***LECTIO DIVINA*: (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 3 December 2017
1st Sunday of Advent, Year B.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week One.

Today marks the beginning of the new Liturgical Year.
The Sunday cycle of readings moves to Year B.
The weekday cycle moves to Year 2.

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:
December 7: St. Ambrose (Memorial)
December 8: The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the Australian Church:
December 4: Brisbane – Anniversary of the Dedication of the new St. Stephen's Cathedral (1989)
December 8: Perth – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (2007)
Port Pirie: Patronal Feast. Armidale – Patronal Feast.

In the Social Justice Calendar:
December 3: International Day of Persons with Disabilities
December 5: International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development.
December 5: World Soil Day
December 7: 1965 – Vatican II Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes.*
December 7: International Anti-Corruption Day, and International Genocide Prevention Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Isaiah 63:16-17, and 64:1, 3-8.
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:33-37.

***Lectio*: Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah chapter 63, verses 16 & 17, and chapter 64, verse 1 and verses 3-8.**
Be aware of the way you handle your bible. Take it up reverently and read the sacred text with deep reverence. This text is given to all of us on this particular day in the Church's Liturgical Year, for our formation as Christians.

***Meditatio:* Some Background on the text, so that we can understand it more profoundly, and make our response to it.**
There are, in this text, a number of themes in the form of statements of faith, and a cry for help which introduce us to its Biblical *sitz im leben* (original setting in the context of Old Testament history).

1. The Lord is Father and Redeemer.
2. The faith of the people is in their God who is Father and Redeemer
3. The *Rorate Caeli* of the Advent Liturgy ("Tear the heavens and come down")* is the desperate cry for help from a people who are the "tribes of your inheritance".
4. Trust in God
5. Guidance of God for "those who act with integrity and keep your ways in mind."
6. A reference to a rebellious people who were at a certain period, unclean, sinful, and who "withered like leaves."
7. Finally, the image of God as potter – the Divine potter – the people are the clay vessels, the work of the Divine Potter.

   *The plea "open the heavens and come down", or another translation: "Come down on us O heavenly dew, O clouds rain down the just one", is the refrain of the Advent Canticle, sung in the Monastic Liturgy every weekend, at First Vespers and Second Vespers.

Read the text again a couple of times. Ponder on the text for a day or more. However, if you are aware of the Holy Spirit calling forth your response to the text, note it down. When the Holy Spirit prays within you or pours unction on a text and calls you forth, this is the true "prayer" *(oratio) of Lectio Divina.* I share my response in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 79
The Response is: LORD MAKE US TURN TO YOU; LET US SEE YOUR FACE AND WE SHALL BE SAVED**.**
Psalm 79 is a plea for the return of God's favour. God is referred to as "shepherd of Israel". The people promise: "We shall never forsake you again." We could well reflect on the times we do forsake the Lord by thinking judgmentally about others, by passing by someone who needs help – we pretend we can't see the one who needs help; by withdrawing from others, and thus from God.

Lectio: **Read the Second text from the First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 1, verses 3-9.**

Meditatio: A brief background to the text or brief explanation of the text, so that we can understand it and respond to it.
This part of *Lectio Divina* is the "time" when the monks of old, having heard the Word read to them, would now listen to one who was educated in the Scriptures, explaining the meaning to them. The majority of monks were uneducated and illiterate.

This text from 1 Corinthians is pervaded by a spirit of waiting, waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed and waiting for the Day of the Lord – for the last day. The Holy Spirit is the strength and energy which will keep Christians steady and on course while waiting.
Fr. Karl Rahner says to all of us who are Christians of the present age: *Advent demands that we look to the future; we are people of expectation and hope."* ("The

Great Church Year"). A Carthusian monk shares: *I hope…for only one thing: Christ. For myself…but not only for myself. More, for those I love. For all humankind, for all creation, I hope, with confidence in the Word of God, for that fullness of life and love which is the full stature of Christ, God all in all."* ("Advent to Pentecost, Carthusian Novice Conferences").. An anonymous source quoted by Sr. Stan of Dublin offers: *When the world says, 'Give up,' Hope whispers, 'Try it one more time.'* Hope is where we are as Advent begins.

