***LECTIO DIVINA* (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday, 11 September 2016
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 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:
September 13: St. John Chrysostom, Memorial.
September 14th: The Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Feast).
September 15: Our Lady of Sorrows. Memorial.
September 16: Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian (Memorial)
September 17: St. Hildegard of Bingen (Feast in Benedictine Houses).

In the Australian Church:
September 12: Maitland/Newcastle – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (1941).
September 14: Military Ordinariate of Australia – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Geoffrey Mayne (2003). Port Pirie – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Gregory O'Kelly, SJ, (2006)
September 16: MELKITE EPARCHY – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Robert Rabbat, (2011).

In the Social Justice Calendar:
September 11: Child Protection Sunday
September 11: Terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre, New York and Washington DC – 2001
September 12: Death of anti-apartheid Activist Steve Biko
September 13: Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the United Nations. (2007)
September 14: Pope John Paul II's encyclical "On Human Work". 1981
September 15: International Day of Democracy.
September 16: International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Exodus 32:7-11,
13-14; 1 Timothy 1:12-17;
Luke 15:1-32.

***Lectio*: Read the first text from the Book of Exodus, chapter 32:7-11 and 13-14.** 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 day in the Church's Liturgical Year, for our spiritual formation.

Meditatio: **Some Background on the text, so that we can understand it more profoundly, and make our response to it.**
In Verses 7-10 of the text, the Lord informs Moses "of the peoples' violation of the fundamental commandment not to worship other gods, (cf. Exodus 20:2-6) and of his intent to destroy them and make a new people from Moses' family." Moses acts as a mediator between God and the people he serves, and he "persuades God to renounce his plan by appealing to the Lord: *What will the Egyptians say, and what about the promise to the ancestors that their descendants will possess the land forever*?" (New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 3:69).

Read the text again a couple of times. Ponder on the text for a day or more. However, if you are aware of the Holy Spirit calling forth your response to the text, note it down. When the Holy Spirit prays within you or pours unction on a text and calls you forth, this is the true "prayer" *(oratio) of Lectio Divina.* I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 50
The Response is: I WILL RISE AND GO TO MY FATHER.
Psalm 50 consists of 21 verses and is a prayer of repentance. The words: "Open my lips and my mouth shall declare your praise", is the "prayer" which begins the Office of Vigils in a monastic community. Vigils is the night office, prayed in the early morning, well before dawn.

Listen, as you pray with the Psalm throughout the week, to the Holy Spirit calling you to respond to a line, a word, a phrase. This is the Holy Spirit praying within you.

Lectio: **Read the Second text from the First Letter to Timothy, chapter 1, verses 12-17.**

Meditatio**: Some background to help us with our understanding and our response.**
This appears to be a "classic" text for the Jubilee Year of Mercy. "Mercy was shown me", says St. Paul. St. Paul went from being a persecutor of Christians to becoming a believer, an apostle, and one of the pillars of the early Church. His conversion is celebrated on January 25th. Paul saw himself as a living example of "God's inexhaustible patience".

Stand back from the reading and go about your work for a while. Maybe a day or two. Be alert to the grace 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.

The Gospel Verse is taken from 2 Corinthians 5:19.
GOD WAS IN CHRIST, TO RECONCILE THE WORLD TO HIMSELF, AND THE GOOD NEWS OF RECONCILIATION HE HAS ENTRUSTED TO US.

***Lectio*: Read the Gospel text from Luke 15:1-32.**
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.**
This long text is the response of Jesus the Good Shepherd, to the Pharisees judgment of him as he sits and eats with tax collectors and sinners. He began to speak to them in parables: three parables to help them understand the nature of his mission on earth.

1. To seek out the lost sheep and carry it back to the fold.
2. The woman who had lost her precious savings – part of her household budget. Perhaps she was a widow. The text suggests that the lost coin is an important part of her security. (money for food?)
3. The story of the prodigal son, which Pope Francis has used in his Letter for the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Pope Francis writes to us: "In the Parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy. We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with two sons (cf. Luke 15:1-32). In these parables, God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon." *(Misericordiae Vultus*:-#9, pages 17-18).

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. This year, we are listening to the book "A Year of Mercy With Pope Francis". Every day at Vespers, we listen to a short reading with a powerful message. One day, Pope Francis spoke about privatized prayer. He didn't say it was a false god. He merely noted that "privatized prayer" without a sense of "mission" is unbalanced. And yes, there are many of us who are ageing and unable to be involved in "missionary action". But the Pope doesn't mean that. He means that in our prayer, we, as Christians, open our hearts to all God's people on earth. Pope St. John XXIII said: "The Church…does not identify itself with any one culture. It is full of youthful vigor and is constantly renewed by the breath of the Holy Spirit. In "Wit and Wisdom of Good Pope John", we read: *We all like to judge events from the vantage point of the handful of earth beneath our feet. This is a great illusion. We must take our view from the heights and courageously embrace the whole.* This is never truer than when we are at prayer. May we avoid a "privatized attitude" to prayer and to all of our Christian activities, and embrace God's people on earth as human beings created in the image and likeness of God, and deserving of our love.

2. I am responding to the notion of "God's inexhaustible patience". While we have a gifted confessor and spiritual director who comes to the Abbey a few times a year, my earliest memory of "God's inexhaustible patience" was through a confessor of my late childhood and teenage years. He had been a chaplain with the Australian Army in the Second World War, and had seen it all – all the horrors of battle. When he heard my confession and the confessions of other children, he would assure us that God is there for us, loving us, showing care and mercy. I always came away with great peace. I was never frightened of the confessional when he was there. That priest, an OMI at Eagle Junction in Brisbane, was a "holy" man, a person after God's own heart. I believe Pope Francis would have been pleased to make his acquaintance.

3. While I have prayed with all the parables in this text, it is the lost sheep that is tugging at me. There are so many lost sheep, little lambs. Every day, I receive emails or cards from friends asking me (and our community) to pray for the lost sheep, or for the one little lamb that has strayed at a young and vulnerable age. William Blake wrote a poem called "The Lamb". It is about the "little lamb" who is asked a series of questions: "Do you know who made you, gave you life and bid you feed, by the stream and o'er the mead; gave you clothing of delight, softest clothing woolly bright; gave you such a tender voice, making all the vales rejoice. Little lamb who made you? Do you know who made you?" Then he writes: "I'll tell you who made you…one who is called by your name, one who calls himself a Lamb." On this Child Protection Sunday, may we pray for all the "little lambs" who are lost, suffering, abused and abducted. May we continue our prayer for Madeleine McCann and William Tyrell.

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 brought forth the Word made Flesh,
Our Saviour Jesus Christ.