “is no education like adversity.” Adverse circumstances, opposing opinions. Sr. Stan of Dublin shares that “pain may dig deep, opening you violently and forcing you to discover emotions and resources you were not aware of. But it can also help you to develop your sensitivity and connect you to others.” (“Day by Day with Sr. Stan”, 293).
3. The following words call for a response from me: “Here is a teaching that is new and with authority behind it.” We live in a nation where politicians are knocked down as soon as they appear. Some of this is justified. Journalists can hardly wait to hang them from the gallows. They are human beings like us and they can be deceitful, liars and very greedy when it comes to property. We would all like to hear an honest politician who lives in middle or lower class suburbia and understands the plight of the poor. We would like to hear them speak the truth of the matter with an authority that has seen them involved with other Australians, the authority that says: “Yes, I’ve been there, and I know what it’s like for my home to be destroyed by fire and flood, to fight with an Insurance Company that won’t fix the mess I’m in.

*Lectio Divina is Holy Reading,
that is, reading of the Sacred Scriptures.
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
It is about reading (and listening), reflecting and praying
in tune with the Holy Spirit within me,
resting in God and responding in the way I live.*



“Here is a teaching that is new . . . and with authority behind it.”