

LECTIO DIVINA (Holy Reading)
PRAYING WITH THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.
Sunday 12 May 2024
Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, 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:

13: Our Lady of Fatima (Optional Memorial).

14: St. Matthias (Feast).

In the Australian and New Zealand Church:

12: The beginning of a Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

15: Sandhurst - Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral, 1977.

In The Social Justice Calendar:

13: World Fair Trade Day.

14: World Communications Day.

19 -24: Laudato Si' Week.

Some facts about the Solemnity of the Ascension

The Ascension marked the solemn close of the post-resurrection appearances and the exaltation of Christ to the heavenly life after he had spoken to the apostles of 'things concerning the Kingdom of God'. Ascension Day is one of the principal feasts of the Christian year and is celebrated 40 days after Easter.

In Sacred Scripture, the number "40" signifies new life, new growth, transformation, a change from one great task to another great task. The rain of the great deluge/flood in the time of Noah lasted 40 days and nights. The people of God were 40 years in the wilderness. Forty days after Christmas, Jesus was taken to the Temple by his parents. Jesus was in the wilderness, where he fasted for 40 days and 40 nights.

LET US NOW MOVE INTO PRAYER WITH THE SACRED TEXTS

The readings are:

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 4:1-13.

Mark 15:16-20.

Lectio: Read the first text from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 1, verses 1-11.

Read it slowly and prayerfully, 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: Some background to help us understand the text and respond to it.

This is Luke's account of the Ascension of the Lord. For forty days Jesus had continued to appear to them and tell them about the Kingdom of God.

Then came this promise: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria and indeed to the ends of the earth. As Jesus said this, he was lifted up and a cloud took him from their sight.”

There are 87 places in the Old Testament where the word “cloud” is used, and for the most part it means the special presence of God as in the Book of Exodus: a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. (Ex. 13:21). When the Ark of the Covenant was brought to the Holy Place “the cloud filled the House of the Lord.” (1 Kings 8:10-11). The cloud heralded the presence of God’s glory. The cloud is a sign and figure of Divine protection (Isaiah 4:5).

Read the text over a couple of times, and you will hear the Holy Spirit prompting you to respond. I share my response to this reading in *Evangelizatio 1*.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 46:2-3, 6-9

The response is: GOD MOUNTS HIS THRONE TO SHOUTS OF JOY:

A BLARE OF TRUMPETS FOR THE LORD, ALLELUIA.

The Grail commentary notes: “There is no doubt that the note of joy in this Psalm and God going up refers to the procession with the Ark of the Covenant up the Temple hill. But for us, there is another ascension. The glorified body of Christ has thrown off the chains of place and time and he has power to lead us always and everywhere. This is surely a psalm for the feast of the Ascension.” (Grail Psalter, 1981, pages 90-91, Collins Liturgical Publications.)

Lectio: Read the Second Mass Reading, from the Ephesians 4:1-13.

Meditatio: The vocation of a Christian is spelt out clearly: charity, selflessness, gentleness, patience. How are Christians bound together? By peace and unity.

Unity: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all. We could take every one of the characteristics of a Christian vocation, cut them up, put them in a basket, cover over the basket and label it: Christianity.

Whenever we fail in unifying people or in peace-making, we are fragmenting – breaking away from our union with Christ (one Lord). We are defiling our baptism (one Baptism). We are breaking our union with the Holy Trinity. (one God)

Stay with this text and be aware of the Holy Spirit’s unction (anointing) on certain words, phrases, sentences. And if your heart is moved to respond, then note your response in your prayer journal. I share mine in *Evangelizatio 2*.

The Gospel Verse is from Matthew 28:19, 20.

GO AND TEACH ALL PEOPLE MY GOSPEL.

I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD.

It is a comforting text, to say the very least, and so reassuring (I am with you always). The command to “God and teach all people my gospel” means that every one of us can do that. You can preach the Gospel if you are bed-ridden, or in a retirement village, nursing or

teaching, helping out with surf lifesaving, or into droving cattle! Whatever you do in this life should present you with the opportunity to be loving, selfless, gentle and patient. (First Reading).

Lectio: Read the Gospel from Mark 16:15-20.

Meditatio: This week, the commentary comes from the Sermons of Pope St. Leo the Great. "...while at Easter it was the Lord's resurrection which was the cause of our joy, our present rejoicing is on account of his ascension into heaven. With all due solemnity we are commemorating that day on which our poor human nature was carried up in Christ...beyond the highest heavenly powers to the very throne of God the Father. It is upon this ordered structure of divine acts that we have been firmly established, so that the grace of God may show itself still more marvellous when, in spite of the withdrawal from our sight of everything that is rightly felt to command our reverence, faith does not fail, hope is not shaken, charity does not grow cold."

Pope St. Leo the Great (c. 400-461 was elected pope in 440. It was a time of general disorder, and he did much to strengthen the influence of the Church of Rome. Although he was not a profound theologian, Leo's teaching is clear and forceful. One hundred and forth-three of his letters and ninety-six sermons have survived. The latter cover the whole liturgical year. (Journey with the Fathers, Commentaries of the Sunday Gospels, Year B. Edited by Edith Barnecut, O.S.B. Pages 60-61. Published by New City Press, 86 Mayflower Avenue, New Rochelle, New York, 1993.

Take time every day for *Lectio Divina*: a line or word, or more. Allow the Holy Spirit to call forth your response to God. I share my response in *Evangelizatio* 3.

EVANGELIZATIO. *Evangelizatio* 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: God does not have favourites. The rich are equal to the poor. The Indigenous family down the road is equal to my family. Recently we had a visit from an Aboriginal elder, aged over 90. He'd been wanting to come to the Abbey for a long time, so his friends brought him. He told us his life story with gentleness, humility and grace. What a great gift he gave us.
2. Am I loving, selfless, gentle and patient? If I am, then I am true to my Christian vocation. If not, then I have work to do - inner work. But inner work takes time, lots of time, and lots of prayer, especially the prayer of *Lectio Divina*. Sr. Antonia's book "I Give You My Word" is now on sale. It is a handbook for anyone who is teaching and leading *Lectio Divina*.
3. Christ has ascended into heaven, taking our poor human nature with him, so that our faith may not fail, our hope may not be shaken, and our charity may not grow cold. (Pope Leo the Great). "Help me Lord to examine myself in this way: Who is the centre of my life, you or me? If you are the centre of my life, then everyone

will be gathered into unity. But if, instead, I see that people around me lose interest and disperse, that will be a sign that I have put myself at the centre. Alexander Pope takes it further when he says insightfully, “In faith and hope the world will disagree. But all humankind’s concern is charity.”

*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 and praying
in tune with the Holy Spirit within me,
resting in God and responding in the way I live.*

