***LECTIO DIVINA*: (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday 1 October 2017
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Two.

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:
October 2: The Holy Guardian Angels (Memorial)
October 4: St. Francis of Assisi (Memorial)
October 7: Our Lady of the Rosary (Memorial).

In the Australian Church:
October 7: Armidale – Patronal Feast.

In the Social Justice Calendar:
October 1: International day for older persons.
October 2: International Day of Non-Violence
October 2: World Habitat Day.
October 5: World Teachers Day
October 4: Animal Welfare Day – a day when we can think about taking a rescue animal, or working for Wires, if we have the time and the space in our homes and on our property.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Ezekiel 18:25-28
Philippians 2:1-11
Matthew 21:28-32

***Lectio*: Read the first text from the Prophet Ezekiel, chapter 18, verses 25-28.**
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.**
The text we are given is part of the unit, 18:1-32, and is a law case for individual responsibility. The theme of individual responsibility plays an important role in Ezekiel's thought. In this particular text, the prophet calls for the renunciation of sin in order to become law-abiding and honest. (Cf. New Jerome Bib. Commentary 20:50). Bauer sheds more light on the topic: *The Law was an uncommonly rich religious reality, a gift from God which constituted the religious life of Israel.* (Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology, Volume 2 edited by Johannes Bauer. page 480). Hence the importance of the prophet's message: individual responsibility. Individual

responsibility and an awareness of individual responsibility should prevent one from pointing the finger at another person who has no regard for abiding by the law and practicing honesty.

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 24
The Response is: REMEMBER YOUR MERCIES O LORD.
Psalm 24 is a prayer for protection and forgiveness.

Lectio: **Read the Second text from the Letter to the Philippians, ch. 2, v's 1-11.**

Meditatio: Paul invokes a series of qualities which for him essentially characterize life in Christ, and so should regulate community relations.

In verses 6-11, Paul supports his exhortation to selflessness by quoting a hymn composed independently of the letter Paul is writing to the Philippians, a Church divided by factions – we need to keep this in mind as we read the text before us. The hymn has a basic two-fold structure:
Verses 6-8: Christ's abasement
Verses 9-11: Christ's exaltation.
This is only brief background help. There are more scholarly interpretations and line-by-line analysis, but we must not lose hold of the text as the word of God given to us as Lectio Divina – sacred reading and prayer.
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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 John 10:27.
MY SHEEP LISTEN TO MY VOICE, SAYS THE LORD; I KNOW THEM AND THEY FOLLOW ME.

***Lectio*: Read the Gospel text from Matthew 21:28-32.**
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.**
This week the Chief Priests and Elders of the people are challenged by Jesus, because they do not practise what they preach. Jesus says, "Tax collectors and prostitutes are

making their way into the kingdom of God before you." These words would have stirred up great anger within them. Jesus reminds them of John's preaching, and praises John for his righteousness (right-wiseness). Again he presents the tax collectors and prostitutes as those who believed in John's prophecy. He reminds the religious leaders present before him that they did not believe in John, his forerunner.

Albert Nolan, in his classic work "Jesus Before Christianity", reminds us that "the people to whom Jesus turned his attention were: the poor, the blind, the lame, the crippled, the lepers, the hungry, the miserable, sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors, demoniacs, the persecuted and the downtrodden…all who labour and are overburdened, …the least, the last, and the babes or the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Page 21). He turns his attention in a different way, towards those who judge all these people, those who oppress all these people, and those who boast of being "better" than all of these. Of this latter group, he calls them hypocrites.

Br. John Venard, in his book "Finally, the Battler's God", says it in a simpler way (that is, not so many words). "If we are chasing religious knowledge only to feel superior, to gain power, to get a promotion or a bigger pay packet, then we are heading in the opposite direction to the teachings of Jesus." Br. John refers us to 1 Corinthians 13:1 & 2. "If I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets, but if I have no love, I am nothing."

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. I am responding to the Law as portrayed in the New Testament. For Jesus it is "moral conduct" which takes first place. The religious leaders of that time were imposing laws and rituals on the people, without keeping them in their own lives. Jesus reprimanded them for this. And Jesus took liberties on the Sabbath, allowing his disciples to pluck ears of corn because they were hungry. He set off a clarion call when he said: "The Sabbath is made for humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath." As a Benedictine nun, I have a regulated day with expectations that I will be where I am supposed to be, and to be there on time. The other day I was late for one Office, because I stopped to help an elderly nun who had dropped her handkerchief and was trying to bend down and get it. In the same way, I am not expected to step over someone who has just had a heart attack, so that I can be on time for the Office. I believe wholly in the words of Jesus. We are not slaves to rules and regulations. They are there to serve us. We are not here to serve them.

2. Because I worked in parish music ministry before I entered the monastery, I was often caught between two musicians disagreeing about the value of a

note, the speed of a hymn or whether the musicians should welcome a newcomer or not. The musicians were members of the school orchestra, which tended to guard its territory. And yet the nun in charge of the orchestra was both welcoming and encouraging of new talent – a beautiful woman who certainly had the strength of her convictions. She was a concert violinist and did on a small scale what Andre Rieu does on a large scale – encourage the young and give musicians a chance to shine. We won't be asked, when we arrive at the gates of heaven, whether we strictly observed the value of a crotchet or a quaver, or whether we are experts in plain chant. We will be asked if we were united in love, playing and singing for the Lord.

3. I am responding to the general state of those whom Jesus holds up: prostitutes and tax collectors, and those listed by Albert Nolan. On reading the book "Mercy, the Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life", by Cardinal Walter Kasper, I came across the following passage relating to the poor and oppressed peoples of our world: "No less important than physical poverty is cultural poverty: in the extreme case, this means illiteracy; less extreme but still severe is having no chance or reduced chances for education, and consequently, having slim prospects for the future." Walter Kasper then talks about another form of poverty: lack of relationships with other human beings, and hence loneliness, isolation and grief. So, when I think about the poverty of others, I will now be aware of these three forms of poverty: material, cultural, and social. And the third kind is a poverty which I can address by simply relating to another sister or a friend in a time of loneliness, grief and isolation.

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, Evangelizatio.