

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)**  
**PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES**  
**Sunday 4 February 2024**  
**5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 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 Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

**In the Liturgy:**

5: St. Agatha, Memorial.

6: St. Paul Miki and companions, Memorial.

8: St Josephine Bakhita, Memorial.

10: St. Scholastica, Memorial. (Feast or Solemnity in Benedictine Houses).

**In the Australian and New Zealand Church**

4: Australia – Word of God Sunday.

5: Canberra-Goulburn: Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, 1973.

6: Waitangi Day (NZ).

9: Maitland-Newcastle – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Michael Kennedy, 2012.

10: Geraldton, Perth: Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. William Joseph Foley, 1991.

**In the Social Justice Calendar:**

06: Waitangi Day (NZ).

08: World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action Against Human Trafficking

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

**The readings are:**

Job 7:1-4 and 6-7

1 Cor. 9:16-19 and 22-23

Mark 1: 29-39

**Lectio:** Read the first text from the Book of Job, chapter 7, verses 1-4 and 6-7.

Let us read it slowly, in order to prepare the soil of our hearts for new seeds and new growth. 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 further background to enrich our reading, reflection and response.

The book of Job is described as the most famous attempt in Western literature to grapple with the question of why good people sometimes suffer. The Old Testament taught that God blesses those who are faithful. Job agonizes over the exceptions (his sufferings) and at the same time, tries to acknowledge the power, the justice and the compassion of God.

The conclusion of all the grappling is that ultimately the reason behind the suffering Job is trying to grapple with is known only to God. This doesn't help! It didn't help Job and it doesn't help us.

Spend time with the text. Ponder on it in the days ahead.

Write your response in your prayer journal. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

**Responsorial Psalm Response:** Psalm 146:1-6

**The response is:** PRAISE THE LORD WHO HEALS THE BROKEN-HEARTED.

Psalm 146 is a prayer of praise to God who maintains the world.

The Lord builds up Jerusalem  
And brings back Israel's exiles,  
He heals the broken-hearted,  
He binds up all their wounds.  
He fixes the number of the stars;  
He calls each one by its name.

**Lectio:** Read the Second Text from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 9, verses 16-19 and 22-23.

**Meditatio:** Some background to help us understand the text.

The first part of the text is about Paul's responsibility to preach the Gospel, i.e. to offer the Good News free! Paul tells the Corinthians that he is not to insist on the rights which the Gospel gives him.

The second part always brings to mind (for me), St. Thomas More, as portrayed in "A Man for all Seasons". This historical drama was written by Robert Bolt and first heard on the BBC in 1954. It was his commitment to religious and personal ethics that led to St. Thomas More's beheading in 1535. Paul too had his religious and personal ethics. He would not insist "on the rights which the gospel gave him." His words in today's reading were: "I have made myself the slave of everyone so as to win as many as I could. For the weak, I made myself weak. I made myself all things to all people in order to save some at any cost; and I still do this, for the sake of the gospel, to have a share in its blessing."

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 2*.

**The Gospel Verse is a prayer from Matthew 8:17.**

HE BORE OUR SICKNESS,  
AND ENDURED OUR SUFFERING.

**Lectio:** Now move on to the reading of the Gospel: Mark 1:29-39.

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

A commentary by Peter Chrysologus has some very 'telling' insights: "Those who have listened attentively to today's Gospel will have learnt why the Lord of Heaven, by whom all creation was renewed, entered the houses of his servants on earth. Nor should it surprise us that he so courteously adapted himself to every situation (Cf. Thomas More and Paul of Tarsus), since his motive in coming among us was to bring mercy and help to all. You can easily see what drew Christ to Peter's house on this particular occasion; he didn't desire to sit down and have a rest, but rather was moved with compassion for a woman stricken down by sickness. He was prompted, not by the need to eat, but by the opportunity to heal; he did not want sustenance for himself, but vitality for another. God wants human beings, not human goods. He desires to bestow what is heavenly, not to acquire anything earthly."

Peter Chrysologus (C.400-450) was born at Imola in Italy and in later life became bishop of Ravenna. He was highly esteemed by the Empress Galla Placidia, in whose presence he preached his first sermon as bishop. He was above all a pastor, and many of his sermons have been kept. When we read the above commentary, we need to hear it as a sermon being preached with passion.

Read the text a number of times, making a note of what speaks clearly to you. Listen to the Holy Spirit within you, placing unction on a word, phrase, line of the text. Stay with it and ponder. Finally, make your response. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 3.

***Evangelizatio*: This is one's lived response to the texts given to us in each Sunday's Liturgy of the Word. 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. Job is in a very bad way. I am responding to this and looking over my life at the many times I have been in a very bad way. Death of loved ones does this to us. Toxic work situations also leave us with grief and frustration. And we wonder with Job, will our eyes ever again see joy? Do we lay in bed some nights wishing it were light again? And when it is day, do we long for the night? All of this happens to us when we grieve, when we lose our job and cannot provide for family, when we cannot afford the prices that supermarkets are charging, when we cannot afford the extra-curricular activities which our children need to take part in at school. And what about the times that we feel destroyed by others, by those in the workplace, our bosses, when our job is given to someone younger, and we are told to leave! All of this can easily leave us like Job. If it doesn't, then we must be saints already. The rude way some people treat us, the lack of courtesy, disrespect and even nasty rumours. Is there a way through it? Of course, we can look at the crucifix and think of the scoffing and spitting on the body of Jesus and the betrayal and the rumours that led to his crucifixion. Looking at the crucifix won't help all of us. Thomas a Kempis said, in the 'Imitation of Christ': If you bear the cross willingly, it will bear you. Oscar Wilde said: 'Where there is sorrow, there is holy ground.' Something to think about. And so, suffering is 'holy ground', if we agree with Oscar Wilde. But it doesn't feel like that when it is taking place.
2. My response is to say that I am drawn to Paul as a person for all, being all things to all people in order to give Christian example to a few. It is demanding to live like this. The Catholic Bishop of Parramatta Vincent Long van Nguyen, OFM Conv. is like this. He enters into all the cultures of his diocese, and supports the food festival, the dancing and singing; He is sympathetic to LGBTQIA+ persons, and for this, some Catholics want rid of him. As a young refugee, he was sexually abused by a Catholic priest, and he was a boat person, spending weeks on a boat from Vietnam to Australia. He spent a lot of the voyage nursing his sister's baby because his sister was sick. This may be why opposition doesn't faze him. He's had to struggle. For a rest now and then, he goes to his parents in Melbourne and works in their garden. He is good at topiary. I wish he would come to my garden! I have one box shrub ready to be sculptured!
3. Why don't we get ready in the evening to bring to Jesus all who are sick and in need of healing, just as the sick were brought to Jesus in the evening. And let us not forget those who need hospital, but no longer have access to one! (Gaza). And the small children living on one meal per day, and only if they can find food. Many are now suffering from malnutrition. And what of the hostages? We wonder about the state of their health. Let

us stretch out our arms, gather them and carry them to Jesus. The load will be heavy, but the world needs us. More than any of those I have just noted, we need to pray for the so-called leaders who begin these wars, sanction the killing of human beings, many of whom are children and who will not stop doing so.

*Lectio Divina is a way of life,  
carrying the Word of God within you as you work or take leisure.  
It begins with reading the word,  
seeking to understand what you have read,  
listening to the Holy Spirit praying within you,  
allowing God to lead you into Divine rest,  
and responding in action to what you have read and prayed over.*

