LECTIO DIVINA **(Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 24 July 2016
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C.
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:
July 25: St. James (Feast)
July 26: Sts. Joachim and Anne, parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary. (Memorial)
July 29: Sts. Mary, Martha and Lazarus. (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:
No Anniversaries to record this week.

In The Social Justice Calendar:
July 24: Bible Sunday
July 26: On this day in 1833, the Emancipation Bill was approved, abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire.
July 29: Schools Tree Day
July 30: World Day against Trafficking in Persons, and International Day of Friendship.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Genesis 18:20-32
Colossians 2:12-14
Luke 11:1-13

***Lectio*: Read the first reading from the Book of Genesis, chapter 18, verses 20-32.** 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.**
In this text from Genesis, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah feature. These cities have no healthy moral compass to guide them and have apostasized by their amoral culture. The promise of their destruction by God is not an unusual phenomenon in the Old Testament. God, through the Prophets, often berated his people, calling them in one instance, an adulterous people. David was called to order by Nathan for his sexual deviancy and for plotting to have a man killed so that he could have the man's wife. Abraham bargains with God. He is in a position to do this, because he has heeded the call of God to leave everything and go the the country God will show him. He has known the promises of God. The full text of the "bargaining" is 18:16-33. Abraham wants to know one thing: Will the judge of the whole world deal justly?

Abraham is conscious of the distance between himself and Almighty God and yet he dares to go on bargaining with God to the point that only 10 righteous people suffice to avert destruction. This is where Abraham stops. He stops at "ten". And yet, below the number ten God can and does save individuals within the city, as can be seen in the story of Lot (Genesis 19:1-29).

After much pondering, take time to respond to the text. You may want to ponder for a day or more, as you rest, 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: Psalm 137
The Response is: LORD, ON THE DAY I CALLED FOR HELP, YOU ANSWERED ME.
Psalm 137 is simply a psalm of thanksgiving to a faithful God. Our Monastic Psalters note: "The great God, Lord of the world and of angels, cares for us, constantly surpassing what we could expect from him.

***Lectio*: Read the Second Mass Reading: Colossians 2:12-14.**

***Meditatio*:** The theme overall is "participation in the death and resurrection of Christ through Baptism." (NJBC 54:20). It seems too that this is recognized as one of the "Hymnic formulas" of the early Christian communities. (Ibid). Scholars also note that the use of the word "record" or "note" (in some translations), found in verse 14, is found nowhere else in the New Testament. It "introduces the image of debtor and creditor, used frequently in the Old Testament and New Testament to describe the relationship between God and human beings." (Ibid). All debt has been cancelled. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the supreme Lord who has brought us "to life with him" and "forgiven all our sins." He has nailed all to the cross. This is a powerful image that Paul presents to us. Incorporated into the image of the "note" or "record", it takes us to that glorious text in the Gospel: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to myself." On the cross, all humankind was reconciled to God. It is an enormous reality to take into our lives.

Make your response in the days ahead. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is from Romans 8:15.
YOU HAVE RECEIVED THE SPIRIT WHICH MAKES US GOD'S CHILDREN, AND IN THAT SPIRIT WE CALL GOD OUR FATHER.

***Lectio*: Read the Gospel from Luke 11:1-13.**

***Meditatio*: Some background to the text which will help us respond.**
In this classic text on "how to pray", the Lord's Prayer is presented to us as the model for all prayer.

- It teaches us the stance of reverence before God.
- The desire that the Kingdom of God will come in our own hearts and in the hearts of all believers.
- Our trust in God for the needs of each day
- The request that our sin will be forgiven
- The promise that we in turn forgive each one who is in debt to us
- The request that God not put us to the test.

Of the third element: "Give us each day our daily bread, Louis Evely teaches that this "means agreeing to come and ask for it again tomorrow. It signifies trust. It means accepting, rejoicing over the fact that our life depends entirely on God. It means agreeing to be not self-sufficient…" (We Dare to say "Our Father", page 86). The last request causes problems. God does not tempt anyone, or lead anyone into temptation (testing). Again, Louis Evely writes inspiringly on this last petition: "We receive heaven. We make hell ourselves by making ourselves unhappy. But even in hell, light shines in the dark. It is darkness that does not want to grasp the light. One single gesture of love, one single sign of repentance, one single call for pity or forgiveness, and hell would end immediately.

Hell is in a way the "Our Father" upside down: My name is hallowed, my kingdom has come, I enjoy alone and for all time the horrible liberty claimed by me to need no one, to depend on no one. My will is done."

Louis Evely's book is one I have prayed with since the 1960s. It is probably out of print, but you may be able to purchase a second-hand copy on e-bay. (Herder-Burns & Oates, 1966)

Stand back from the Gospel, having read it a number of times. Ponder over it, and be still. When you feel called to do so, make your response to the text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 3.

EVANGELIZTIO. Evangelizatio is about the evangelization of the "self". It is that part of Lectio Divina where we make our lived response to the text. First of all, we pray with the text, take time to ponder and understand the text, be still with the text and listen to the response we are being called to make.

1. I am responding to the immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah. Yes, their culture was sexually immoral. Our culture today has many more aspects of destruction of human life. Each day in our world, one person every fifteen minutes is killed by a land-mine. They die immediately from the explosion, or (as is the case with children), from blood loss and exposure. These are the latest estimates from the United Nations. In Africa alone, children live on the most mine-plagued continent, with an estimated 37 million mines embedded in the soil of at least 19 countries. And the report goes on and gets worse. And this is just one issue across the globe. Then, there is the disrespect towards the elderly and the unborn. We have much to pray about. We tend to get into the old habits of thinking that every immoral act is sexual. And yet our present Pope is leading the way in showing us that all people are deserving of reverence, as he embraces asylum seekers and refugees fleeing from the very issue of land-mines and all the horrors of war in our present age, including biological warfare. More than ever, we need to make a commitment to daily prayer for all God's people, especially children who are killed,

maimed, taken for the sex trade, or for underage slave labour in factories where there are no inspectors. Let us pray: Lord Jesus, have mercy on your people who suffer daily, who are oppressed in any way. Come to their assistance and set them free." And more than that, we could begin to incorporate the prayer of "fasting" into our lives, giving up something we like eating, or something that gives us pleasure. This is a powerful form of prayer.

2. My response is to share words that always speak to me in the depths of my being. Blessed Columba Marmion once wrote that "The crucifix is the most vivid revelation of sin." The distortion, the dying Saviour, the brutality, the mockery, the nails in hands and feet, the total desecration of human life in this mode of death! So, this week, I will look again upon the crucifix in our cloister and also pray the Stations of the Cross, following Jesus once again on the ultimate journey to Golgotha where he set me free. The Stations of the Cross need not be kept for Good Friday. One can pray them in one's lounge room or bedroom. There are many books which contain the Stations of the Cross and the prayers and reflections that accompany each Station.

3. To pray the "Our Father" slowly, reflectively, sincerely, is my response. We sing it at the end of every "hour" of the Liturgy and once in the Mass: 8 times a day publicly. One cannot pray this prayer taught to us by Jesus, unless one means it. Often I have hesitated over: "…as we forgive those who have trespassed against us" and I have looked honestly at my heart in regard to forgiveness.

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.