***LECTIO DIVINA* (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday, November 29th 2015
First Sunday of Advent, Year C.
The Weekday Liturgy changes to Year 2.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week One.

The First Sunday of Advent begins a new Liturgical Year.

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:
November 30: St. Andrew (Feast)
December 3: St. Francis Xavier (Memorial)

In the Australian Church:
November 29: Parramatta – Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (2003).
December 3: Geraldton – Patronal Feast.
December 4: Brisbane – Anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral (the restored Cathedral) 1989.

In our Social Justice Calendar:
November 29: International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.
November 29: On this day in 1989 – the death of Dorothy Day, Founder of the Catholic Worker Movement.
December 1: World AIDS Day
December 2: International Day for the Abolition of Slavery.
December 3: International Day of Persons with Disabilities.
December 6: International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development.
December 6: World Soil Day.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Jeremiah 33:14-16
1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2
Luke 21:25-28 and 34-36.

***Lectio*: Read the first text from the Prophet Jeremiah, chapter 33, verses 14-16.**

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 spiritual formation.

***Meditatio:* Some Background on the text so that we can understand it more profoundly and make our response to it.**
This text is about a God who remains faithful to his covenant with humanity. The branch which is growing is both the Messiah in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and the

promise to the people of the Old Testament that a Messiah will come. The promise will be fulfilled. A Messiah will be born from the line of David. The characteristics of the Messiah will be honesty and integrity, and these characteristics will result in salvation and reassurance. Then there is the "name" of the promised one, the Branch. The name is "The Lord our integrity". Integrity means reliability, truth and honour. So, the promised Messiah will be the Lord of truth, the Lord on which we can rely, and one whom we can honour.
This is a brief summary, but it opens the text for prayer.

Read it 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 24
The Response is: TO YOU O LORD I LIFT MY SOUL.

Psalm 24 is prayed to the promised Messiah who is "The Lord-our-integrity". I must place myself before the Lord as one in need of teaching, one who needs to be shown how to walk the paths of truth and how to be humble so as to walk the "right path". I pray this Psalm as a believer in the Lord's "faithfulness and love", and as one who reveres (reverences and praises) the Lord. The Christological dimension of this Psalm is seen in the Christ of the New Testament who gives us the Gospel as our Guide. And so we return to those words of St. John Cassian, who said that we "must till the soil of the heart daily with the plough of the Gospel."

Take time through the week to ponder on this Psalm and listen to the Holy Spirit calling you to respond to a line, a word, a phrase. This is the Holy Spirit praying within you.

Lectio: **Read the Second text from the First Letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 3, verse 12 to chapter 4, verse 2.**

Meditatio: Some background to help us with our understanding and our response.

The text is addressing the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. However, in the "present" time, it is about the "branch" growing within us, the Branch which is the Living Lord. Paul prays that this Living Lord will be generous in increasing our love for one another and the whole human race. We remember that the Branch will grow into a giant tree with its own branches which will spread and give shade and rest to the whole human race. This is done through the sincerity of our lives, and the great mystery we call prayer. In the mystery of prayer, we can give shade and rest to the whole human race. Paul prays that Jesus the Lord will "confirm" (strengthen) our hearts in holiness.as we prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ on the day when he will come again.
Paul exhorts us to make more and more progress in the kind of life we are meant to live and we know already that this life is one which takes Jesus Christ as our Model.

And it is one which is growing all the time, as Jesus Christ within us grows more present and more powerful – the Sacred Branch which becomes the huge tree.
The text concludes when Paul reminds the Thessalonians of the example and teaching he gave to them previously.

Stand back from the reading and go about your work for a while. Maybe a day or two. Be alert to the grace of God. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist on the strings of the harp. The Holy Spirit will bring forth the most beautiful response to this reading. You will be surprised by the Spirit.

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 Luke 21:25-28 and 34-36.**
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.**
Literally, this text is about the ending of the world and the coming of a new world. It is akin to apocalyptic literature with its cosmic images. The message of the text is firm and clear: "… your liberation is near at hand." So, interpreting it in an ecclesial dimension, one can see it as the ending of the world of darkness, and the beginning of a new world dominated by the Light of Christ. Interpreting it personally, we can hear it as the end of the old world (old self) and the beginning of a new world (the new self), dominated by the Sacred Branch growing within each of us. I don't see any reason to complicate the text. I believe this short interpretation breaks it open for prayer.

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. In our times we are, with good reason, skeptical about promises! Why wouldn't we be? Governments promise the world to their people and then once in power, these promises are not kept. This is too often the case. For me, the Holy Spirit has poured power into the words "…shall dwell in confidence." The words are about Judah. Judah shall dwell in confidence because the promised Messiah will come. I am Judah and the word is addressed to me. And I reflect with my friend, Sr. Stan of Dublin, "Faith is living with promise, with waiting, with darkness, with ambiguity, with uncertainty. Faith, a gentle strength without answers." (Stillness Through My Prayers). I shall and can dwell in confidence because the Messiah has

already come. But the Branch keeps on growing, because the Messiah, the Christ, dwells within me and like John the Baptist, I must decrease more and more, so he can increase, from a Branch to an enormous tree which will shelter all who need my love and healing.

2. In my response to this text, I am reminded of the teaching of St. Augustine: "Enlarge your love to the size of the world if you want to love Christ, since the members of Christ are to be found all over the world. Human beings are only whole when they are overflowing with love." And St. John Climacus taught: "Love, in its nature, makes a human being like God, as far as is possible for a human being. When someone is completely permeated with the love of God, the brightness of that person's soul is reflected as if in a mirror. The one who loves God also loves others. Indeed, the second love is the proof of the first." These are powerful teachings. What about me? I certainly fall short in all of this. God, give me the grace to enlarge my love to the size of the world and therefore to become a "whole" human being. This week in the Social Justice Calendar, there are five anniversaries which challenge me to enlarge my love: persons with disabilities, the Palestinian people, the slaves of this age, those afflicted with the AIDS virus, and those who volunteer for economic and social development world-wide. I will immerse myself in these anniversaries and embrace all concerned in the Mystery of Prayer.

3. The Holy Spirit has led me to respond to the words: "…your liberation is at hand." I know that my liberation is at hand every day when I awake and set foot outside my monastic cell and go to prayer with my community and to work and to all the monastic exercises of the day. My liberation is about the end of the old self and beginning of the new self, about the Sacred Branch within me growing a little more each day, a little stronger each day. The coming of Jesus Christ is happening within me every single day. Am I attuned to it? That is the important question.

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.