***LECTIO DIVINA* (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday, 4 September, 2016
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, 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 Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:
September 8: Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the Australian Church:
September 5: Bunbury - Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Gerard Holohan (2001)
September 7: Wilcannia-Forbes – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (1960)
September 8: Broome – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (1963)

The Social Justice Calendar:
September 4: Fathers' Day
September 5: National Child Protection Week begins.
September 5: On this day in 1997, Bl. Mother Teresa of Calcutta died.
September 7: National Threatened Species Day.
September 8: International Literacy Day.
September 10: World Suicide Prevention Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Wisdom 9:13-18
Philemon 9-10 and 12-17
Luke 14:25-33.

Lectio: **Read the first text from Wisdom, chapter 9, Verses 13-18.**
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.**
Overall, the intention of this text is to compare the greatness of God with the frailty of human beings.
"Who can know the intentions of God? Who can divine the will of the Lord? The reasonings of mortals are unsure, and our intentions unstable." Then comes a brief description of the reality of the human body – its perishable nature and the fact that it often impedes the quest for God. It is described as "this tent of clay".
Finally, the answer to all the questions is presented in one word: Wisdom – with a capital letter).

This is the gift of the Holy Spirit – one of the seven gifts received in the Sacrament of Confirmation. It is Wisdom (the text states) that straightens our paths and teaches us about the things that please God (or lead to union with God). It is the gift of Wisdom that keeps us on the straight path to God and saves us from wandering in pursuit of earthly pleasure. In the Gospels, Jesus is presented as the Way to God, the Light which overcomes darkness, the Word of God made flesh. To follow Jesus is the way to give expression to the gift we have been given. When we turn away from Jesus, we wander in the mist and the darkness like the lost sheep of the Gospel story, or like the Prodigal Son. The sheep is sought out by Jesus and carried back on his sacred shoulders; the prodigal son is prompted by his lowly circumstances to return home and live with his father. Did the Holy Spirit prompt him to see the error of his ways? Probably not. Hunger and poverty drove him back to warmth of the family home. And his father ran to meet him with gestures of love, welcome and mercy. The father in this story is surely the one who represents a God of Wisdom.

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.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 89
The Response is: IN EVERY AGE, O LORD, YOU HAVE BEEN OUR REFUGE.
Psalm 89:3-6, 12-14, 17. (These are the verses the Church has chosen for our prayer and response this Sunday)
Psalm 89 is a Psalm which ponders on the shortness of life. Pray long with this Psalm and listen to the Holy Spirit pouring unction on certain words and phrases.

Lectio: **Read the second text from Philemon 9-10 and 12-17.**

Meditatio: **Some background to the text so that we understand it better and can then make our response**.
This is a simple text with a profound message. Onesiums is a slave (he would have been paid for at the Slave Market where such men and women were paraded before the buyers and sold as we would sell something today at an Auction).
Onesimus robbed his master Philemon and then fled from Philemon, with the money. The popular opinion as to where he went, places him in Rome, suggesting that it was easier for him to get lost in the large crowds of a city.
Later Onesimus comes across Paul. He is touched by God and then baptized by Paul. Onesimus enters the Christian family of believers. And in doing so, becomes like a son to Paul, while he was "in chains for the Gospel". It is thought that this letter expresses the beginnings of the Christian attitude to slavery: that it was contrary to the teaching of Jesus.
Paul tells Philemon (also a close friend of Paul), that he cannot take Onesimus back as a slave, because in the Christian family, they are both now equal. This "equality" is seen in other Letters of Paul. In Galatians 3:28 – "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus".

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 from from Psalm 118, verse 135.
LET YOUR FACE SHINE ON YOUR SERVANT AND TEACH ME YOUR LAWS.
The shining of God's face comes first, the learning comes second. It is about encountering God, living in the shining light of God and from there, learning the Wisdom of God's Laws.

Lectio: **Read the Gospel text from Luke 14:25-33.**
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?**
This text is about the demands of Discipleship. It demands "full-hearted response on the part of disciples…" Verses 28-32 and 33, present the fate of those who are not able to see something through to completion. Jesus' followers must not recoil before any sacrifice required of them – to see their following of him through to the end - even if this means the sacrifice of all their possessions. (cf. New Jerome Bib. Commentary, 43:145).
St. Benedict says; "Prefer nothing whatever to Christ." The Gospel text before us seems harsh. Taking a spiritual approach, it is asking us, not to hate anyone, but rather to bring our parents, siblings, spouse, children and grand-children and our own lives into our choice for Jesus Christ. All these persons are part of our own flesh. We cannot separate ourselves from them. What we can do is go on witnessing our commitment to the Christian way, to the person of Jesus Christ.

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 the 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. I can respond to this text and say "Yes, my 'reasonings are unsure' and my 'intentions unstable'". I have been close to death a couple of times in the last ten years. And so I try to stay close to God and to the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels. It has become more urgent for me not to waste my life but rather to serve my community more earnestly, to remain faithful to daily *Lectio Divina*, and to become a person who, when prompted by the Holy Spirit to do a good action for another, carries out this good action. There used to be a saying among Catholics: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." So, if I

want union with God through the wisdom with which I have been graced, then I need to write that email, send that card, make that phone call, welcome the newcomer to my Parish, take a meal to a sick neighbor, stand with friends who are in grief over the death of a loved one. This is about walking the straight path which has been shown to us by Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

2. My response is made in the spirit of the Gospel and the Rule of St. Benedict which is Christo-centric. Everyone who comes to the Abbey seeking God, is treated with reverence and shown hospitality in the Benedictine tradition. They are persons made in the image and likeness of God. All are invited to share in the Liturgy of the Hours with us. The spirit of our community is that we are all ONE in Christ Jesus. No one is better than anyone else. We are all pilgrims, at different stages of our journey, while keeping in sight our true homeland.

3. There are different kinds of sacrifice which characterize followers of Jesus. When I was a young religious, stationed in Longreach, Central Queensland, Sunday Mass was the great witness of faith. As well as those who lived in town, there were many families who came from afar, driving easily 80 kms on the country roads to come and worship God at Sunday Mass. The Priest was a very holy man. He would often wait, if he noticed that a family was not yet there. One family came by light Aircraft. These people sacrificed time (at least half of every Sunday) in order to choose Christ. So did our early missionary priests who only had a horse to get them to country towns and western properties in order to bring Christ to people. This was, and in many cases, still is, the Spirit of Christianity in Australia. I have a friend, a Presentation Sister, who looks after three (I think) parishes in North West Queensland. With the shortage of priests, this is often the case. She "prefers nothing whatever to Christ", and spends her life in bringing Christ to those country people in remote areas.

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.