***LECTIO DIVINA*: (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday, December 13th 2015
3rd Sunday of Advent, Year C
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Three

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 14: St. John of the Cross, Memorial.
December 17: The "O" Antiphons begin. The Liturgy of the Hours changes to the "Greater Advent Ferias".

In the Australian Church:
No Anniversaries this week.

In the Social Justice Calendar:
December 18: International Migrants' Day
December 18: On this day in 1894, the South Australian Parliament was the first in Australia to give women the right to vote.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Zephaniah 3:14-18
Philippians 4:4-7
Luke 3:10-18

***Lectio*: Read the first reading from the Prophet Zephaniah, Ch. 3, verses 14-18.**
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.**
First of all, something on the name "Zephaniah". We are informed in the resource book edited by Paul Gardiner that the verb on which the name Zephaniah is based, occurs frequently with the idea of being hidden by the Lord from evil, or of his saints being his treasured ones. "Both would be appropriate ways to describe this prophet's relationship with the Lord." (Page 680, "The Complete Who's Who in the Bible, An exhaustive listing of all the characters in the Bible", edited by Paul Gardner).
The Prophet Zephaniah focuses on the Day of the Lord.
There are EIGHT references to JOY. The Day of the Lord is a cause for rejoicing. The text is addressed to the "remnant" of the people, who will be saved because oppression will be overcome by rejoicing – the rejoicing of salvation. Fear will be a thing of the past for God is in their midst as a victorious warrior. God's relationship with his people will be characterized by joyful expectation, loving renewal, joyful dancing and festivity. The images speak for themselves. It is a text of great comfort

and reassurance, both for the people of the "remnant" and for each one of us who hears it in the present.

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.

The Responsorial Psalm: Isaiah 12
The response is: CRY OUT WITH JOY AND GLADNESS, FOR AMONG YOU IS THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL.
The Psalm is from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 12, verses 2-6. It is a summary of the events of the first reading, only here the people are the ones exhorted to "sing and shout for joy". Again, the reinforcement of the Lord's Presence is noted: "…great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

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 Reading: Philippians 4:4-7**
***Meditatio*:** This is a text which has been chosen for its Advent theme, the nearness of the Lord. It follows the theme of the first reading and the responsorial psalm, with its exhortation to "be happy, always happy in the Lord."
Then there is the supporting text, if we can call it that – not to worry, but to ask for what we need in prayer: prayer and thanksgiving. In so doing, we will know "peace". This too looks to the coming of the Saviour, who was called in the Old Testament "Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." (The Prophet Isaiah).
So far, we have salvation, joy, the nearness of the Lord, and the reinforcement of that "nearness", another exhortation to be happy, always happy in the Lord, and a promise that the end result of all this will be peace. The first text, the responsorial psalm and the second text all share the same theme. If we take this text to heart, fear and oppression of spirit will be things of the past, and our lives will change – we will be freed by the nearness of the Lord.

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 from Isaiah 61:1
THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME; HE SENT ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.

***Lectio*: Now read the Gospel text from Luke 3:10-18.**

***Meditatio*: Some background to the text which will help us respond.**
This text is ultimately about the baptism which Jesus will bring, the only baptism which will sort the wheat from the chaff, bring salvation or not! A Carthusian Monk has some deeply spiritual insights to share on this Gospel passage, and I have summarized them here: John has "precise ideas about the manner in which …divine power is going to manifest itself. 'His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear the threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he

will burn with unquenchable fire.' The baptism in the Holy Spirit and the fire will be a destroying bath. John sees in the 'One who is to come' the redoubtable Judge who will eradicate with the unquenchable fire all the sinners who have not repented of their sins and changed their conduct before it is too late. John regards himself as entrusted with preparing Israel for the terrible judgment, with helping them to escape the eternal punishment which threatens them. But the manner in which Jesus fulfils his mission does not correspond at all to that idea and arouses John's astonishment." The way Jesus will carry out his mission is expressed in the Gospel Verse: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he sent me to bring Good News to the poor." He will lay his hands on the sick and heal them, free the woman taken in adultery, eat with tax-collectors and sinners. This will be his victory: LOVE. Certainly not the victorious warrior of the Old Testament, but rather the Son of God who is gentle and humble of heart. It would be enriching for us to read Matthew 25 again at this point. That will be the only judgment – whether we have clothed the naked, fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, visited those in prison and in darkness. This will be the ultimate sorting out at the end.

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. The words I am responding to are: "Do not let your hands fall limp, for the Lord your God is in your midst." I am aware that some days I drop my bundle so easily, give in to sadness, forgetting that Jesus is not only in my midst, but walking with me in every step I take. I often read that beautiful and uplifting verse "Footprints". And the words, "In your times of trial and sufferings, when you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I was carrying you." My mind goes at this point to those who are carrying children and the elderly from the violence of Syria. The love and care on the faces of so many parents as they carry infants and help the elderly to flee the terrorist regime! Their faces reflect for me the face of God. And the United Nations personnel who are caring for refugees – they too reflect the face of God. This surely is God in our midst. "God is Love", we are told clearly in John's Letter. Thus wherever love is manifest, **there is the Presence of God. There is God in our midst.**

2. What speaks to me in this reading is the exhortation not to worry, to pray for what I need and the promise of peace when I follow this course. Don't worry, pray for what I need and enjoy the peace of mind and heart that comes. Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman whose feast day we celebrated on October 9th said: "Therefore I will trust Gd…if I am in sickness, my sickness may serve God, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve God. If I lose my friends I will trust God and if I am thrown among strangers I will trust God. When I feel desolate and my spirits sink, I will trust God." St. Thomas More said, when imprisoned in the Tower of London awaiting execution: "Mistrust God, I will not, though I feel myself faint. I trust that God will set his holy hand upon me and in the stormy seas hold me up from drowning." The faith

of these two saints was tested and tried and they surely knew the exhortation of St. Paul: not to worry, to pray for what they needed and to enjoy the peace of mind that such a stance brought to them. I pray for the grace to live like this.

3. My response to this Gospel is to read Matthew 25 again – the last judgment - and to remember the words of St. John of the Cross whose feast day we celebrate this week: "In the evening of life, we will be judged on love." Love will be the winnowing fan and the measuring stick. May I never forget that.

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.