***LECTIO DIVINA*: (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday, December 20th 2015
Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year C.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Four.

Before beginning prayer with the Sacred Texts, let us take a look at the week ahead in Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:
December 25: The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day)
December 26: St. Stephen. Evening Prayer is Evening Prayer 1 of the Holy Family.
December 27: Feast of the Holy Family. St. John the Evangelist is omitted this year.

In the Australian Church:
No anniversaries this week

In the Social Justice Calendar:
December 20: International Human Solidarity Day.
December 21: 1991 - The Dissolution of the USSR and the founding of the Commonwealth of Independent States including Russia.
December 21: 1993 - The Native Title Bill was passed by the Australian Senate.
December 23: 1901 - Immigration Restriction Act (White Australia Policy) enacted.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Micah 5:1-4
Hebrews 10:5-10
Luke 1:39-44

***Lectio*: Read the First Reading from the Prophet Micah, chapter 5, verses 1-4.**
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.**
The text is important for its placing of the birth of the Messiah in the city of Bethlehem. Hence its relevance so close to the Nativity of the Lord. The Messiah is to be a new David. Bethlehem is the city of Jesse and his son David. In its original context, the woman is the mother of the new David and the peace which the new David will bring, will be freedom from the oppression of Assyria. In a Christological context, the woman is the Mother of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Messiah will be the Good Shepherd who will stand and feed his flock which will be gathered together by the power of Divine Love. Security, peace, justice, a new age – this is what the Messiah will bring to the world.

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.

The Responsorial Psalm: **Psalm 79**
LORD, MAKE US TURN TO YOU;
LET US SEE YOUR FACE AND WE SHALL BE SAVED
Psalm 79 is a plea for the return of God's favour. In the first text from Micah, God's favour has already been proclaimed: a Messiah (a new David) will be born and will stand and feed his flock, bringing peace and security. Well may we pray this response frequently throughout the week as we lead up to Christmas and the coming of our Saviour: "Lord, let us see your face and we shall be saved." And we do see God's face in the faces of our brothers and sisters on this earth. And when we love Christ in one another then we recognize the Mystery of the Incarnation.

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

***Lectio*: Read the Second Reading, from the Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 10:5-10.**
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 equally important on the verge of Christmas. It is about obedience as compared with sacrifice. Firstly, Psalm 40, verses 7-9a are used and attributed to the Son of God at his Incarnation The meaning is that God prefers obedience to sacrifice. Jesus' obedience was expressed by the willing offering of his life which would lead to the ultimate sacrifice on Calvary. In verse 8 there are various descriptions of offerings: sacrifices, offerings, holocausts and sin offerings. These terms, we are informed, are meant to cover the four main types of sacrifices in the Old Testament (the old order): peace offerings, cereal offerings, holocausts and sin offerings. The last includes the guilt offerings of Leviticus 5:6-7. The bottom line is that Christ, in coming into the world, abolished the old order with its many sacrifices, when he embraced the ultimate sacrifice – laying down his life for the life of humanity, to free humanity from the bondage of sin and death. It is good to have a reminder of this great mystery as we come close to Christmas. We need to keep Calvary in view as we look at the nativity scene wherever it confronts us. (Some of this background can be found in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 60:58).

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 Luke 1:38.
I AM THE SERVANT OF THE LORD: MAY HIS WILL FOR ME BE DONE.
(The words of the Mother of God).

Lectio: **Read the Gospel text from Luke 1:39-44.**
Pause and ponder. Read the text again.

Meditatio: Some informed background to the text.
In a Patristic Commentary on this text, Guerric of Igny takes up the words of Elizabeth to Mary: "When the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy." Opening out this text, he writes in exhortation: In the words and spirit of Elizabeth, the soul responds to the message, whether it has come through Isaiah, or of his fellow prophets, saying *Why is this granted to me, that my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears*, *my spirit leapt for joy within me in eager longing to run ahead to meet my God and Saviour.* Let us too arise with joy and run in spirit to meet our Saviour. Hailing him from afar, let us worship him, saying, "Come, Lord, save me…come and show us your face, we have been waiting for you; be our help in time of trouble. This indeed was how the prophets and saints of old ran to meet the Messiah, filled with immense desire to see with their eyes, if possible, what they already saw in spirit. We must look forward to the day, so soon to come, on which we celebrate the anniversary of Christ's birth.

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 the Messiah, the Lord Jesus standing and feeding his flock and the miracle of the Eucharist comes to me at this point, the miracle which takes place at every Mass. This for me, is the Lord standing and feeding his flock. And it is also a miracle when we serve Jesus Christ in the marginalized of society. In 2014, on Christmas eve and Christmas day, over 3000 meals were served to the homeless and poor in Sydney, by the volunteers who work at the Exodus Foundation – especially in the mobile food van and at the "Loaves and Fishes" Restaurant. And what of the multiplication of kind deeds to the less fortunate – the many "giving" trees which are placed in shopping centres and towns? When any of us give at Christmas to Christ in the marginalized and the poor, then we stand in the shoes of the Messiah and feed the flock. I know an 11 year old Christian boy who has asked his parents for a Christmas present which he can give to somene in need. He doesn't want a gift for himself. His parents have fed the flock of Christ all their lives, so I guess he has learnt by example. So, it begins with the Eucharist and goes from there to the marginalized and poor. In whatever way we do it, we feed the flock of Christ.

2. My response is by way of a sharing. In our cloister on the way to the Church, we have a large life-size crucifix which was in our Monastery Church when we lived in Sydney. Every year, one of our nuns places the

baby Jesus in the crib in front of the crucifix. Every year, it is a challenge for me, because it brings home the fullness of the Mystery of the Incarnation.

3. My response is to Guerric of Igny's challenge to run and meet the Lord with eager longing. So often, I'm content to wait upon the Lord, trusting certainly, but not actually getting up and running to meet the Lord with joy and spiritual longing. So, it is not just another Christmas that I face, but a new Christmas. And because it is a new Christmas, I will run with the enthusiasm of someone eager to see the face of Christ once more. On December 24th, 1818, Fr. Joseph Mohr was a little weighed down by preparation for his sermon for Midnight Mass. He was probably not in a "running" mood. A knock on the door saw a poor peasant woman wrapped in a shawl. She told Fr. Mohr of a birth earlier that day to a poor charcoal maker's family. She asked if he would come and bless the infant so that he might live and prosper. Trudging through the snow-laden hills with the woman, they finally reached the little cabin and Fr. Mohr went in and greeted the parents and blessed the child. He returned through the snow-laden hills and finally reached his own presbytery. He was tired, but overjoyed that he had looked into the faces of Christ. Then God gifted him with a gift which has touched the world ever since. He was given the words of the Christmas carol, "Silent Night". His friend, Franz Gruber, the schoolteacher of the village, put it to music, using his guitar and it has touched our hearts ever since. May we all have the enthusiasm of Fr. Mohr and Franz Gruber this week.

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.