***LECTIO DIVINA*: (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday, 8th May, 2016
Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Three.

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:
May 14: St. Matthias, Apostle. (Feast)

In the Australian Church:
There are no anniversaries to record for this week.

The Social Justice Calendar:
May 8: Mother's Day
World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day
World Communications Day
A Week of Prayer for Christian Unity commences.
On this day in 1945, the Second World War ended in Europe.
May 12: International Nurse's Day
May 13: International Conscientous Objector's Day
May 14: World Fair Trade Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Acts 1:1-11
Ephesians 1:17-23, or Hebrews 9:24-28, and 10:19-23
Luke 24:46-53

***Lectio*: Read the First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Ch. 1, verses 1-11.**
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*: Some informed background so that we can honour the text in its original meaning.**
Yes, it is an account by Luke of the Ascension of the Lord. But reading more deeply, it is a text rich with a message for life: *Stay in Jerusalem and wait there for what the Father has promised*. This command appears in retrospect. Jesus had told them [in Luke's Gospel] not to leave Jerusalem…
In this "waiting mode", this "listening mode", "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses…"

The Church will go out from Jerusalem, Jerusalem as the place of abiding and waiting, (the Jerusalem of the heart), and also Jerusalem the Holy City. The whole movement of Luke's Gospel points to Jerusalem. It is the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. But it doesn't end with the Gospel. It spills over into the Acts of the Apostles, where Luke brings his theme to a climax. Everything has led up to Jerusalem. Now everything will lead out from Jerusalem. The Apostles will go out from the Holy City to the rest of the world and proclaim what they have witnessed, to the ends of the earth. By his Ascension, he will become the eternal High Priest, who will go on interceding for his people on earth.
*The number 40 is used in the Sacred Scriptures to suggest a time of probation, separation or judgment.
Jesus was forty days in the wilderness.
The Israelites were forty years in the desert.
It is forty days between Christmas Day and the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple
It is forty days between Easter and the Ascension, and in this time, Jesus had made several appearances to his disciples and taught them about the Kingdom of God.

Now take time apart with this reading. Listen to the Holy Spirit placing unction on certain words and phrases. The prayer of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is the "oratio" of Lectio Divina – the true prayer which will lead to a lived response. After pondering over many hours (days), you will want to make your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: **Psalm 46**
The response is: GOD MOUNTS HIS THRONE TO SHOUTS OF JOY;
A BLARE OF TRUMPETS FOR THE LORD.
Psalm 46 is a Psalm prayed to God as King of the world. The Jamberoo Abbey Monastic Psalters note: "No doubt it refers to the procession with the Ark of the Covenant up to the Temple hill, but for us there is another 'ascension'. The glorified body of Christ has thrown off the chains of place and time, and he has power to lead us always and everywhere. This is surely a psalm for the feast of the Ascension."

Certain lines of the Psalm will speak to your spirit. Pray with them throughout this week.

***Lectio*: Read the Second Reading, from Ephesians 1:17-23.**
PAUSE. Read it again. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist, in order to bring forth the most authentic melody of your response…

***Meditatio*: Understanding the text in order to make an informed response to it. This text is taken from a long text which spans Ephesians 1:3-3:21.**
Ephesians 1:3-14 is a blessing.
Ephesians 1:15-23 is a text which takes the theme of "thanksgiving" and concludes with a prayer of intercession. The text we are given doesn't begin until verse 17. We are referred to Colossians 1:12,27; Colossians 2:10,12; Colossians 1:18-19, 24. These texts are echoed in the text from Ephesians which the Church has given us this Sunday. The message of the last part of our text is that God's might is revealed in the

Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and in his exaltation over all angelic forces. The author of Ephesians uses early "creedal" statements that formulated the Christ-event in terms of Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 8:7.
In verse 22, the author announces an important metaphor that will pervade the letter to the Ephesians: Christ is the head of the body, the Church. The Church is the beneficiary of God's all-embracing plan, and beneficiary of Christ's lordship over all things and over all angelic powers. The Church, Christ's body, shares in the dominion of the Head of the Church. And so, nothing could assure us more than that! (cf. the New Jerome Biblical Commentary on Ephesians)
Bl. Columba Marmion, in his work "Christ In His Mysteries", puts it spiritually: Christ ascends into heaven in order to prepare a place for us. Christ enters there as our High Priest. Christ makes it possible for us to enter with him into heaven, and takes us with him into the sanctuary of the divinity. (Pages 315-321). Marmion also writes: "Because of the Ascension, Christ Jesus is, and remains for every soul the one source of salvation, of grace, of life, of benediction; henceforward, the name of Jesus has become so great, so resplendent, so glorious that every knee shall bow before it, in heaven, on earth…and every tongue shall confess that Jesus lives and reigns in the glory of God the Father." (page 305)

Take time over the text before making your response to it in the days ahead.
I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is taken from Matthew 28:19-20.
GO AND TEACH ALL PEOPLE MY GOSPEL. I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD.

Lectio: **Read the Gospel text from Luke 24:46-53.**
Pause and ponder. Read the text again.

Meditatio: **Some informed background to the text.**
As we have already seen, Luke speaks in more detail and theological depth of the Ascension at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. Here, in the Gospel, Jesus tells them to "Stay in the city then, until you are clothed with the power from on high." Then, Jesus leads them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany, blesses them and withdraws from them, going to the Father. Their response, as recounted by Luke is one of worship, joy and praise.
This same event is recounted in retrospect in the Acts of the Apostles (first reading).
It is significant that Bethany is a village on the Mount of Olives. According to John 11:1, it was the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. And so, it was familiar territory for Jesus. There was the raising to life of Lazarus. There was a visit to the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus. If one visit has been recorded, there were probably more visits. Mary and Martha and Lazarus were friends of Jesus. So, this little village was symbolic of a "raising to life". Now it is more than ever a place of "resurrection" because Jesus departs from there, ascending to the Father, to make the way forward for the resurrection of every one of his followers.

Stand back from the Gospel and ponder. Hear the words: BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD. 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 is to make a re-commitment to a stance or attitude of abiding and waiting in the Jerusalem of my heart, and listening to how the Holy Spirit speaks directs the course of my life.

2. In response to this text from Ephesians, I pray for that "spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed". Only through such grace will I be able to remain with this great mystery in reverence, and awe. There is no scientific explanation for the Ascension. It is one of Christ's mysteries, which, with all his mysteries, "leads us to drink more often at the fountains of livng water which have sprung up for our salvation and joy." (Bl. Columba Marmion).

3. Keeping in mind that the Ascension of the Lord is one of the "mysteries" of my faith, I have in addition, delved into different spiritual commentaries which aid my Lectio Divina. Of all the spiritual commentaries I have probed, I find Fr. Thomas Keating's writing on this "mystery" to be the clearest: "The grace bestowed on us by the Ascension of Jesus is the divinization of our humanity. Our individuality is permeated by the Spirit of God through the grace of the Ascension and more specifically through the grace of Pentecost." Page 86, "The Mystery of Christ').

Lectio Divina is Holy Reading,
that is,
reading of the Sacred Scriptures
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
It is about reading (and listening),
reflecting,
praying in tune with the Holy Spirit within me,
resting in God,
and responding in the way I live.