***LECTIO DIVINA*: (Holy Reading)**
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES
Sunday, January 10th 2016
Feast of the Baptism of the Lord and the First Sunday of the Church's year.
For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalter takes Week One.

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:
January 11: Feast of St. Aelred of Rievaulx. This feast is celebrated in Cistercian and Benedictine Monasteries.
January 15: Sts. Maurus and Placid, disciples of St. Benedict. This day is celebrated in Benedictine Monasteries.
January 17: St. Anthony of Egypt. (Memorial)

In The Social Justice Calendar:
January 10: On this day in 1946 – First UN General Assembly opened with 51 Nations present.
January 15: On this day in 1842, St. Mary MacKillop was born in Fitzroy, Victoria.
On this day in 1929, Martin Luther King Jr was born in Atlanta, USA.

In the Australian Church:
No anniversaries this week.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings for Year C are:
Isaiah 40:1-5 and 9-11
Titus 2:11-14 and 3:4-7
Luke 3:15-16 and 21-22

***Lectio*: Read the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 40:1-5 and 9-11.**
Read it aloud. Read it slowly. Be aware of the Holy Spirit placing unction on the message of this text. When your heart responds to a word or a line, or a phrase, this is the Holy Spirit touching your heart and calling forth your response.

***Meditatio*: A little background to the text will help us understand it and make a response to it.**
This is a text from Second Isaiah, the Book of Comfort, which sings the song of a Messiah yet to come, one who will indeed do that – comfort his "own". The Baptism of Jesus is the setting for this glorious prophecy which announces: "Here is your God." The whole Unit, 40:1-11, is about the commissioning of the Prophet. The Book of Comfort begins with Chapter 40, verse 1 and ends with Chapter 55, verse 13.
A note on "speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and call to her…" - the heart was understood as the organ of reasoning, not the organ of feeling. (cf. NJBC 21:9)
Also note in comparison with this text, Isaiah 6, and Jeremiah 1.
And let us note the motif of God as shepherd of his people – compare this with Jeremiah 31:10, Ezekiel 34, and Psalm 22 (23).

After much pondering, take time to respond to the text. You may want to ponder for a day or more, as you rest, work, walk, garden…sit and watch the ocean, the lake, the river. Just take time.

I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio* 1.

The responsorial Psalm: Psalm 103
The response is: OH, BLESS THE LORD MY SOUL.
Psalm 103 is a Psalm of worship of God's boundless care for his creation. It is a long Psalm of 35 verses. We are given just a portion of the Psalm, enough to stir our spirit of praise.

***Lectio*: Read the Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14 and 3:4-7.**

***Meditatio*:** This text belongs to Christmas, the Baptism, Pentecost and the Christian journey. It begins with "now", the Christian journey, reminding us that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (our salvation) has taught us "that what we have to do is to give up everything that does not lead to God, and all our worldly ambitions; we must be self-restrained and live good and religious lives…" It is not tempered with the compassion of Jesus for the sinners of the Gospel stories. It has moved into early Church codes for the Christian life.
There is a reminder of the sacrifice of Calvary and then the beautiful reference to the kindness, love and compassion of God which brought about our salvation. The "cleansing water of rebirth" and the "renewing of the Holy Spirit" refer to our own baptism and are an allusion to and also the words of, John the Baptist: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit…"

Make your response in the days ahead. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 2.

The Gospel Verse is adapted from Luke 3:16.
John said: "He who is to come is mightier than I; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. **"**

***Lectio*: Read the Gospel text from Luke 3:15-16 and 21-22.**

***Meditatio*: Some background to the text which will help us respond.**
"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire", says John the Baptist. And yet, as a Carthusian monk notes: "Instead of the 'Strong One' deploying the avenging power of God's anger against sinners, Jesus presents himself as the manifestation of the Lord's merciful tenderness towards the poor and all those who suffer." (Page 27, 'From Advent to Pentecost', Carthusian Novice Conferences, Cistercian Publications, Cistercian Studies Series, 188).
And now for Jesus!
The New Jerome Biblical Commentary notes ONE vitally important factor: Jesus [after his own Baptism] WAS AT PRAYER. "In Luke, Jesus' ministry begins with prayer and ends with prayer (22:46).
The figure of Jesus at prayer is a symbol that Jesus' power to effect salvation stems from God. In this instance, that Power comes through God's gift of the Spirit." This event is paralleled in Luke's description of the missionary Church aborning in Acts 1:14 and 2:1-13. This prophetic and eschatological symbol indicates that divine

revelation is to be made. (cf. Ezekiel 1:1 and Isaiah 64:1). While the audition of Luke 3:22, is given solely to Jesus, it seems that the heavens being opened (3:21|) and the dove descending in bodily form (3:22) constitute a theophany visible to all – all who have the eyes of faith. The dove symbolized the hopes of men and women for love, life, and union with God. These hopes are now realized in Jesus." (NJBC 43:49).

Stand back from the Gospel, having read it a number of times. Ponder over it, and be still. When you feel called to do so, make your response to the text. I share mine in *Evangelizatio* 3.

EVANGELIZTIO - this is about the evangelization of the "self". It is that part of Lectio Divina where we make our lived response to the text. First of all, we pray with the text, take time to ponder and understand the text, be still with the text and listen to the response we are being called to make.

1. My response is to the image of God "gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast, leading to their rest the mother ewes." And recently two examples of this as "real pastoral care" have happened in my life. I've just read Fr. Ted Cooper's Book, "Pioneer Priests of Australia 1800 – 1870", (St. Paul's Publications, 2015). I am now more than ever in admiration of their care for the flock entrusted to them: long journeys of many days, on horseback, to reach a remote bark hut in the middle of "nowhere", to spend time with a family, share meals with them, administer the Sacraments, celebrate Mass, stay for a couple of days and then set out again for a similar journey. They would often camp out. These pastoral stories are the foundation of the Catholic Church in Australia. The second example: On October 3rd 2015, our Chapalin baptized a baby boy in our Monastic Church. At the end of the Ceremony, he took the child in his arms. The child put his little head against Fr. Paul's shoulder and Fr. Paul sang to him a most beautiful blessing. Both these examples speak to my heart. This is my kind of God!

2. My response is to the kindness, love and compassion of God who has shown me what it means to "live a good and religious life." Surely it is by "walking with the Gospel for my guide" (St. Benedict), that I do this. The Gospel is the revelation of God's kindness, love and compassion. When I walk with the Gospel for my guide, It means I'm a "Jesus" person in my community, workplace, Parish, Social Club.

3. My response is to the words: "Jesus was at prayer…", as he was so often throughout his life on earth. He would spend whole nights in prayer. And so, I question myself about the quality of my own prayer. Is it busy – busy with me? Or, is it quiet, leisurely, with my own heart available for God's visitation? Am I to be found at prayer before I begin each day? Am I to be found at prayer at the closing of each day? Am I to be found at prayer before an important decision that I need to make? A long time ago, in the 1960s, a friend of mine received a marriage proposal. She was a nurse at Brisbane's Mater Hospital. She spent time before the Blessed Sacrament is the Mater Hospital Chapel, just sitting, thinking, praying, her heart available for God's visitation. She went ahead and said her "yes" after prayer. Her marriage has

been richly blessed. In the same era, my father spent a whole morning in the Church (Forty Hours Adoration was on), because he had to decide whether to sell his business (for family reasons).

Lectio Divina is prayer with the Sacred Scriptures.
We read,
we seek to understand with the help of a commentary,
we ponder,
we take time for stillness
and we respond.
It is a way of life, not a method of prayer.
Take the Mother of God as your model.