***LECTIO DIVINA*: (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday, 6th March 2016
4th Sunday Lent, Year C.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Four.

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 this week:
There are no Memorias, Feasts or Solemnities

In the Australian Church:
March 9: Ukranian Eparchy – Episcopal Ordination of the Most Rev. Peter Stasiuk, CSsR, 1993.

The Social Justice Calendar:
March 6: Clean Up Australia Day
March 11: On this day in 2011, the Fukishima Prefecture, Japan, was devastated by an earthquake and tsunami, killing 18,500 people, destroying the nuclear plant and causing widespread contamination.
March 12: On this day in 1913, Canberra was founded as Australia's Capital.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Joshua 5:9-12
2 Corinthians 5:17-21
Luke 15:1-3 and 11-32 – the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

***Lectio*: Read the First Reading from the Book of Joshua, chapter 5, verses 9-12.**
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.**
On the first Sunday of Lent we saw the first major event of Salvation History: Joseph went down into Egypt.
The Second Sunday: God's Covenant with Abraham.
Third Sunday: The call of Moses to lead the Hebrew prople out of Egypt.
Fourth Sunday: Joshua . Joshua is not a Patriarch. He is commissioned for his role in 1:1-9. The name Joshua means "the Lord has saved" – hence the opening sentence of our text. Joshua is Moses' divinely chosen successor. He will complete the work of Moses by leading the people into the promised land. There they are to observe the Mosaic commands, so that the land of promise may continue to be theirs. (cf. New Jerome Biblical Commentary 7:12. Other Commentaries have similar content.

The text we are given is part of 5:2-12, which narrates the ceremonies at Gilgal. It seems that the ceremony described was a communal ceremony, not a family ceremony. It is noted in the Commentary (7:24), that because of the communal aspect of this ceremony, Joshua is a prototype of King Josiah.
King Josiah ruled over Judah from 640-609 B.C. He is famous for his religious reforms, for his seeking of the Lord, for his eradication of paganism. Josiah renewed the Covenant, destroyed cultic centres, and reinstituted the Passover in Jerusalem. (cf. "The Complete Who's Who in the Bible" edited by Paul Gardiner, page 382 and 383).

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 33
The response is: TASTE AND SEE THE GOODNESS OF THE LORD. (The food of the Promised Land).
Psalm 33 is a Psalm of praise and deep reverence for God. Our Monastic Choir Psalters note that Psalm 33 "is a song for the small martyrdoms of every day". One may be discouraged by weakness in trials of the present, uncertain of one's resistance in the future: but of course our own weapons are always rusting and loose in our hands. The bright and effective sword is the Hand of God alone. The Hand of God has triumphed in the first text from Joshua. It will triumph in our own lives as it directs us from slavery to freedom.
Certain lines of the Psalm will speak to your spirit. Pray with them throughout this week.

***Lectio*: Read the Second Letter from Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 5, verses 17-21.**
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*: Some background to the text, so that we can more easily understand it and make our response to it**.
2 Corinthians 5:11-6:10 is the whole story: Reconciliation in a new Creation. This is Paul's conclusion of a long development on authentic apostleship. Verse 17 addresses anyone who belongs to the believing community which is Christ (NJBC 50:25).
Verses 18-19 cite and interpret a traditional formula of the early Church which mentioned the initiator (God), the agent (Christ) and the means of Reconciliation (forgiveness of sins). Only when restored to AUTHENTICITY is humanity at peace with God.
Verse 20 emphasizes that ambassadors for Christ prolong the mission of Christ in a unique way.
Verse 21 simply expands verses 18-19 by explaining the role of Christ in reconciliation. We are referred to Isaiah 53 for the background of just what Jesus Christ has done for humanity.
The bottom line is that through God's loving act in Christ we are reconciled to God. (50:25 & 26)

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 15:18.
I WILL RISE AND GO TO MY FATHER AND TELL HIM:
FATHER, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST HEAVEN AND AGAINST YOU.

Lectio: **Read the Gospel text from Luke 15:1-3 and 11-32 – the Parable of the Prodigal Son. 2:1-14.**
Pause and ponder.

Meditatio: **Some background to the text in the light of this Jubilee Year of Mercy:**
Pope Francis says in "Misericordiae Vultus", his official Letter for this Jubilee Year, that "In the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy." The Pope mentions in particular Luke 15:1-32. He says that "in these parables God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon." Surely this is all the background we need to enter into this magnificent story.

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. My response is to the words of the Lord to Joshua in the opening sentence: "Today I have taken the shame of Egypt away from you." The "Egypt" of my life, or of our lives, is a place of slavery. Usually, we put ourselves there. Sometimes other people, situations or circumstances put us in Egypt. For many of us, hurt and betrayal put us in this place of slavery. Grief, when it consumes us, also puts us into slavery. When we find ourselves in an "Egypt", our health will suffer too. Slavery makes us sick. Jesus is the one who can take the slavery of "Egypt" out of our lives. Why not simply ask him?

2. My response is to the notion of "a new creation" for anyone who is in Christ, and to something in the Commentary: "Only when restored to authenticity is humanity at peace with God." For me, it has always been of the utmost priority to be an authentic human being and to be so "in Christ". For, in and with Jesus Christ there can be no lies, no hypocrisy, no power games, no deceit, no rejection of other human beings made in the

image and likeness of God. The call to authenticity in Jesus Christ is the on-going call of a lifetime.

3. I am responding to the Father in this Parable, the Father who has the fatted calf killed and holds a party, and before that, runs out to meet the son who is returning home. I'm afraid I am often like the elder son who says: "What about me – I've been here all the time, waiting on you, working for you and you've never held a party for me." It's lopsided, isn't it? My own father used to go after my wayward brother, every time he needed help, and it made the rest of us angry. In that respect we were like the elder son. The Father in this Parable is, of course, God, and this is what the Jubilee Year of Mercy is all about: the God who runs to meet us and brings out the best robe and puts it on us, making us into that "new creation", as the old ragged clothes (the "old ceation") fall away. All we have to do is turn our heads in the direction of "home" and return, return to God with all our hearts.

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.