***LECTIO DIVINA*: (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday, 24 January 2016
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C.
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:
January 25: The Conversion of St. Paul (Feast)
January 26: Australia Day. Feast.
January 27: Sts. Timothy and Titus (optional Memorial)
January 28: St. Thomas Aquinas (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:
No anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:
January 26: On this day in 1972, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was established in Canberra.
January 27: International Day of Commemoration for the Victims of the Holocaust.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Nehemiah 8:2-6 and 8-10
1 Corinthians 12:12-30
Luke 1:1-4 and 4:14-21.

***Lectio*: Read the first text from the Book of Nehemiah, Ch 8, verses 2-6 and 8-10.**
Be aware of the way you handle your bible. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep reverence. This text is given to all of us on this particular Sunday in the Church's Liturgical Year, for our formation as Christians.

***Meditatio:* Some background on the text, so that we can understand it more profoundly, and make our response to it.**
The name "Nehemiah" means "The Lord has compassion". Nehemiah was the post-exilic Governor of Judah. He undertook two restoration projects:

1. The rebuilding of the City of Jerusalem.
2. The religious reform of Judah, where he was assisted by the scribe Ezra.

The essence of the religious renewal was to help the post-exilic community re-commit themselves in fidelity to the Lord, the God of Israel.
Ezra was a priest descended from Aaron (Ezra 7:2-7). In 2 Kings 25:18-21 we can read that his family was slaughtered by King Nebuchadnezzar's army at Riblah. Ezra is described as a "scribe" (in the NRSV edition of the Bible). He is described as a "teacher" (in the NIV of the Bible).
Most commentaries on the text are complicated with details relevant for an academic study, but irrelevant for Lectio Divina.

The main theme of the text is clear: The Torah is read to the assembly to stir their hearts and call them back, and it did this. The power of the event was overwhelming.
Just at the end of the reading, there is an important line which might be missed: "Go, eat the fat, drink the sweet wine, and send a portion to the one who has nothing prepared, for this day is sacred to our Lord. Do not be sad: The joy of the Lord is your stronghold."
So, on that sacred day, it was important to share with those who had nothing ready.

With this background in mind, read the text again. Ponder for a while. Maybe a day or more! Make your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 18
The response is: YOUR WORDS LORD, ARE SPIRIT AND LIFE.

Psalm 18 is a psalm which praises God both as Creator and Law-Giver (the one who gave the Torah which was read to the Assembly in the first text). The response contains the word "spirit" which comes from the Latin "spiro" - to breathe.
Translating then: "Your words Lord, are my breathing and my life.
Or…
Because I breathe the Word of God, therefore I live.
Pray with the psalm throughout the week and note the words, phrases or lines which speak to your heart.

Lectio: **Read the second text from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 12, verses 12-20.**

Meditatio: Some commentaries suggest that Paul, in this text, was using a comparison current at the time (the community or Church made up of many parts like the body). The New Jerome Biblical Commentary disagrees with this theory. Paul saw society as, above all, characterized by divisions. (cf. Gal 3.:28).
The thrust of the text then is:
"Diversity is rooted in unity. The different members all share a common existence, Christ. The Spirit is within the Church.
'One member' is the key statement. Just as the human body needs different members (14-20), so the Church needs a diversity of spiritual gifts, and each one makes a specific contribution.
In verse 21, there is a slight change of perspective. The members need each other.
The last two verses, 28-30, concentrate on the spiritual gifts. The first three gifts are numbered and personalized. They constitute the fundamental three-fold ministry of the Word by which the Church is founded and built up: Apostles, Prophets, Teachers." (cf. NJBC 49:60).

Stand back from the reading and go about your work for a while. Maybe a day or two. Be alert to the g.race of God. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist on the strings of the harp. The Holy Spirit will bring forth the most beautiful response to this reading. You will be surprised by the Spirit.

I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2

***Lectio*: The Gospel Verse is taken from Luke 4:18.**
THE LORD SENT ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR AND FREEDOM TO PRISONERS.

