

**LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)**  
**PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES**  
**Sunday 17 March 2024**  
**Fifth Sunday of Lent, 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:**

18: St. Patrick, (Solemnity). Feast in N. Z.

19: St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

21: The Passing of St. Benedict. It is a Solemnity in the Abbey Calendar.

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

18: Adelaide, Auckland, Ballarat, Bathurst, Hobart, Lismore, Melbourne – Patronal Feast.

18: Auckland – Anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral, 1848.

Broken Bay – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Patrick Murphy, (2007).

Bunbury: Anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral, 2011.

18: Wellington – Anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral, 1983.

19: Dunedin, Rockhampton – Patronal Feast.

**In the Social Justice Calendar:**

We are in the middle of Harmony Week (20-26 March)

22: World Water Day

23: Earth Hour

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

**The readings are:**

Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 12:20-30

**Lectio:** Let us read the first text from Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Read the text with deep reverence. Listen to the Holy Spirit placing the oil of anointing on a word or phrase or sentence and calling you to respond.

Jeremiah 1-38 records the history of Israel before the fall of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 39-52 records the history of Israel after the fall of Jerusalem.

This text is about a new covenant. The one with Moses would have continued except that the people broke it over and over.

The new covenant speaks of depths. "Deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I will be their God and they shall be my people."

Read the text again and maybe a third time. Read it slowly, marking some of the words, phrases, sentences which may cause you to stop and recognize that the Holy Spirit is calling you to a word, a phrase, a sentence, or to the whole text. Ponder for a while. Maybe a day or more! Make your response.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 50:3-4 and 12-15.

**The response is:** CREATE A CLEAN HEART IN ME, O GOD.

Psalm 50 is a prayer of contrition.

**Lectio:** Read the second text from Hebrews 5:7-9.

**Meditatio:** Some background to help us understand the text and make a response.

First of all, a little revision: “Because of its careful and involved composition and its major theme of the priesthood of Christ, Hebrews has been regarded as a theological treatise. However, the author’s principal purpose was not to expound doctrine for its own sake, but to ward off the apostasy that was a real danger for those to whom he wrote. The work is called ‘a word of exhortation’ (13:22, a designation that is also given to a synagogue sermon in Acts 13:15.)” (From the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 60:27 and 28.)

Probably Hebrews is a written homily to which the author has given an epistolary ending. Because there are references to speaking, (2:5; 5:11; 6:9; 9:5), some have suggested that the homily was intended for oral delivery. Others don’t agree. So, for us who don’t have to become involved in such a discussion, we can read it and allow God to speak through it. Christ is, for me, the source of eternal salvation.

**The Gospel Verse is from John 12:26.**

IF YOU SERVE ME, FOLLOW ME, SAYS THE LORD;  
AND WHERE I AM MY SERVANT WILL ALSO BE.

**Lectio:** Read the Gospel from John 12:20-33.

**Meditatio:** Some background to help us understand the text and make our response.

St. Cyril of Alexandria says of this Gospel: “...we do not think of a spike of wheat, any more than we do of ourselves, in isolation. We think of it rather as part of a sheaf, which is a single bundle made up of many spikes. The spikes have to be gathered into a bundle before they can be used, and this is the key to the mystery they represent, the mystery of Christ, who, though one, appears in the image of a sheaf to be made up of many, as in fact he is. Spiritually, he contains in himself all believers. As we have been raised up with him, writes Saint Paul, so we have also been enthroned with him in heaven. He is a human being like ourselves, and this has made us one body with him, the body being the bond that unites us. We can say, therefore, that in him we are all one.”

Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) succeeded his uncle Theophilus as patriarch of Alexandria in 412. The Incarnation is central to Cyril's theology. Only if Christ is consubstantial with the Father and with us can he save us, for the meeting ground between God and ourselves is the flesh of Christ. He fought the Arians with exegesis and polemics. He fought the Nestorian heresy and attended the Council of Ephesus at which he presided. Mary's title, *Mother of God* was solemnly recognized at this Council and the Nestorian heresy was condemned.

Read the text a number of times, making a note of what speaks clearly to you. Stay with it and ponder. Finally, make your response. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 3.

**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: When we come up against immorality, we immediately think of sexual immorality. But perhaps we should begin looking at the immorality of buying products which are made by children in obscene working conditions – slave labour. They earn a pittance in wages and live on very little food. (They have been known to look for rats in the street drains, kill them and take them home to a small hovel where their mothers will cook the flesh). Or we drink the milk which our farmers try to sell at a fair price, but which our supermarkets gain from their imposed prices - profit. The farmers lose out. The supermarkets win. And then there are the farmers not being paid a fair sum for their fruit and vegetables. All this is immoral. And it is immoral that we have to work three jobs to keep food on the table and pay the electricity bills. Friends of mine don't use electric lights in their home. One of my sisters watches television at night but doesn't use any other lights. She has a large torch and says that batteries for the torch are cheaper than the cost of electricity. So, we would be justified in asking: "Are electricity companies immoral? Are the Supermarkets greedy?"
2. Christ, for me, is the source of eternal salvation. Bl. Columba Marmion osb, has the following reflection on this very truth. He says: "If we wish the transformation of our lives into that of Jesus Christ to be complete and true, and to meet with no obstacle to its fullness, then the love we have towards our Saviour must radiate around us and shine forth upon all humankind. This is what St. John points out to us when he sums up all Christian life in these words: *And this is God's commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and that we love one another. By this shall all know that you are my disciples, that you have love, one for another.* So, this commandment of the love of our sisters and brothers is the supreme wish of Christ: it is so much his desire that he makes of it, not a counsel, but a commandment, his commandment. And he makes the fulfillment of it the infallible sign by which his disciples shall be recognized: *By this shall all know that you are my disciples, that you have love, one for another.* It is a sign everyone can understand; none other is given; no one can be mistaken as to this sign: the love you have for one another will be the unequivocal proof that you truly belong to me. And in fact, in the first centuries, the pagans recognized the Christians by this sign: See, they would say, how they love one another. The love of Christ, for me, is the source of eternal salvation."
3. Macrina Wiederkehr published a book in 1997, and called it, "The Song of the Seed, a monastic way of tending the soul." (Harper Collins Publishers). In Chapter 1, she writes: "As I kneel to put the seeds in careful as stitching, I am in love...I worship on my knees, laying the

seeds in you...” Just before this reflection she reminds us that “the earth is a mother. Her soil has soul. She blesses each seed that is sown, and the seed becomes a song.” For me, when I lose part of myself, and experience it falling away, that seed is planted in mother earth. She blesses it and the seed becomes a song – my song. If we think of it this way, losing (giving up) part of ourselves is not as painful or hurtful as it seems.

*Lectio divina is a way of life, not a method of prayer.*

*We read the text from the sacred scriptures.*

*We take time to understand the text by way of a commentary.*

*We respond to the text and listen to the prayer of the Holy Spirit within us.*

*Such a response is taking place from the beginning of our prayer.*

*The Spirit will place unction on the word/words we are meant to hear.*

*We ponder as we go...*

*Like the Mother of God, we treasure all this in our hearts.*

