***LECTIO DIVINA* (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday, 20 March, 2016.
Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord.
Blessing of Palms and Procession.
The Gospel for this entrance ceremony is from Year C.

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week 2.
The "Hours" are those of Holy Week.

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:
March 24: Holy Thursday. Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper.
March 25: Good Friday
March 26: Holy Saturday.

In the Australian Church:
March 21: Adelaide – Anniversary of the death of the Most Rev. James Gleeson, 2000.
March 24: Toowoomba – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (1935)

The Social Justice Calendar:
March 21: international Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.
International Day of Forests.
World Down Syndrome Day
National Harmony Day (Australia)
March 22: World Water Day
March 23: World Meteorological Day.
March 24: On this day in 1980, Blessed Oscar Romero was assassinated.
International Day for the Right to the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims.
March 25: International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.
1877: Death of Caroline Chisholm.
March 26: On this day in 1975, Biological Weapons Convention entered into force.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Isaiah 50:4-7
Philippians 2:6-11
Luke 22:14-23:56 – the Passion of Our Lord according to Luke.

***Lectio*: Read the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 50, verses 4-7.**
Read it aloud. Read it slowly. Be aware of the Holy Spirit placing unction on the message of this text. When your heart responds to a word or a line, or a phrase, this is the Holy Spirit touching your heart and calling forth your response.

***Meditatio*: A little background to the text will help us understand it and make a response to it.**
The first Song of the Suffering Servant is Isaiah 42:1-7. Pause to read this text.
The second Song of the Suffering Servant is Isaiah 49:1-6. Pause to read this text.
The third Song of the Suffering Servant is Isaiah 50:4-7, the first text of the Palm Sunday Liturgy.
We can call it an Old Testament Christological text because of the elements which relate to the Lord's Passion:
The Lord made no resistance.
He did not turn away.
He was scourged.
He was slapped in the face.
He was spat on.
He trusted always in the Father, knowing he would not be shamed, but vindicated.
In its original context the person speaking is a prophet, the Prophet Isaiah, or a disciple of the Prophet Isaiah – maybe one from the School of Isaiah.
For this person, the Lord provides speech and hearing and strength against all opposition.
All prophets faced opposition, as does anyone who speaks the truth.

After much pondering, take time to respond to the text. You may want to ponder for a day or more, as you work, walk, garden…sit and watch the ocean, the lake, the river, the mountains. Just take time. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 21
The response is: MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU ANANDONED ME?

These were the words Jesus cried out when on the Cross. Psalm 21 has the following note in our Monastic Psalters: "When the crucified Christ shouted the first dreadful line of this psalm, his mind must have gone on to its triumphal end, thanking his Father that this dark way of desertion led to the light beyond it." Personally I don't agree with this comment. As one who had taken on the human condition, I believe he cried out in anguish on that cross and a happy ending was the furthest thought from his mind. I prefer to pray the response on behalf of the Christians who are undergoing persecution in Syria at the moment, or the political prisoners who feel abandoned by their own governments, or on behalf of those going crazy behind the razor wire of detention centres.

Pray with the Psalm throughout the week, marking the words, phrases or lines which speak to you and call forth prayer from your heart. Re-visit some of your darkest hours.

***Lectio*: Read the Second Mass Reading: Philippians 2:6-11.**

***Meditatio*:** This text is an early liturgical hymn. It incorporates the two parts of Christ's journey through Holy Week and Easter. The first part begins by noting Christ's Divinity and his equality with God, while at the same time proclaiming that Christ "emptied himself", becoming human, and suffering the humiliation of death on a cross. The second part proclaims Christ's exaltation as Lord of all creation. Every

tongue shall acclaim that Jesus is Lord. All should bend the knee at the name of Jesus. It's easy enough to hear how such a hymn could be recited or chanted in the early Christian assemblies.

With this background, read the text again, and then ponder as you work or take time for leisure. Allow God to speak to you in the depths of your heart. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from Philippians 2:8-9.
CHRIST BECAME OBEDIENT FOR US EVEN TO DEATH, DYING ON THE CROSS. THEREFORE GOD RAISED HIM ON HIGH AND GAVE HIM THE NAME ABOVE ALL OTHER NAMES.

***Lectio*: Now read the Gospel text from Luke 22:14-23:56. The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Luke.**

***Meditatio*: Some background to the text which will help us respond.**
The call to all who listen to this account is a call to do so with commitment.
We live in an age, as Pope Francis says, of "too many words". Technology has done that to us: words and images assail us all day long. We don't stop and listen while someone reads to us. And yet we are asked to listen "with the ear of the heart" to this account of the Lord's Passion.
The right attitude is: enter into it with commitment.
The wrong attitude is: wishing it would finish so we could get on with the Mass and get home.
Twice a year we have the account of the Lord's Passion read aloud to us: Palm Sunday and Good Friday. What could be more important than giving ourselves to this account and reflecting again on all that Jesus did for each one of us?

Make your response in the days ahead. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 3.

EVANGELIZATIO – this is one's lived response to the texts given us by the Church each Sunday. It is about the evangelization of the "self", and pins me down to be who I am: A Christian who prays with the Word of God, and responds to the call of the Word of God in my everday life.

1. My response is to one Christological element: God provides me with speech in order to know how to reply to the wearied. I interpret this as knowing what to say to those who are tired, lonely, sick, grief-stricken, desperate, physically and emotionally abused. God gives me the words when I trust in him. God also awakens my spirit to listen with the ear of my heart (like a disciple), to his guidance. Help me Lord, to block out the noise within me, that noise which competes with your guiding presence.

2. I am responding to this text by hearing again the call to reverence. From a very young age I was educated to bow my head at the name of Jesus. I still do this because such an act of reverence has been woven into the fabric of my life. Holy Week is surely a suitable time to return to those gestures of reverence which acknowledge that Jesus IS our Lord, the one who emptied

himself and became one of us and in the end went to the Cross for each one of us. Surely as Christians this would be a counter-cultural gesture in a society where the word "Jesus" is so often used only crudely, and in the context of swearing.

3. From the writings of Pope Francis for the Jubilee Year of Mercy, I share the following: "The supreme expression of mercy towards those who crucified him [Jesus] shows us the point to which the mercy of God can reach." (Misericordiae Vultus, #24). Jesus said: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." So many of those who hurt us do not know what they are doing to us. Can I reach out in forgiveness to just one person this week, in the same spirit as Jesus did on Calvary?

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 pondered the Word of God in her heart
and brought forth the Word made flesh,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.