***Lectio*: Read the Gospel text from Luke 1:1-4 and 4:14-21.**
Read it slowly and reflectively and maybe a second time. Try to read aloud rather than with the mind. Listen to the text as you read. Stand back from it and ponder.

***Meditatio*: Some background to help us understand the text and respond to it.**
Verses 1-4 begin Luke's Gospel. Luke states his intention.
Who was Theophilus? In "The Complete Who's Who in the Bible" edited by Paul Gardiner, we can note that "Luke dedicated his Two Volumes to Theophilus (cf. Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1).
It is possible…that he [Theophilus] came from a high social class and…perhaps he was a financial supporter of Luke's work". Other opinions noted in the same reference: "He was a Gentile, a God-fearer, or a Jew…a believer. The fact that he was addressed as needing reassurance shows Luke's commitment to him as a person and suggests that Theophilus was under pressure to renounce what he had believed." (Darrell Bock, Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary).
The rest of the text is set in the Synagogue at Nazareth.
Jesus is handed the Scroll with the reading from the prophetic Literature of the Old Testament.
It is about Luke's theology, because this Isaiah text is not to be found on a synagogue scroll. Luke weaves an artistic text from Isaiah 61:1-2 and Isaiah 58:6., and it is resplendent with the colours of Luke's presentation of Christ – with Luke's theology of promise and fulfillment. (cf. NJBC 43:59).

Read the Gospel text again slowly. Stand back from the text and the commentary and go about your work quietly ruminating. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 3.

EVANGELIZATIO: My lived response to the texts with which the Church exhorts me to pray. St. James says "Be doers of the Word." And the Book of Deuteronomy tells us that the Word of God is in our hands to do it.

1. I ask myself, how long it is since I have wept at the power of God's Word, or have prostrated before the Lord – so deeply touched by the presence of God in the Sacred Scriptures? Do I need a renewal, a restoration? Since it is January 2016, and a still early new year, I re-commit myself to be faithful daily to Lectio Divina and to open my heart to the power of God's Word.

2. My response is to the words "…that each part [of the body] may be equally concerned for all the others." In my own Monastic Community we have an important statement (within our Constitutions) – "The Christ of the Community". Our emphasis in community living is that whatever we are appointed to do in the way of work is done in service of the Christ of the Community. Even our elderly Sisters who can no longer work are appointed to pray for the Community. That is their service. The Benedictine Rule teaches one to consider at all times what is best for the

"other" rather than for oneself. What Paul is saying rings true for me as I seek as one part [one member] of the body [the community], to be equally concerned [attentive/aware of] every other member and her needs.

3. A lot of Christian charitable outreaches in our cities and towns have all or part of the text Jesus read as their inspiration. In Kiama, the nearest small Coastal town in our area, there is a group of dedicated Christians – a combined Churches group - who have established an outreach called "The Homestead of Hope". The text that Jesus read is the motto of their Ministry, which "aspires to leave the fragrance of God's love and mercy" (their brochure) with those who come to their gatherings, where coffee, tea, sandwiches, soup and most of all a listening ear is provided for the homeless, the desperate and the lonely. I had the privilege of meeting with one of the key persons involved in the founding of "The Homestead of Hope", and asking our community to pray for a whole month specifically for the project. If only the text which Jesus read could inspire all of us to reach out in the name of Jesus to all who need our love, our healing, our forgiveness, our kindness, our care. My own brother, who has led a very different life from mine, (but who has always been compassionate (a Gospel value), has recently taken in a homeless man in his 80s. He cares for all his needs. And, it isn't easy to take in a homeless person, to clean up that person, give fresh clothing and have that person sit at your table. So, I thank God for the women and men associated with the "Homestead of Hope", and for my brother with his gift of compassion. The man he has taken in, came to Australia in the 1950s as a very young man and worked on the Snowy Mountains Scheme. He later fell on hard times. It happens!

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.
Lectio Divina is a way of life
not a method of prayer.