***LECTIO DIVINA*: (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday, September 6th 2015
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week Three.

Before beginning prayer with the Sacred Texts, let us take a look at the week ahead in the Liturgy, the Australian Church and the Social Justice Calendar.

In the Liturgy:
September 8: The Nativity of the Mother of God.

In the Australian Church:
September 7: Wilcannia-Forbes – Dedication of the Cathedral (1960).
September 8: Broome – Dedication of the Cathedral (1941)

In the Social Justice Calendar:
September 6: Fathers' Day
September 6: National Child Protection Week Begins.
September 7: National Threatened Species' Day
September 8: International Literacy Day.
September 10: World Suicide Prevention Day
September 11: Terrorist Attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York, and on Washington D.C. (2001)
September 12: On this day in 1977 the world heard the news of the death (in prison) of the anti-apartheid activist, Steve Biko.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:
Isaiah 35:4-7
James 2:1-5
Mark 7:31-37

***Lectio*: Read the first text from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 35, verses 4-7.**
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 Sunday 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.**
This is one of the most beautiful Messianic texts of the Prophetic Literature. It is a text for "all faint hearts", for "all who are afraid." It looks to the Jesus of the Gospels who will bring us the gift of salvation. And this salvation will open blind eyes, open deaf ears, give the lame their strength again, unbind the tongues of the dumb. This Salvation will be like water gushing in a desert – in other words, something miraculous – streams in a wasteland – no more scorched earth, no more parched land. The images are powerful. May we sit with these images and ponder deeply on them.

With this background in mind, read the text again. Ponder for a while. Maybe a day or more! Make your response. I share my response in Evangelizatio 1.

The Responsorial Psalm: Psalm145
The response is: PRAISE THE LORD MY SOUL.
Psalm 145 is a psalm in praise of God's fidelity. God is all-faithful. May we continue to cast our cares upon God.

Pray with the Psalm throughout the week and note the words, phrases or lines which speak to your heart.

Lectio: **Read the second text from the Letter of James, chapter 2, verses 1-5**

Meditatio: James comes straight to the point. We can't believe in Jesus, profess to follow Jesus, and at the same time practise class distinction. We can't become judges of other people, "corrupt judges". Then comes a reminder that "God chose the poor of the world to become rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom which is promised to those who love him". We may recall that Jesus had meals with tax collectors and sinners, that he freed the woman taken in adultery, healed the woman who simply touched the hem of his garment, and allowed a sinful woman to wash his feet with her tears. This is the Lord we profess to follow. No, there is no room for class distinction.

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 from Matthew 4:23.
JESUS PREACHED THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM AND HEALED ALL WHO WERE SICK. (This is the promise of the First Reading from Isaiah).

Lectio**: Read the Gospel text from Mark 7:31-37.**
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.**
The story is uncomplicated. The Messiah has come, the one spoken of by Isaiah in the First Reading is now on earth, among God's people, opening blind eyes, opening deaf ears, healing the lame, unbinding the tongues of the dumb. This is the water gushing in the desert for those with illnesses and disabilities for which there were no cures and which alienated the victims from family and the rest of society – mostly because sickness or disability was associated with sin.

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." The Book of Deuteronomy tells us that the Word of God is in our hands to do it.

1. Many years ago, an advertisement for the "Blind Society" was sent to us in the mail. The words on the front page were: "Opening Blind Eyes Takes a Miracle". The miracle referred to was a miracle of modern medicine. Spiritual blindness is another matter. Applying the matter to my own life, I understand spiritual blindness to encompass attitudes of un-forgiveness, prejudice, resentment, and negative judgments. I will look at un-forgiveness this week and send a card to one of my brothers who resents my being in the Monastery. I will write a loving message on the card and ask God to bring healing into his life and mine. After all, if I don't "do" the Word, it remains simply words on the page of my bible.

2. In our Monastic Church we don't experience the situation described here by James. Everyone is welcome to join us in prayer. No one is excluded. But there are other forms of class distinction in our lives which I feel should be addressed. Sr. Joan Chittister describes what I call the "them" and "us" syndrome, and it surely applies to Asylum Seekers and Refugees. She says: "**We** and **they** are hallmarks of an age awash in refugees, under siege from immigrants and yet inseparably linked in a world in which there are no more natural boundaries. It is a world, a city, a neighbourhood, full of many of their kind and some of our kind. **We**, it is clear, have a natural right to everything **we** need to live in dignity and security. **They** are required to wait for such things and to work harder to get them, or sometimes, to stand by and watch, while **we** use up what **they** lack." (Page 128, "Illuminated Life – Monastic Wisdom For Seekers of Light"). So, to whom do I say: 'Come in, you are very welcome'? To whom to I say, 'Just wait there – you have to earn a place. I was here first. It's **MY** country'?

3. My response to this Gospel is to be a stream of fresh water in the desert of someone's depression. I know just how I will "do the Word" of this Gospel. I will give the fresh water of encouragement, companionship, kindness in the life of one depressed or lonely person this week. I pray for the grace to do so.

Lectio Divina is about reading the Sacred Scriptures
and reflecting on the Sacred Scriptures 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.
Lectio Divina is a way of life,
not a method of prayer.