LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)

PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.

Sunday, May 17th, 2015, is the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. There is widespread evidence that it has been celebrated since the later years of the 4th Century A.D. It used to be kept on Thursday of the Fifth Week of Easter, that is, 40 days after Easter. The Paschal Candle used to be extinguished after the Gospel on Ascension Thursday. In recent decades, the Ascension of the Lord has been moved to the Sunday before Pentecost, and so the 7th Sunday of Easter is omitted. There are still some Countries which keep to Ascension Thursday.

The Ascension of the Lord, according to tradition, took place on the Mount of Olives.

The readings are:

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 1:17-23 or Ephesians 4:1-13. I have chosen the second text.

Mark 16:15-20.

For those who pray the Divine office, the Psalter takes Week 3.

Before we pray with the Sacred Texts, let us look to the week ahead, <u>in the Liturgy:</u>
There are no *Memorias*, Feasts of Solemnities this Week.

<u>In the Australian Church</u>:
March 19: Geraldton celebrates the Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Justin Bianchini – 1992.
Canberra-Goulburn celebrates the Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Christopher Prowse -2003
May 22: Rockhampton celebrates the Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral – 1982.

<u>In our Social Justice Calendar:</u>
May 17: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins.
May 17: World Telecommunications and Information Society Day.
May 17: this day is also the day Fr. Ted Kennedy, the Apostle to our city's Indigenous population, was called home by God – 2005.
May 20: On this day in 2002, the Timor-Leste Constitution came into force, with Xanana Gusmao as first President.
May 22: International Day for Cultural Diversity, Dialogue and Development.

May 23: International Day to End Obstetric Fistula.

Let us now move into prayer with the Sacred Texts which the Church gives us for the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, Year B.

***Lectio*:** Read the first text from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 1, verses 1-11.

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.** This is Luke's account of the Ascension of Our Lord. There are some "glaring" truths facing us throughout this text. The Number 40 is used in the Scriptues to depict a time of trial, testing, learning, preparation. For 40 days after the Resurrection, Jesus shows Himself to the Apostles, telling them about the Kingdom of God. At table, in one of these meetings, He told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. Jerusalem was the Holy City in which the apostles would receive the Holy Spirit, and from which the Gospel would be proclaimed abroad, eventually to all Nations on earth. Jesus is taken from their presence in a CLOUD. A cloud, in Scripture, always signifies the Divine

Presence. Then the two Angels, Messengers of God, speak to the Apostles, reassuring them that Jesus "will come back in the same way as you have seen Him go…" The gift of the Holy Spirit will be the Presence of Christ among all believers.

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.

Lectio: Read the Responsorial Psalm. <u>The Response is</u>: GOD MOUNTS HIS THRONE TO SHOUTS OF JOY; A BLARE OF TRUMPETS FOR THE LORD.

Psalm 46 is a Psalm to God, King of the world. The words of the Response refer to the Procession up the hill to the Temple, carrying the Ark of the Covenant. For Christians these words refer to the "glorified body of Christ which has thrown off the chains of place and time", ascended to Heaven, and now "has the power to lead us always and everywhere." (Cf. Jamberoo Abbey Psalters).

Take time through the week to ponder on this Psalm and listen 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 Letter to the Ephesians chapter 4, verses 1-13.

***Meditatio*:** Some background to help us with our understanding and our response.

This is Paul's reflection on the two-fold Mystery: the Ascension of the Lord, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The first section of the text is written as a Post-Pentecost text. Then Paul goes back to Christ's coming as one of us, and even descending to the lower regions of the earth (Holy Saturday), to free those trapped in Hades. Then, the Ascension into Heaven again and the outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There is so much wealth in this text that we would be wise taking just a small section and praying with it.

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 Matthew 28:19 and 20. GO AND TEACH ALL PEOPLE MY GOSPEL. I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD. The second part of this text is probably the most comforting text in the whole of the Gospel: I am with you always, until the end of the world.

***Lectio*: Read the Gospel text from Mark 16:15-20.**

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 is the concluding text of Mark's Gospel, and is the abridged version of the Commissioning of the Disciples and the Ascension of the Lord. It accompanies the mission with the signs, and signs not just in the ministry of the disciples but of all who preach the gospel in the name of Jesus: devils will be cast out, believers will speak in tongues, believers will not be harmed by poisonous snakes, or by poison itself, and they will heal the sick. These signs have to be translated into today's Christian Ministry, and not taken literally. The snakes and the deadly poison surely symbolize the darkness which tries very hard to assert itself over the Light of Christ. Back in the middle of March, the Lindt Café in Martin Place was reopened. Darkness did not prevail because people of all Faiths prayed during and after the Siege of December, 2014. A Memorial was set up for posterity. It is a Memorial to those who lost their lives, and a Memorial to the Light of God, whoever God is for people.

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 am responding to the command to stay in the Jerusalem of my heart and wait for the Presence of God. So often I am asked to do this when I am presented with a situation which is difficult. I want it changed and fixed immediately. I have no patience. And yet, inevitably, I hear the words of Jesus: "Wait, be patient and trust Me. I will take care of it." And Jesus always takes care of it.
2. My response is to the first sentence and the last sentence. I see both these as not only binding the text together, but as challenging me to "lead a life worthy of my vocation", and thus I will become "fully mature with the fullness of Christ." I hear that there is no room for luke-warmness. Primarily I'm a Christian and am called to live that vocation in all circumstances of life – especially in the ordinary activities of every day. That's mostly where God is. The extraordinary events are few and far between. I love what Fr. Thomas Keating says about "ordinary time". He writes: "Ordinary Time…is time that has been transformed by the eternal values introduced by Jesus through his entrance into the space-time continuum of human experience. Every moment of chronological time is now the precious

present in which eternal values are being offered, communicated and transmitted. Chronological and eternal time intersect in the mystery of the present moment…"

3. I am responding to the "casting out of devils" [demons] which is one of the signs of those who believe in Jesus and who spread the Gospel of Jesus. And instead of looking for unusual so-called "demons", I am looking at the more usual demons: un-forgiveness, the desire for revenge (pay-back), the demon of "power", "superiority", and the opposite – the demon of "inferiority". And then there is the demon of "fear", and the demon of jealousy. The demons we don't confront will destroy us. And we need all the help we can get to confront our demons and to be delivered from their grip. They are ugly, and they rear up when least expected. May we be aware of them this week, and pray the Name of Jesus when any of our demons rise up! May we be faithful to prayer and so keep the demons away.

***LECTIO DIVINA* IS ABOUT READING THE SACRED SCRIPTURES, REFLECTING ON THE SACRED SCRIPTURES 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.**