***LECTIO DIVINA*: (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Friday, December 25th 2015
Christmas Day, the Solemnity of the Birth of Jesus.

Most Parishes have four Masses on this day: Vigil, Midnight, Dawn, Day. Our Abbey celebrates the Office of Vigils followed by Midnight Mass. This begins at 10.45 p.m. All are welcome!

For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, we are in Christmastide, which includes the Feasts mentioned below. Christmastide spans the period from Evening Prayer 1 of Christmas Day up to Evening Prayer 2 of the Baptism of the Lord (10th January, 2016).

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 26: Feast of St. Stephen.
December 27: Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.
December 28: Feast of the Holy Innocents
December 29: 5th Day in the Octave of Christmas.
December 30: 6th Day in the Octave of Christmas
December 31: 7th Day in the Octave of Christmas.
January 1: Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God.
January 2: Sts. Basil and Gregory Nazianzen (Memorial). The Psalter today is Sat. of Week 1.
January 3: Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord.

In the Australian Church:
December 28: The Diocese of Sandhurst remembers the death of Bishop Joseph Grech in 2010.
December 30: The Diocese of Cairns remembers the death of Bishop John Torpie in 2000.

In the Social Justice Calendar:
December 26: On this day in 2004, South East Asia was devastated by a tsunami which killed up to 300,000 people.
December 31: On this day in 1946, paid annual leave was granted to workers in Australia.
January 1: World Day of Prayer for Peace.
January 1: On this day in 1901, the Foundation of the Commonwealth of Australia took place.
January 1: On this day in 1994, the Native Title Act commenced operation within Australia.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings for Midnight Mass are:
Isaiah 9:1-7
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-14

***Lectio*: Read the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 9, verses 1-7.**
Read it in a reverent way. The Word of God is sacred. Let us give ourselves to the Sacred Text and open our hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit calling us forth to respond. Be aware of the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart as you read. This is the true "oratio" (prayer) of *Lectio Divina*.

***Meditatio*: Some informed background so that we can honour the text in its original meaning.**
First of all the **yoke**, the **bar** and the **rod** are symbols of Assyrian oppression – oppression of the Jewish people at this time in their history. The reference to Midian is a brief reference to the tradition of the Holy War, in which victory comes from the Lord. Then we come to the "names" of the one who will be born for us:
Wonder-counsellor: he will have no need for advisors.
Mighty God: God Warrior. For a deeper understanding of this term, we are referred to Isaiah 10:21, 1 Samuel 28:13, Psalm 45:7
Everlasting Father: "Father" describes the quality of the reign (rule) of the one who is to come – a father, one who loves his children.
Prince of Peace: Peace will be the result of the qualities of this new-born king.
(For this background, I have consulted the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 15:22. Other commentaries have similar descriptions).

With this background, read the text again and take a long time to ponder on the overall message. Build into each day some quiet time. Be still before the Lord. After pondering over many hours (days), you will want to make your response. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 1.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95
The response is: TODAY IS BORN OUR SAVIOUR, CHRIST THE LORD.
Psalm 95 is about the universal reign of the true God and therefore the appropriate response to the first reading from Isaiah.
Certain lines of the Psalm will speak to your spirit. Pray with them throughout this week.

***Lectio*: Read the Letter from Paul to Titus, chapter 2:11-14.**

PAUSE. Read it again. Listen to the Holy Spirit playing on the fibres of your heart like a harpist, in order to bring forth the most authentic melody of your response…

***Meditatio*:** This text has been taken out of a longer unit, Titus 2:1-15, which addresses Christian duties within the household. The duties of household members are noted in the list of 2:2-10. And then comes our text which needs to be read in the light of what has gone before because 2:11-14 gives the reason for the "list" of duties.

The reason that we can live virtuously, as outlined in the "list" is because of the salvation of Jesus Christ, the salvation which has set us free, the saving power of God as manifest in Jesus Christ.
(cf. NJBC, 56:20 and 21).

