***LECTIO DIVINA*: (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 17 September 2017
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A.
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:
September 20: Sts Andrew Kim Taegon, Paul Chong and Ha-Sang and companions (Memorial)
September 21: St. Matthew (Feast)
September 23: St. Pius of Pietrelcina (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:
September 23: SALE – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (1915).

The Social Justice Calendar:
September 18: 1961 – Death of Dag Hammerskjold Secretary General of the United Nations.
September 21: International Day of Peace, and World Alzheimer's Day.
September 23: 1959 – Launch of the Australian Consumers Association.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Sirach 27:30-28:7
Romans 14:7-9
Matthew 18:21-35.

***Lectio*: Read the First Reading from the Book of Sirach, Ch 27 vs 30 - Ch 28, vs 7.**
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*: Understanding the text so that we can make an informed response.**
This text from the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament places emphasis on the "memory". The people are asked

- to remember the last thing, dissolution and death
- to remember the commandments
- to remember the Covenant

The memory of such realities will lead to the renunciation of hate, to living by the commandments, to the renunciation of ill-will and to over-looking the offences of others.
St. John Climacus sheds light on what exactly happens to us when we don't heed this wisdom teaching: *The memory of insults is the residue of anger. It keeps sins alive,*

hates justice, ruins virtue, poisons the heart, rots the mind, defeats concentration, paralyses prayer, puts love at a distance, and is a nail driven into the soul…forgetting offences is a sign of sincere repentance. If you keep the memory of them, you may believe you have repented but you are like someone running in your sleep.

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 quietly pondering over many hours (days), you will want to make your response. Maybe your response will be an immediate one. This does not mean that we cease to ponder on the text throughout the week. Lectio Divina is a way of *life.* I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 102
The response is: THE LORD IS KIND AND MERCIFUL;
SLOW TO ANGER AND RICH IN COMPASSION.
There are some powerful statements in this Psalm. Note: "It is he …who heals every one of your ills, who redeems your life from the grave, who crowns you with love and compassion.
Why not ask for this crown? When I wear it and practise it, I'm much more at peace!

***Lectio*: Read the Second Text from Romans 14:7-9.**
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. Verse 7 notes the "liberating act of Christ, freeing human beings from bondage to law, sin and death."
In vs 9: "Paul formulates the finality of the passion, death and exaltation of Christ, stressing his sovereignty over the dead and the living, which became his…it is a universal dominion proper to the *Kyrios* [Lord] of all." (New Jerome Bib. Commentary 51:123).

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 John 13:34.
I GIVE YOU A NEW COMMANDMENT;
LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.

***Lectio:* Read the Gospel text from Matthew 18:21-35.**

Meditatio: Some informed background to the text.
Forgiveness and un-forgiveness!
This is the parable of the unforgiving servant.

It is noted in the commentary on Matthew's Gospel that the first part of this text is a Peter-Jesus dialogue in which the bloodthirsty boast of Lamech is reversed (Genesis 4:15 and 24). Pause to read these texts.
The parable that follows the Peter-Jesus dialogue, spans verses 23-35. It is only loosely attached to the teaching about forgiveness. It is probably composed by Matthew to make part of the Lord's prayer vivid to his people. This parable teaches the need to imitate the divine mercy. (cf NJBC 42:116).

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. I am responding to the words of St. John Climacus. How much does it cost me in "health", to keep all the hurts, and the anger and the desire for revenge, alive and well within me? I, like all of us, want to see an end to acts of terrorism and revenge – acts of hate and destruction. But first I must look into my own heart, and ask God to have mercy on me for all the hurts I keep alive, the anger I so cleverly cover up, the prejudices which I house. William Blake is a master of spiritual help. In "Songs of Experience", 1794, we find: "I was angry with my friend: I told my wrath, my wrath did end. I was angry with my foe: I told it not, my wrath did grow." If we acknowledge it, tell it, speak to the one with whom we are angry, then these things don't get out of proportion, or grow into weapons of mass destruction!

2. The Holy Spirit has prompted me to respond to the proclamation, "Lord". A Priest of the Byzantine Church, reflecting on the "Jesus Prayer", says of this proclamation: The proclamation "Lord" is "a proclamation of Christ's Resurrection. It is a profession of faith in his divinity. It is a proclamation of his power. He is the Lord, the only Lord. What happens inside me when I utter this powerful word 'Lord'? If I say it with faith, it I say it in my heart and from my heart, he comes." (Pages 37 and 38, "Reflections on the Jesus Prayer" by a Priest of the Byazntine Church. Dimension Books Inc. 1978).

3. Forgiveness is the topic none of us want to hear, because at some time in our lives un-forgiveness will have a strong hold on us, and we will become physically and emotionally sick from remaining in this state. It was a talk I once heard on the old tape recorder, which helped me the most when I was struggling to forgive one of my siblings for what had been done to our family, and especially to me (at least I thought so, until recently). This speaker explained that when we don't forgive, we build a prison, and we put all those we don't forgive in that prison. The only problem is that we need to feed them, and clothe them and check on them, in order to keep

them alive. All this is at cost to us – not monetary but at cost to our emotional and physical health. Keeping alive the hurt, our determination that we will definitely not forgive! And yet, when I think about it now, am I not like the unforgiving servant? I have been forgiven so much by a merciful God. Why can't I extend this forgiveness to my brother or sister? One of the most powerful stories I have ever read on forgiveness is in the book "Call Me David", by John Sweeney. David is Bishop David Cremin of Sydney. It is on pages 137-139. It is a Nelson Mandela story on forgiveness. There is also the story of Elsa Joseph, a Jewish woman, who was separated from her two girls, during the Nazi Occupation. Elsa was a concert violinist. Both of her daughters were gassed in Auschwitz. After the war, she played her violin in the concert halls of Europe, and in Germany, where her two girls were murdered. Elsa spoke of the need of the world then [and now] for reconciliation and forgiveness. The alternative was a world tearing itself apart. Elsa Joseph said: "If I, a Jewish mother, can forgive what happened," then why can you not sink your differences and be reconciled to one another?" She spoke these words in concert halls in Germany, Northern Ireland, Lebanon and Israel. Elsa Joseph's message obviously hasn't been heard. But then, neither has the message of Jesus, so where does that leave us?

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.

