

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 24 March 2024
Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, Year B
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week Two

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:

Holy Week – no other celebrations are permitted.

28: Holy Thursday. Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper begins the Paschal Triduum.

29: Good Friday

30: Holy Saturday.

31: Easter Sunday.

The Sacred Paschal Triduum ends with Night Prayer (Compline) on Easter Sunday.

In the Australian Church:

24: Toowoomba – Anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral (1935).

28: Townsville – Anniversary of the death of Bishop Michael Putney, 2014.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

24: International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims.

25: Death of Caroline Chisholm - 1877.

26: Biological Weapons Convention - 1975.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Isaiah 50:4-7

Philippians 2:6-11

Mark 14:1-15:47

Lectio: Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 50, verses 4-7.

Read it aloud. 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 will help us understand the text and make a response.

Biblical Scholars tell us that this is a text which is variously translated. They propose *that* it should read: “The Lord has given me a disciple’s tongue that I may know how to sustain the weary. The word rouses me in the morning, in the morning he rouses my ear to hear like a disciple.

The word “weary” is a powerful word. It is not “tired”, but “weary”, suggesting weary right through to one’s bones. Like prophets before him, this servant/prophet too is maltreated. He “sets his face like flint.”

Other texts which encase this response are: Isaiah 48:4; Jeremiah 1:6 & 18; Ezekiel 3:8-9. In the New Testament, we will listen with the ear of a disciple, to the Lord who set his face like flint while he was spat at! So, already, we are close to Good Friday. (New Jerome Bib. Commentary 21:38)

Read the text over a couple of times. And you will hear the Holy Spirit prompting you to respond. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 21

The response is: MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME?

Psalm 21 bears the title, “the suffering servant wins the deliverance of the nations. (Grail Psalter (1962). The commentary is particularly meaningful: “When a dying person has the strength to whisper, “Our Father”, we may suppose that his or her thoughts go on with the prayer their lips cannot finish. When the merciful crucified Christ shouted the first dreadful line of this psalm, his mind must have gone on to its triumphal end, thanking his Father that this dark way of desertion led to the light beyond it.” (Grail Psalter, Psalm 21, page 46, 1962 edition).

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading, from Philippians 2:6-11.

Meditatio: Some background to help us understand the text.

This text is, as we know well, an early Christian hymn with a two-fold journey on the part of Christ. There is the emptying of self. There is the taking on of a servant. There is yet a more dramatic form of humility – death on a cross between two criminals. Finally, there is the glory: “God raised him on high and gave him a name which is above all other names.

There is no equivalent proclamation in the Church’s liturgy today, except as this text comes to us on certain Sundays of the year, or on the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross. We proclaim our faith each Sunday in the Apostle’s Creed. This takes the hymn beyond its boundaries and incorporates all the tenets of our faith through the ages.

Ponder on the text for a day or two, and then make your response. The Holy Spirit will lead you in this. I share my response in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Philippians 2:8-9

CHRIST BECAME OBEDIENT FOR US, EVEN TO DEATH, DYING ON THE CROSS.

THEREFORE GOD RAISED HIM ON HIGH AND GAVE HIM A NAME ABOVE ALL OTHER NAMES.

Lectio: The Gospel is from Mark 14:1-15:47.

Meditatio: Some background to Mark’s version of the Passion of Christ.

The New Jerome Biblical Commentary breaks up this long text into sections, and this is a positive and practical way for us to follow for *Lectio Divina*. Obviously, we can’t take the whole text. But we can take one or two sections. We hear the text as a whole at Mass.

14:1-11. Plotting and Anointing

14:12-16. Arrangements for the Passover Meal

14:17-31. The Last Supper
 14:17-21. Prediction of Judas's treachery
 14:22-25. The supper
 14:26-31. Prediction of Peter's Denial
 14:32-42. Gethsemane
 14:43-52. Arrest.
 14:53-72. Trial before the high priest and Peter's Denial
 15:1-15. The Trial before Pilate
 15:16-20. The Mockery
 15:21-32. The Crucifixion
 15:33-39. The Death of Jesus
 15:40-47. The Burial

Let's take it slowly. Each of us will know what section we are meant to pray with and respond to. Listen for the message you are to hear in this Gospel text and be still as you receive the visitation of God into your life through God's Word. When you feel called to do so, make your response to the text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 3.

***EVANGELIZATIO.* *Evangelizatio* is about the evangelization of the "self". It is that part of *Lectio Divina* where we make our lived response to the text. First of all, we pray with the text, take time to ponder and understand the text, be still with the text and listen to the response we are being called to make.**

1. The Holy Spirit is placing unction on the "face like flint" image of Jesus on Good Friday. Jesus was subject to torture. Whipping and making a crown of thorns for his head was torture. Torture is a weapon that is used in our times, on political prisoners and long ago, on our convicts. These physically and emotionally damaged people were treated to unspeakable torture with its whips and chains. The father of one of our early nuns was the medical doctor on Norfolk Island. Convicts would come to him ill with dysentery, or whatever, hardly able to stand. He would tell the soldiers that the sick needed to rest. Instead, they were ordered back to work in chains until they dropped and died. A great Benedictine, William Ullathorne, wrote a pamphlet on the atrocities of the convict system. (Transportation). He addressed the British Parliament on this issue and begged that it be stopped. He had spent time on Norfolk Island, especially with those in solitary confinement. He described the appalling details. His name is still on the Norfolk Island website. Our listening in Latin is *obsculta*, the first word of the Benedictine Rule. Listen is also used in the scene of the Transfiguration of the Lord, when the Father says: "This is my Son, my Beloved: **hear (listen to)** him." It means a listening and a response on the part of the listener.
2. This text from Philippians is incorporated into the monastic liturgy and into the Prayer of the Church on certain weekends of the year. In the monastic tradition, it is set to music and this has made all the difference for me. A sister who is a chantress (cantor) sings it and the community responds. Thus, it has been opened out and extended as a proclamation of the Word. St. Augustine was the one who said that when we sing, we pray twice. I understand this teaching. When we sing such a canticle (from Philippians), we hear it more deeply because it is a slow delivery of the impact of the Word of God. We need to steer clear of prayer that is rushed. St. Therese of Lisieux said: "Prayer is a surge of the heart. It is a simple look turned towards heaven; it is a cry of

recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.” I find her words very supportive of my life of prayer. slow, deep, thorough and lasting.

3. The reading of the passion and death of Christ brings before us a reminder of what Jesus has done for us. St. Augustine shares: *As they were looking on, so we too gaze on his wounds as he hangs. We see his blood as he dies. We see the price offered by the Redeemer, touch the scars of his resurrection. He bows his head as if to kiss you. His heart is made bare open, as it were, in love to you. His arms are extended that he may embrace you. His whole body is displayed for your redemption. Ponder how great these things are. Let all this be rightly weighed in your mind: as he was once fixed to the cross in every part of his body for you, so he may now be fixed in every part of your soul.*

*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.*