Take time over the text before making your response to it in the days ahead.
I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse: Luke 2:10-11.
GOOD NEWS AND GREAT JOY TO ALL THE WORLD; TODAY IS BORN OUR SAVIOUR CHRIST THE LORD.

Lectio: **Read the Gospel text from Luke 2:1-14.**
Pause and ponder. Read the text again.

Meditatio: This text from Luke doesn't need much commentary. Let's just say that Israel was under Roman domination (more like oppression). Caesar Augustus wants a census taken of his empire. Joseph is obeying the law and takes his pregnant wife to Bethlehem. Joseph was of David's house and line and Bethlehem was the city of David. While there, Mary gives birth to the Saviour of the world and this new-born king is wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger surrounded by the household animals. This is the first miracle: the poverty surrounding his birth.
The second miracle: the first to hear the news are shepherds – lowly shepherds. Could this be a sign that the Messiah who is to come from the House of David "is the first to whom the term Shepherd is applied"? (Johannes Bauer, "Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology"). The Good Shepherd will bring back the stray and teach the lost sheep of the House of Israel.

Lastly, the words: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to all who enjoy his favour." The "peace" announced here will be the peace which the new-born king will bring. In the first reading from Isaiah, the new-born king was described as the "Prince of Peace". Those who enjoy his favour will be those who embrace the Gospel of love, and walk the way marked out by the Saviour of the world.

Stand back from the Gospel and ponder. Go to a quiet corner of your garden or a nature reserve, or your own home, or a church which is open for prayer. Hear the words: BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD. Allow the Holy Spirit to play on the fibres of your heart like a harpist in order to bring forth the most beautiful melody of your response to God. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 3.

Evangelizatio **is my LIVED RESPONSE to the sacred scriptures given to me each week by the Church for my formation as a Christian. If I don't respond, they are merely texts on a page. When I do respond, they are my life.**

1. I am responding rather honestly to the "yoke" the "bar" and the "rod", as symbolic of the oppression I create in my own life and which ends up in a load of stress. When I say to myself, "There are not enough hours in the day…" I know that I've gone too far. God has given me a day at a time, and within that time frame, God calls me to live peacefully and to get done what I can get done in peace. I am also aware that when I am oppressing

myself, I am a source of oppression for others. I pray for the grace to be at peace this Christmas and to live each day as a gift instead of a tight time frame in which I have to get through the ridiculous number of things I've written on my list.

2. I am responding to the words: "…what we have to do is give up everything that does not lead to God." These are words which affect the choices I make on any given day in my life. I am particularly aware of the act of thinking over which I have a choice: positive thinking or negative thinking. And, the act of speaking: positive words or negative words. There are choices for life and choices for death. I can be numbered among the "living dead", or I can witness that I am "fully alive" because a Child has been born for me, has schooled me in the way of love,\ and has given His life for me on Calvary. It is up to me. No one else can make the choices for me.

3. My response comes from reflecting on the manger, the simplicity it reveals and the shepherds taking it in turns to watch through the night. And I am taken to the words of Pope Francis who, on December 8th, opened the Holy Year of Mercy. He writes in "Misericordiae Vultus": "In the fullness of time, when everything had been arranged according to his plan of salvation, God sent His only Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal his love for us in a definitve way. Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions and his entire person, reveals the mercy of God. The person of Jesus is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously. The relationships he forms with those who approach Him manifest something entirely unique…the signs he works, especially in the face of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion. Let us kneel at the Nativity Scene this Christmas with this conviction: Jesus manifests a God who is nothing but Love and who is present, close, provident, holy and merciful." (Pope Francis)

Lectio Divina is Holy Reading,
that is,
reading of the Sacred Scriptures
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
It is about reading (and listening),
reflecting,
praying in tune with the Holy Spirit within me,
resting in God,
and responding in the way I live.