***LECTIO DIVINA* (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 24 September 2017
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week One.

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 27: St. Vincent de Paul (Memorial)
September 29: Archangels (Feast)
September 30: St. Jerome (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:
No anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:
September 24: Social Justice Sunday.
September 26: International Day of Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.
September 28: World Maritime Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Isaiah 55:6-9
Philippians 1:20-24 & verse 27
Matthew 20:1-16.

***Lectio*: Read the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 55, verses 6-9.**
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 three words: 'Seek the Lord', is an exhortation which usually invited people to the sanctuary." As used here, these words are exhorting people to seek the Lord elsewhere. Verses 8-9 explain "that God is transcendant and hidden, yet near enough to be burdened by human sin." (Cf. New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 21:49)

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. Just take time. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Pslam 144
The response is: THE LORD IS NEAR TO ALL WHO CALL HIM.

Psalm 144 is a song in praise of God's grandeur.
Pray with the Psalm throughout the week, marking the words, phrases or lines which speak to you and call forth prayer from your heart.

***Lectio*: Read the Second Mass Reading, Philippians 1:20-24 & 27.**

***Meditatio*: A little background to help us understand the text and make our response to it.**
Philippians 1:12-26, describes Paul's own situation. He is in prison.
A close look at the meaning of the text is necessary:
Vs. 20: *Christ may be glorified*...means that the power of the risen Lord, operative through the Spirit will be so effective as to demand public acknowledgment.
Vs. 21: Paul recalls his own baptism. We are to note related texts, such as Gal. 2:19-20; Philippians 3:7-11; Romans 6:3-11.
Vs. 22: Remaining alive provides further opportunity for preaching the gospel and reaping the fruits.
Vs. 23: Paul speaks of dying and being with Christ.
Vs. 24: The demands of the apostolate override Paul's option for death.
Vs. 27 has a three-fold meaning:
1. For Paul, Christian ethics flow from the status before God, brought about through faith in the gospel
2. Paul appeals for the kind of steadiness that comes from closed ranks in a line of battle.
3. Those who follow Christ and who preach the gospel are to defend and propagate the faith they have received.

With this background, read the text again, and then ponder as you work or take time for leisure. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is taken from Acts 16:14.
OPEN OUR HEARTS O LORD, TO LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF YOUR SON.
This simple but powerful prayer may be the best way to begin Lectio Divina each day.

***Lectio*: Now read the Gospel text from Matthew 20:1-16.**

***Meditatio*: Some background to the text which will help us respond.**
"Have I no right to do what I like with my own?"
"The last will be first and the first last."
It is a story of God's generosity, his goodness and care of the most needy.
The vineyard is the symbol of Israel.
A denarius was a normal day's wage.
The 11th hour is the hour before the sun goes down, and work stopped.

Overall, it is a teaching text: on the way Jesus treated everyone with the same generosity: poor or rich, needy of self-sufficient, socially low or socially high. And no, it isn't fair. Many of us would question what Jesus did.

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. I am responding to the exhortation that God is not limited to the sanctuary (the temple, the building we call church). God is elsewhere too, and everywhere. The Rule of St. Benedict teaches that the Divine Presence is everywhere. In the Presence Poems of Xavier Kelly, he addressed God as Presence: "Presence, you put it to me that however rough the dawn breaks, your Spirit waits in hope. While I scan my small horizon of an allegedly neutral world… the way that I front up makes it sacred or profane." Sr. Stan of Dublin, in her beautiful book "Stillness Through my Prayers", also addresses God as Presence: "Presence – a sacred experience in stillness…the countless wonders of day and night in nature."

2. The Holy Spirit is prompting me to ponder on the fact that Paul is writing from prison, where death is a daily reality. Another person wrote from prison - Cardinal Van Thuan. He shared his understanding of authentic Christianity. He said that Christians are those who bear Jesus in their minds, hearts, gaze, hands, and on their lips. (Prayers of Hope, Words of Courage, page 17). Aung San Suu Kyi spent over 15 years in house arrest, and endured suffering for her people. She said in 1994, that "truth, justice, and compassion are often the only bulwarks which can stand against ruthless power", the power which is as corrupt as ever across our world. When Hildegard of Bingen allowed an unbaptized person to be buried in the Monastery Cemetery at Rupertsberg, she received an interdict imposed on her monastery by the Archbishop of Mainz, - in other words, a ban of punishment: they were to cease relationships with the outside world. she said that the one thing the Archbishop couldn't do was silence their praise of God. Sr. Joan Chittister quotes Kahlil Gibran as saying: "You can muffle the drum, and you can loosen the lyre, but who shall command the sky lark not to sing?" We need to hear the words of those great people who stood against brute force. These people were (are) on fire, as was St. Paul when he wrote from prison. May we keep the flame of the Gospel alight in our lives, so that we make a difference against the hatred, revenge, terrorist mentality, warfare of all kinds, and abuse of our children in domestic situations, or by those entrusted with the responsibility of caring for these precious little ones.

3 My response is to God's love. Who couldn't respond to God's love? A small example which always makes me smile: As archivist of my community, I am to keep all letters and Christmas cards which come to the Abbey each year. At the end of January, when I am sorting through Christmas cards before filing them away for posterity, I sort them into categories: Oblates, friends, guests who make retreats here, family, Relgious, Bishops and Clergy. I am obliged to do this for

the purposes of Archival Research in the future. When doing this exercise, I have a permanent smile on my face, and I say to myself: All these people are equal in the sight of God. We are all equal in the sight of God. If God was doing this exercise, God would put all the cards in a box, mixed up, out of order. Order is a human thing. God meets us where we are, probably when we are mostly broken, or disordered – a mess! The last shall be first and the first shall be last.

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.