Take time to ponder on this reading. This is done as we go on with each day's work, or rest, or travelling to work on the train and bus. We don't need perfect conditions. *Lectio Divina* is a way of life. Once it becomes so, then we can ponder anywhere. Write your response to the text. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is taken from Psalm 84:8
LORD, SHOW US YOUR MERCY AND LOVE, AND GRANT US YOUR SALVATION.

***Lectio*: Read the Gospel text from Mark 13:33-37**
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. Stand back from it and ponder.

***Meditatio*: Some background to help us understand the text and respond to it.**
Be on your guard. Stay awake. If Jesus is always coming (and He is), then the Church is forever on the watch. The Church is a vigil personified. The believer is a Vigil personified. Dom Andre Louf, in his classic work "Teach Us to Pray", writes on page 81: *To live in vigil [watching] is to begin to live somewhere on the boundary of darkness and light, where Jesus is always in process of coming. The power of such a vigil lies in the power of the prayer prompted and led by the Spirit within us: 'Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:20). It is the prayer of the bride in the Apocalypse, who awaits her bridegroom. Hers is a vigil of love, laying the world bare before God, piercing the heart of God and enticing Him to descend into the world. Then…at midnight, the cry will go up: 'The bridegroom is here; go out and meet him!' Only those who are found awake at that hour will be able to go with Him into the banquet hall.*

Read the Gospel text again slowly. Stand back from the text and the commentary and go about your work quietly ruminating.
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.

1. My response, directed by the Holy Spirit, is to the Divine Potter. Those of us who are gardeners know that clay is one of the richest soils on earth. It just needs help to make it workable. We mix in gypsum to loosen up the soil. We could ponder on the connection between the creation of human

beings from the dust of the earth (Genesis), and on the fact that when we die, our bodies will return to the earth. From another angle – I know that at many times in my life, I have been like clay soil, and have needed God's grace to loosen me, and make me workable. Very early in my monastic life I was taught that all prayer in the monastic tradition is about working with the soil of the heart. If the soil God finds is clay, then divine grace can still form us and shape us. We can expect a bumpy ride though, as we are thrown back on to the potter's wheel over and over until we become pliable. The water God uses with the clay is the living water, the divine water. Mixed with clay it will enable the divine potter to create a vessel, or a channel of God's love in a broken world. We all want to be formed and made into a channel of God's love in our broken world.

2. My response is to the message of "vigilance" in my Christian life. However, I see it more on a daily or hourly basis, and so it calls me to live in a particular stance. My vigilance for the coming of the Lord becomes a way of life for me. I rise in the morning, and with God's grace I walk freely, letting go of my own plans, and preparing myself for God's surprises. I have worked hard at this over the years, beginning in the 1970s, and now that I am approaching 70, I am still working hard. It is so easy to slip out of the stance and into impatience when my plans are interrupted. However, there is one thing I have learned well. When I am interrupted and someone needs help, the more peacefully I respond, the less energy I use fighting against the interruption. And when I have helped out, given myself to this interruption, or "visitation from God", I find I have all the time I need and more. And I am not tired because I didn't fight against the interruption.

3. I know that the first Christians believed that the second coming of Christ would be at midnight. I hear this explanation as not about time, but rather as being about the presence of God in the reality of time. Midnight for me symbolizes the very middle of the night, the center of darkness and distress, of desperation, of black depression, of human brokenness and mental anguish. I will pray this week for the people in my life who are in this deep and desperate night. I will pray for those who have written to our community and asked us to pray for them because they are living in "midnight" anguish.

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.

The traditional Latin terms are: Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, Contemplatio, Evangelizio


THE ADVENT OF
HOPE PEACE LOVE JOY LIGHT