***LECTIO DIVINA*: (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday, December 6th 2015
2nd Sunday of Advent, Year C.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Two.

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:
December 7: St. Ambrose (Memorial)
December 8: Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

In the Australian Church:
December 8: Perth – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (2009)
Port Pirie – Patronal Feast.
December 9: Melbourne – Anniversary of the Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Denis Hart (1997).
December 12: Armidale – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (1919), Hobart and Sale – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. Eric D'Arcy (2005).

The Social Justice Calendar:
December 9: International Anti-Corruption Day.
December 10: Human Rights Day
December 12: On this day in 1831, the Sisters of Mercy were founded by Catherine McAuley

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Baruch 5:1-9
Philippians 1:4-6 and 8-11
Luke 3:1-6

Lectio: **Read the first reading from the Prophet Baruch, chapter 5, verses 1-9.** Read slowly and prayerfully, really listening to the text as you read aloud. This is about my on-going conversion.

***Meditatio*: Understanding the text so that we can immerse ourselves in it, and make our response to it.**
The Prophet Baruch was Jeremiah's secretary. This explains why there is no book in the Old Testament which is written by Baruch. What Baruch wrote down was what Jeremiah told him to write down. We can read this for ourselves in Jeremiah 36. The message of our text is one of hope: no more sorrow and distress. Instead, the integrity of God will be wrapped as a cloak around the exiles. A diadem of the Eternal God will be placed on their heads and such glory will be seen by every nation under heaven.
"Peace through integrity, and honour through devotedness" is the new name they are given. It is a name which carries within it a great responsibility to live in integrity and to remain devoted to God. The new name comes at a price!

Symbolically, the people are asked to turn their eyes to the east. The east is where the sun rises every day. And the rising of the sun in the east symbolizes (in the New Testament), the rising of Jesus Christ on Easter morning. Somewhere in Church documents, it is said that Churches should be built facing the east.
The text goes on to remind the people that God has remembered them and therefore is re-assembling them to come home to their own land. They left as prisoners, but will return as royalty.
Then we are plunged into the imagery of Advent: the flattening of high mountains, of hills, and the filling of valleys to make a way for the Lord, only in this case it is to make a way for the people to return in safety, under the glory of God. And finally, the imagery of giant trees providing shade and fragrant trees providing joy for the people.
The text concludes with God imaged as a guide who brings joy, light, glory, mercy and integrity. These realities are the escort for the exiles coming home.

Take time to ponder on this text in the days ahead as you go about your work, rest, recreation. Allow the Holy Spirit to work on the fibres of your heart, and bring forth the melody of your response to this text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 1.

The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 125
The response is: THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US; WE ARE FILLED WITH JOY.
Psalm 125 is the "classic" psalm of the returned exiles. It is a pilgrimage psalm in its original context. In its Christological context, the sowing is in tears (they go forth in tears), because "unless the seed falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone". The seed is the Word. The Word became flesh and was crucified. The tears are his, the joy is ours. "What marvels the Lord worked for us."
Pray long with this psalm and listen to the Holy Spirit pouring unction on certain words and phrases.

Lectio: **Read the second text from Philippians 1:3-6 and 8-11.**

Meditatio: Some background to the text so that we understand it better and can then make our response. This text is chosen in Advent for its reference to the Day of Christ, the Second Coming of Christ. However, as Christians in the present time, the Day of Christ for us, is "every day" of our lives. In this sense we can apply the prayer of Paul to our lives in the present: that our love for one another may increase more and more
That we will never stop improving our knowledge (of the Word of God), and deepening our perception (of God), so that we can recognize what is best – best for us and best for others.
At the foundation of this prayer is Divine Wisdom. It is the gift of Wisdom, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which will lead us to deeper knowledge and perception of God and a deeper reverence for the things of God.
In this way, we go back to the **call to integrity** of the first reading. Integrity, love, knowledge, perception – these are all the characteristics of one who comes from exile to freedom.
At the end of this text from Philippians, there is a reference to the perfect goodness which Jesus Christ produces in us.

May we never forget this. It is Jesus and Jesus only who can lead us to the fullness of goodness, the wholeness of the Christian life.

Read the text again and allow the Holy Spirit to work on your heart. What words, what phrases, what sentences are to change your life? I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is taken from Luke 3:4 and 6.
PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE STRAIGHT HIS PATHS;
ALL PEOPLE SHALL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.

Lectio: **Read the Gospel text from Luke 3:1-6**
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.

Meditatio: **What is it about?**
It is simple in its message. John the Baptist begins his prophesying – going through all the Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins "as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah". John quotes from Isaiah chapter 40. Luke's theology is manifest in his use of the words "repentance" and "forgiveness of sins". Robert Karris, ofm, in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary notes that the use of these words specifically detail what Jesus Christ has achieved for humanity. This comes to light in the Gospel of Luke. Karris also points out that "what John is about is in fulfillment of God's promise of a new exodus, which will be from the exile of sin and death, and will be accomplished by Jesus, whose way John prepares." (43:43).

Read this Gospel text a number of times, and as you read, listen to the Holy Spirit playing like a harpist on the fibres of your heart, to bring forth melody of your response. 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. The Word of God is life-changing for me when I respond to it in a practical way.

1. My response is to the notion of exile. I believe we are all in exile of one kind or another and we all need delivering from our exile. For me, the exile I so easily slip into is the exile of negativity. Negativity makes me a prisoner. It's not what I want and yet it happens so easily. The call of God to me in this text is to return to integrity. Integrity is honesty and truth. First of all it means being honest with myself. Am I really honest in my words, actions, relationships with other people? Am I honest and faithful to daily *Lectio Divina*, or do I waste this time by doing other things? Am I faithful in my attendance at the Liturgy of the Hours, or am I thinking of all the things I've got to fit into this one day? When I'm serving other sisters with cooking, cleaning, washing or ironing, do I give of my best, or do I grumble in my heart about all these tasks, and wish I didn't have to do them? All of this grumbling, reluctance, waste of prayer time is an exile. It keeps me in prison.

When I give myself truthfully, honestly, then I return from exile and am given that new name which is spoken about in today's reading: "Peace through integrity. Honour through devotedness".

2. I will approach each day this week as the Day of Christ for me, and be aware of all the ways in which Christ comes into my day, especially in the goodness of my Sisters in community and in their neediness as well. I will be aware of the face of Jesus and the voice of Jesus in those around me and in those of the wider human family.

3. I am responding to crooked paths, valleys, mountains and hills which need climbing, winding ways and rough roads. All of these, in whatever way they are manifest in my own life, are obstacles which are in the way of an authentic Christian life, a life of integrity, truth and honesty. So, I believe it is best that I look at just one of these over this week as I prepare for the Second Sunday of Advent. I have a mountain I must climb. It is an old wound, an emotional wound. I need to take it to Jesus and sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to Jesus guiding me from the exile of this prison into the freedom of his love. I will spend extra time before the Blessed Sacrament this week and I know that with the help of Our Lord, I will climb that mountain.

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.