

Guide to *Lectio Divina*

Choose a word or phrase of the Scriptures you wish to pray. It makes no difference which text is chosen, as long as you have no set goal of “covering” a certain amount of text. The amount of text covered is in God’s hands, not yours.

Read. Turn to the text and read it slowly, gently. Savor each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the “still, small voice” of a word or phrase that somehow says, “I am for you today.” Do not expect lightning or ecstasies. In *lectio divina*, God is teaching us to listen, to seek him in silence. God does not reach out and grab us but gently invites us ever more deeply into his presence.

Ponder. Take the word or phrase into yourself. Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas. Do not be afraid of distractions. Memories or thoughts are simply parts of yourself that, when they rise up during *lectio divina*, are asking to be given to God along with the rest of your inner self. Allow this inner pondering, this rumination, to invite you into dialogue with God.

Pray. Whether you use words, ideas, or images — or all three — is not important. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. Give to God what you have discovered during your experience of meditation. Give to God what you have found within your heart.

It is not necessary to assess the quality of your *lectio divina*, as if you were “performing” or seeking some goal. *Lectio divina* has no goal other than that of being in the presence of God by praying the Scriptures.

Fr. Luke Dysinger

Lectio Divina: 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Sunday, October 4, 2020

The parable of the murderous laborers
Matthew 21:33-43

1. Opening prayer

Lord, this Sunday I wish to pray with one of the most beautiful images of the Old Testament: “do not forsake the vineyard your right hand planted”. Continue to cultivate and enrich it with Your favored love.

May Your Word in this Sunday's liturgy be hope and consolation for me. May I meditate on them and let them resonate in my heart even to the end of my life. May my humanity be the fertile womb wherein the force of Your word may sprout.

2. Reading

a) Context:

Matthew frames the parable of the murderous laborers between two other parables: the one of the two sons (21:28-32) and that of the wedding banquet (22:1-14). All three parables contain a negative reply: that of the son to his father, that of some peasants to the master of the vineyard, and that of some invited guests to the king who is celebrating the wedding of his son. All three parables tend to point to one single point. Those who, because they have not accepted the preaching and baptism of John, are now unanimous in refusing the final invitation of God in the person of Jesus and are condemned. The introduction to the first parable in 21:28-33 should also be considered as the introduction to the parable of the murderous laborers:

After Jesus had entered the temple precincts, and while He was teaching, the chief priests and elders of the people came up to Him and said, “On what authority do You do these things? Who has given You this power?”

It is the priestly and secular aristocracy that goes to Jesus when He was in the temple. They are worried by Jesus' popularity and ask Him questions to know two things: what authority He attributes to himself in doing what He does, and the origin of this authority. In fact, the answer to the second question also gives the answer to the first question. The high priests and leaders of the people demand a juridical proof and they forget that the prophets had authority directly from God.

b) The Text:

33 Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. 34 When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. 35 But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. 36 Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way. 37 Finally he sent his son to them thinking, "They will respect my son." 38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, "This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance." 39 So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to



those tenants?' 41 They answered, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him at the proper time.' 42 Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is the Lord's doing and we marvel at it? 43 'I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.'

3. A moment of prayerful silence

We cannot comprehend the word of God unless God himself opens our hearts (Acts 16:14). However, it is up to us to arouse our curiosity by listening and to stop and stand before the Word...

4. An interpretation of the text

a) An invitation to listen:

The parable begins with an invitation to listen: *Listen to another parable* (v.33). Jesus draws the attention of the leaders of the people to the parable He is about to proclaim. This is an imperative, ""listen"", which does not exclude a certain threat, if we look at the way the parable ends: *"I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit"* (v.43). On the other hand, Jesus explains the parable of the sower to His disciples without any sign of reproach (Mt 13:18).

What is the explanation of this invitation to listen, which is a little menacing? The answer is to be sought in the economic conditions of Palestine in the 1st century A.D. Big lots of land belonged to liberal foreigners who rented land in groups. The renting agreement provided that part of the harvest would go to the owner, who carried out his right by sending stewards to collect his share. In such a situation one can understand that the feelings of peasants were sorely tried. They felt greatly disheartened and this sometimes led to revolt.

