

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES

Sunday 28 April 2024

Fifth Sunday of Sunday, 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 and New Zealand Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:

April

29: St. Catherine of Siena, Doctor of the Church.

New Zealand – St. Peter Chanel, Patron Saint of Oceania

May

01: St Joseph the Worker Memorial

02: St. Athanasius. Memorial

03: Sts Philip and James

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

28: National Vocations' awareness Week in New Zealand.

03: Townsville. Episcopal ordination of the Most Rev. Timothy Harris, 2017.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

01: International Worker's Day

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Acts 9:26-32

1 John 3:18-24.

John 15:1-8.

Lectio: Read the First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles 9:26-31.

Read it in a reverent way. 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: A little background to the text, so that we understand it and can make an informed response.

This text takes us back to "the road to Damascus", the conversion of Saul, and then, to his working with the disciples, preaching fearlessly in the name of the Lord Jesus. He took on the Hellenists and argued with them so forcefully that they set out to kill him. The other disciples come to his rescue and take him to Caesarea, and from there to Tarsus. He had his conversion in circa. 35 A.D. His first missionary journey was circa. 48 A.D. Acts 8-12 focuses on Judea and Samaria. Chapter 9 falls within this time frame. Judge says that the "Gospel of Christ begins with Paul of Tarsus. His are the earliest direct records of it. But he did not invent it. Indeed, his life was turned upside

down when he tried to stop it. Though a passionate nationalist, he was called to take the gospel to other nations. He had to find his way through the culture conflict between Jew and Greek.” (Paul and the Conflict of Cultures. The Legacy of His Thought Today. E.A. Judge. Edited by James R. Harrison). Paul made three missionary journeys by ship.

Take time over the text before making your response to it in the days ahead.
I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 21:26-28, 30-32.

The response is: I WILL PRAISE YOU LORD,
IN THE ASSEMBLY OF YOUR PEOPLE.

The commentary on this psalm is rich in its own depth. It reads: “When a dying person has the strength to whisper, ‘Our Father’, we may suppose that his/her thoughts go on with the prayer their lips cannot finish. When the 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. But Christ does not suffer alone, nor is he glorified alone. We are ‘in Christ’ for better or worse, for suffering and for joy. The feeling of desertion and the uncertainty that so oddly comes with physical pain, or even with continued weakness, must be lived through in faith – a faith that gives no light but only strength to go on doing what we know we must. (Grail Psalter, 1963 edition, page 46).

Lectio: Read the Second Text from 1 John 3:18-24

Meditatio: The background to this text:

The precise nature of Christian love was manifested by Christ who died for his people. The imitation of Christ is the essence of Christianity. If a thought arises in the heart of a Christian, a thought which condemns the sacrifice demanded as unnecessary, and suggests that it can be avoided and that love can be maintained quite apart from a definite surrender of life or goods, this is evil. The demand of God is greater than this ignorant impulse of the human heart. If such thoughts persist, there can be no answer to prayer, and no boldness nor freedom in approaching God now or at the day of judgment. “His commandments are these – that (a) we believe in the name of God’s Son, Jesus Christ and that (b) we love one another, imitating the sacrifice Christ made for us.

“Our thoughts are our roots and with these roots our branches will stretch and develop boundlessly and freely.” (Hsing Yun)

We all want the thoughts which arise in our hearts to be life-giving.

Take time to ponder on this text and be open to the Holy Spirit who will draw us to certain words, phrases, sentences which call us forth and challenge us. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from John 15:4-5

LIVE IN ME AND LET ME LIVE IN YOU, SAYS THE LORD;
MY BRANCHES BEAR MUCH FRUIT.

Lectio: Read the Gospel text from John 15:1-8.

Meditatio: A commentary by St. Augustine on today's Gospel.

"The passage from the Gospel in which the Lord calls himself the vine and his disciples the branches affirms in its own way that, as mediator between God and the human race; Christ Jesus is head of the Church and we are Christ's members. It is beyond dispute that a vine and its branches are of one and the same stock. *Dwell in me*, said Jesus, *and I will dwell in you*. If branches are attached to a vine, it is not to confer any advantage on the vine; it is rather that the branches themselves may draw their sustenance from the vine. If a branch is cut off, another can grow from the life-giving root; but once severed from the root, no branch can remain alive.

(Augustine was born at Thagaste in Africa and received a Christian education, although he was not baptized until 387. He was ordained a priest in 391. His writings are voluminous and his influence on subsequent theology was immense. He moulded the thought of the Middle Ages, down to the 13th century. Yet he was above all a pastor and a great spiritual writer).

Take time every day for *Lectio Divina*: a line or word, or more. 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. My response: Paul's conversion took place on the road to Damascus. Today, Damascus is the capital of Syria, and at present a place of darkness and fear. Missile tanks roll along, men in military uniforms carry guns. On 1 April 2024, an Israeli airstrike destroyed the Iranian consulate annex building adjacent to the Iranian embassy in Damascus, killing 16 people, including a senior commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and seven other officers. Two civilians were killed in the attack. The following countries condemned the attack: Algeria, Armenia, Brazil, China, Cuba, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania Nicaragua, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United States, Venezuela and Vietnam. In case we don't know, diplomatic premises, like homes and schools are considered "civilian objects under international law, and they are not permissible as targets unless they are used for military purposes. Unless Israel was able to justify the airstrike as an act of self-defence, it would be in violation of Article 24 of the United Nations Charter. The Holy Land! "Lord, put an end to the spiral of terror and suffering in the Holy Land and the whole Middle East." I will give this week to prayer for the whole Middle East. I pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. "Have mercy on us and on the whole world." (From the Prayer for peace in the Middle East, published by the international Catholic foundation dedicated to the Spiritual and pastoral support of suffering and persecuted Christians).

2. I believe that loving one another in imitation of Jesus is the hardest task given to Christians. In order to love others, we have to put ourselves aside. Our wants and needs have to take a back seat for a while. I love the words of Leo Tolstoy: "Love is God, and when I die it means that I, a particle of love, shall return to the general and eternal source." If this is going to be a reality for me, I need to begin today.

3. This Gospel text throws open a great opportunity for us to paint, draw, write poetry, or simply journal. And apart from this, a visit to a vineyard is a help. In our area, we have a choice of many vineyards and wineries. Or you may choose a vineyard movie to watch. My favourite is "A

Walk in the Clouds” (1995). Anthony Quinn features in the film. When a disastrous fire burns the entire vineyard, the salvation of one plant with roots enables a family to begin again. I see that Jesus is that plant which enables all of us to begin again, no matter how badly we are damaged. It only takes Jesus, one plant, to lead us home.

Lectio Divina is about reading the Sacred Scriptures and reflecting on them from an informed background.

It is allowing the Holy Spirit to play on the fibres of my heart like a harpist, and bring forth the beauty of my response.

In responding to the text, my life is changed more and more into Christ.

