

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 7 April 2024
Second Sunday of Sunday, Year B
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours the Psalter takes Week 2.

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:

8: Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord.

11: St. Stanislaus (Memorial).

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

No anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:

07: World Health Day

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Acts 4:32-35

1 John 5:1-6

John 20:19-31.

Lectio: Read the first text from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 4, verses 32-35. 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 to the text will help us understand it and make a response.

The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 4, is part of chapters 1-7, and tells us about the Gospel being preached in Jerusalem. So, the apostles are remaining close to Jerusalem. Judea and Samaria and the rest of the world will come later. The text we are given presents a picture of an ideal community, and we need to keep it there! There is no such community or family or parish, or church! The ideal is not the real. The Jerome Biblical Commentary calls it the “golden age” impression of the apostolic era (44:36)

This ideal people went every day as a body to the Temple.

They lived together and owned everything in common.

They sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed.

They met in their houses for the breaking of bread.

They shared their food gladly and generously.

They were looked up to by everyone.

Yes, this is the ideal. We wish it were true, but it's not true.

Read the text again and spend time with it as you go about your work and leisure. If you have the time in your week, take your reflection to a seat where you can watch the ocean, the lake, the river, the mountains, your own garden. Just take time to respond. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 117: 2-4, 15-18, 22-24.

The response is: GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD FOR HE IS GOOD,
HIS LOVE IS EVERLASTING.

Psalm 117 is a processional song of praise. Verse 22 contains the great essence of the Paschal Mystery: "The stone rejected by the builders has become the corner stone."

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading: 1 John 5:1-6.

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

1 John 5:1-5 – Faith overcomes the world.

Verse 1: this verse repeats the association between love of God and love of neighbour from chapter 4, verses 20-21.

Verse 4: The victory that overcomes the world is our faith. The word of God or the 'anointing' is the source of this victory, and a share in the victory won by Jesus.

In verse 6, "the affirmation that belief is the source of eternal life is expanded in two directions – (1) belief must include his coming in water and blood and (2) belief in the Son is grounded in God's own testimony."

Let us simplify it: Faith overcomes the world (of darkness). Faith is the source of eternal life.

Make your response in the days ahead. I share mine to this text in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from John 20:29

YOU BELIEVE ME THOMAS, BECAUSE YOU HAVE SEEN ME;
HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN ME, BUT STILL BELIEVE!

Lectio: Now read the Gospel text from John 20:19-31.

Meditatio: Some background to the text which will help us respond.

St. Cyril of Alexandria reflects on this Gospel text: "All the disciples had doubts, not just Thomas. It was their very astonishment that made them slow to believe, but when it became impossible to disbelieve what they could see with their own eyes, blessed Thomas made his profession of faith – 'My Lord and my God.'"

Christ had to be patient with Thomas when he said he would not believe and with the other disciples too when they thought they were seeing a ghost.

St Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) succeeded his uncle Theophilus as patriarch in 412. Until 428, the pen of this brilliant theologian was employed in exegesis and polemics against the Arians; after that date it was devoted almost entirely to refuting the Nestorian heresy. The teaching of Nestorius was condemned in 431 by the Council of Ephesus at which Cyril presided, and Mary's title, Mother of God, was solemnly recognized. (Journey With the Fathers, Year B, page 51).

Stand back and ponder on the text – every aspect of it – over a few days. Listen to the Holy Spirit praying within you. This is the true *oratio* of *Lectio Divina*. Allow your spirit to rest and be still. Finally, make your response to the text and keep it in your prayer journal, and in your heart.

EVANGELIZATIO – this is one's lived response to the texts given us by the Church each Sunday. 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. My response is to move away from idealism and cling to reality. In that first community there would have been illness, death (of children and adults). There would have been ambition, jealousy, the thirst for power, and the snobbery that makes us think we are better than others (the Pharisee and the Publican). And there would have been many who were on course at the outset, but not on course as their faith waned. Some would have regretted handing over their possessions to the community – 'if only I hadn't done that!' But I believe that what was true for them is still true for us: I have a small piece of prose which I share: "The measure of people: not, 'how did they die?', but – 'how did they live?' Not – 'what did they gain?' but 'what did they give?' 'Were they ever ready with words of good cheer, to bring back a smile, to banish a tear?' Not – 'what was their church, nor what was their creed?' but – 'had they befriended those really in need?'" (Author unknown) This ideal first community is one of light. Jesus Christ has risen and has overcome sin and death.
2. My response is to faith! And if you know me well, you will know these words from Tagore: faith is the bird that sings while the dawn is still dark. We had a beautiful group of people from the Milton-Ulladulla Parish just before Easter. They came with their priest, Fr. Michael Dyer, for a three-day retreat leading up to Holy Thursday and the sacred Paschal Triduum. One beautiful lady left me a shining gem, because she told me about faith and ageing. She was not young, and yet not elderly. She spoke of the crosses we carry when we can't do what we used to do. Her focus was on Jesus and all that Jesus carried, both on the way to Calvary and when crucified. And she gave witness to me of the faith that is needed to grow old. St. John Climacus (525 – 600) says of faith: "Faith furnishes prayer with wings, without which it cannot soar to heaven."

3. I like the commentary of St. Cyril of Alexandria. I had never thought before that all the disciples would have in some way doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead. This makes sense of all his appearances. He kept at it to help them come to terms with his resurrection. He came through walls, he broke bread with them, he cooked a barbecue on the shore and invited them to come and have breakfast. And he ate with them – all this to help them see that he was real and his message every time he came was “Peace be with you.” This is the message of the Risen Lord – “Peace be with you.” Am I troubled, anxious, frightened, out of control? Am I ill? I wasn’t banking on being ill. Am I facing surgery? Has my husband or wife died recently? Has my grandson or granddaughter been in a car accident? Have I lost someone in the fires of Western Australia or Victoria or Queensland? Have I lost my home and the vehicles on my farm? I don’t want welfare. But I do appreciate my friends reaching out with food and other necessities. Have I lost a friend in the floods? Am I just being used? Is that what I feel? I need to hear the message of Jesus: “Peace be with you.”

*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.*



Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

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