In His parable, Jesus refers to this concrete situation but takes it to a higher level of understanding. The situation becomes a compendium of the story of God and God's people. Matthew invites the reader to read the parable in a symbolic sense. The "owner" is the figure of God and the vineyard is Israel.

b) The careful care of the owner for his vineyard (v.33):

First there is the initiative of the owner who plants a vineyard. Matthew uses five verbs to describe this attention and care: *planted... fenced... dug... built... leased*. After he had planted the vineyard, the owner leases it to those concerned and then goes abroad.

c) The many attempts of the owner to retrieve the fruits of the vineyard (vv.34-36):

In the second scene, the owner twice sends his servants who, charged with the task of retrieving the produce of the vineyard, are ill treated and murdered. This aggressive and violent action is described with three verbs: *thrashed... killed... stoned...* (v.35). By sending many more servants and by intensifying the ill treatment suffered, Matthew means to allude to the history of the prophets who were also similarly mistreated. We recall some of these: Uriah is killed by a sword (Jer 26:23); Jeremiah was fettered (Jer 20:2); Zachary was stoned (2 Chr 24:21). We may find a resume of this part of history of the prophets in Nehemiah 9:26: "they have killed your prophets..."

d) Finally he sent his son:

The reader is invited to recognize in the son, who is sent "finally", the one sent by God to whom respect is due and to whom the produce of the vineyard is to be delivered. This is the owner's last attempt. The term ""finally"" defines the son as the Messiah. It is also possible that this view of eliminating the son may be modeled on another story from the OT: Joseph's brothers who say: "Come on, let us kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns here!" (Gen 37:20).

The parable reaches its dramatic peak with the outcome of the son's mission when he is killed by the leasing vine-dressers so that they may take over the vineyard and usurp the inheritance. Jesus' fate is set side by side with that of the prophets, but as son and heir, superior to them. Such Christological comparisons may be found in the Letter to the Hebrews, where the superiority of Christ as son and heir of the universe is placed in evidence: "*In times past, God spoke in many and varied ways to our fathers through the prophets; in this, the final age, He has spoken to us through His Son, whom He made heir of all things...*" (v.1-2).

There is a detail at the end of this parable that we must not overlook. By placing the words, "*they threw him out*" followed by, "*they killed him*", Matthew decidedly alludes to the passion of Jesus where He is taken out to be crucified.

e) Leasing the vineyard to other peasants (v.42-43):

The end of the parable confirms the loss of the kingdom of God and the giving of the kingdom to another people capable of bearing fruit, a people that is capable of a living an active faith and a practical love. The expressions "*I tell you, then...will be taken...and will be given...*" show the solemnity of God's action marking the history of ancient Israel and of the new people.

5. Meditations for ecclesial practice

- The symbol of the vineyard is a mirror where we can see a reflection of the personal and communitarian history of our relationship with God. Today, it is the church, this great vineyard that the Lord cultivates and cares for and that is entrusted to us, and the vine-dressers (collaborators) who have the task of continuing the mission started by Him. This is certainly a tall order. Nevertheless, as church, we are aware of the tension that exists and that the church may experience between fidelity and infidelity, between refusal and welcoming. This Sunday's Gospel tells us that, notwithstanding the difficulties and apparent fragility, nothing can stop the love of God for us, not even the elimination of His Son. It is this sacrifice that gains salvation for all.

- We are called to stay with Jesus and continue His mission of helping men and women to meet Him and to be saved, and to struggle every day to counter the forces of evil and fulfill the desire to do good and promote justice.

- As church we are called to learn, after the example of Jesus, to experience conflict and be able to bear difficulties in our commitment to evangelization.

- Do you believe that trials instruct our hearts? Do you believe that difficulties can be an instrument to measure our authenticity and the firmness of our faith?

6. Psalm 80 (79)

The psalmist expresses the desire of every person to be in contact with the hand of God who prepares the soil to plant and transplant His beloved vineyard.

You brought a vine out of Egypt,
to plant it You drove out nations;
You cleared a space for it,
it took root and filled the whole country.

The mountains were covered with its shade,
and the cedars of God with its branches,
its boughs stretched as far as the sea,
its shoots as far as the River.

Why have you broken down its fences?

Every passer-by plucks its grapes,
boars from the forest tear at it,
wild beasts feed on it.

God Sabaoth, come back, we pray,
look down from heaven and see,
visit this vine;
protect what Your own hand has planted.

They have thrown it on the fire like dung;
the frown of your rebuke will destroy them.
May Your hand protect those at Your side,
the child of Adam You have strengthened for Yourself!

Never again will we turn away from You,
give us life and we will call upon Your name.
God Sabaoth, bring us back,
let Your face shine on us and we shall be safe.

7. Closing prayer

Lord, how many times is love repaid with darkest ingratitude? Nothing is more destructive than to feel betrayed and made a fool of, to know that one has been deceived. It is even more difficult to realize that so many acts of kindness, generosity, openness, tolerance and sincerity, and of commitment to solidarity have come to nothing.

Lord, You have experienced the ingratitude of many. You have been patient with those who assailed You. You, who have always been merciful and meek, help us fight our inflexible hardness towards others. With the Psalmist, we too pray, "Do not forsake the vineyard You have planted". After this encounter with Your Word, may our prayer become an ever more penetrating plea so that it may touch Your heart: "Raise us up again Lord, show us Your face and we shall be saved". Lord, we have great need of Your mercy and, as long as there is the desire in our hearts to seek Your face, the way of salvation remains open to us. Amen!



Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time.

04OCT 2020 - TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Celebrate the joy of new life

In a happy collision of observances, October is dedicated to respecting life, supporting fair trade, employing the differently abled, and praying the Rosary. Today is not only Respect Life Sunday but also, in memory of Francis of Assisi, an occasion to bless the animals who share our lives. If you're seeking an integrated moral code, here's your chance to champion the spectrum of life. The Rosary's Joyful Mysteries lead the way: embrace new life, encourage mothers, support child-affirming laws, recognize the gifts of all God's children, and respect the wisdom of young people.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 5:1-7; Philippians 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-43 ([139](#)).

"Finally, [the landowner] sent his son to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.'"

05OCT 2020 - MEMORIAL OF BLESSED FRANCIS XAVIER SEELOS, PRIEST

A saint for this season

As we've lately learned, it's hard to be happy during a health crisis, but Redemptorist Father Francis Xavier Seelos was called the "Cheerful Ascetic," even while serving the sick during a disease outbreak. Known for his kindness and missionary zeal, this German-born priest kept his sermons simple for everyone to understand and was sought out as a compassionate confessor. He was an itinerant preacher throughout the Eastern and Midwestern United States, before being sent to New Orleans where he died of yellow fever. Those seeking healing can submit their [prayer petition](#) to the National Shrine of Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos.

Today's readings:

Galatians 1:6-12; Luke 10:25-37 ([461](#)).

"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart . . . and your neighbor as yourself."

06OCT 2020 - MEMORIAL OF BLESSED MARIE ROSE DUROCHER, VIRGIN

When Mary receives a Martha job

Jesus said his friend Mary was right to cease activity, to simply sit at his feet and listen. But the church may ask you to be more like Martha—to reach out to the world, as Jesus also called on his followers to do. Such was the dilemma of Marie Rose Durocher. This quiet and frail young woman preferred the quiet life but was pressed into pastoral service by her brother, a Montreal priest in the 1830s. Then her bishop asked her to start a new religious community to help educate the young. How is God asking you to move beyond your own comfort zone today?

Today's readings:

Galatians 1:13-24; Luke 10:38-42 ([462](#)).

"A woman whose name was Martha welcomed him."

07OCT 2020 - MEMORIAL OF OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY

Protect us from harm

The Rosary has been a favored Catholic form of prayer for centuries. Inviting us to pray five Our Fathers, 50 Hail Marys, and five Glory Be's while meditating on gospel stories from Mary's and Jesus' lives, this spiritual practice has helped generations of Catholics ask for Mary's intercession. In October 1571, Catholic soldiers prayed the Rosary to prepare for battle with Turkish soldiers in the Gulf of Corinth. When they won that battle, Pope Pius V claimed that October 7 would be known as the Feast of Our Lady of Victory. Two years later, his successor, Gregory XIII, changed the name to the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. As our world faces the challenge of the COVID-19 virus, we again ask for Mary's intercession. Our Lady of the Rosary, pray for us.

Today's readings:

Galatians 2:1-2, 7-14; Luke 11:1-4 (463).
"Jesus was praying in a certain place."

08OCT₂₀₂₀

Persistence pays off

Prayer is not like an ATM whereby requests are entered and dispensed. Ultimately our model is Jesus. Christ's persistence in prayer united him with God but did not erase his suffering. He sweated blood, he was crucified. When we do not receive the answer we are hoping for to our prayer request, we may suffer too, but, like Jesus, we can open ourselves to deeper union with God. Take time today to offer God your needs, trusting that God's strength and presence always suffices.

Today's readings:

Galatians 3:1-5; Luke 11:5-13 (464).
"If you . . . give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

09OCT₂₀₂₀

God casts out evil

Although Hollywood has popularized exorcism with such movies as *The Exorcist* (1973) and more recently *The Conjuring* series, exorcism is a legitimate rite in the church. An exorcism is actually a form of prayer. It is used in situations where the faithful experience a force of evil or the "powers of darkness," which we call the devil or demons. Recognizing the place of exorcism in the prayers of the church is important because it reminds us that God has already freed us from the snare of evil. As you encounter various "demons" in your life, remember to pray: Call upon God to be with you and to separate you from all that is evil and to surround you with God's love.

Today's readings:

Galatians 3:7-14; Luke 11:15-26 (465).
"But if it is by the finger of God that [I] drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

10OCT₂₀₂₀

Put on your dancing shoes!

On this day, the Jewish community celebrates Simchat Torah. This joyous harvest festival marks the beginning and end of the annual Torah reading, and culminates in dancing with the sacred texts. In a similar sense of celebration, Jesus says to his disciples, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it." Choose scripture as your companion, and get ready to shimmy, shake, rock and roll, and trip the light fantastic all for the greater glory of God.

Today's readings:

Galatians 3:22-29; Luke 11:27-28 (466).
"And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."