

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: 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Sunday, October 18, 2020

Tribute to Caesar

When hypocrisy sets a snare for honest people *Matthew 22:15-21*

1. Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind that You read them to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word, written in the Bible, You helped them to discover the presence of God in the disturbing events of Your sentence and death. Thus, the cross that seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the source of life and of resurrection.

Create silence in us so that we may listen to Your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May Your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, may experience the force of Your resurrection and witness to others that You are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice and peace. We ask this of You, Jesus, son of Mary, who revealed the Father to us and sent us Your Spirit. Amen.

2. Reading

a) A division of the text to help with the reading:

Matthew 22:15-17: The question of the Pharisees and Herodians

Matthew 22:18-21: Jesus' reply

b) A key to the reading:

Jesus comes from Galilee to Jerusalem for the annual feast of the Pasch. As He enters the city, He is acclaimed by the people (Mt 21:1-11). He immediately goes to the temple where He drives the vendors away (Mt 21:12-16). Although He stays in Jerusalem, He spends the nights outside the city and returns to the city in the morning (Mt 21:17). The situation is very tense. In His discussions with the authorities, the high priests, the elders and the Pharisees in Jerusalem, Jesus expresses Himself in parables (Mt 21:23 – 22:14). They would like to get hold of Him, but they are afraid (Mt 21:45-46). This Sunday's Gospel on the tribute due to Caesar (Mt 22:15-21) is situated within this general state of conflict between Jesus and the authorities.

c) Text:

15 Then the Pharisees went away to work out between them how to trap Him in what He said. 16 And they sent their disciples to Him, together with some Herodians, to say, 'Master, we know that You are an honest man and teach the way of God in all honesty, and that You are not afraid of anyone, because human rank means nothing to You. 17 Give us your opinion, then. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' 18 But Jesus was aware of their malice and replied, 'You hypocrites! Why are you putting Me to the test? 19 Show Me the money you pay the tax with.' They handed Him a denarius, 20 and He said, 'Whose portrait is this? Whose title?' 21 They replied, 'Caesar's.' Then He said to them, 'Very well, give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.'



3. A moment of prayerful silence

so that the Word of God may penetrate and enlighten our life.

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Which part of the text touched you most? Why?
- b) Which groups in power are getting ready to set a trap for Jesus? What kind of trap?
- c) What did Jesus do to get out of the trap laid by the powerful?
- d) For today, what does the saying, “Pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar and God what belongs to God” mean?

5. For those who wish to go deeper into the theme

a) The context of our text in the Gospel of Matthew:

As we were saying, the context of the Gospel of the 29th Sunday is the debate between Jesus and the authorities. It begins with the discussion with the priests and elders on the authority of Jesus (Mt 21:23-27). Then comes the parable of the two sons where Jesus denounces the hypocrisy of some groups (Mt 21:28-32). There follow two parables, one of the murderous wine growers (Mt 21:33-46) and another concerning those who are invited but refuse to attend the wedding feast (Mt 22:1-14). At this point in our text (Mt 22:15-22) the Pharisees and the Herodians enter to set a trap. They ask Him about the tribute to be paid to the Romans. It was a tricky question that divided public opinion. They wanted to accuse Jesus and so lessen His influence over the people. The Sadducees immediately begin to question Him on the resurrection of the dead, another controversial question and cause of dissent between the Sadducees and the Pharisees (Mt 22:23-33). It all ends with a discussion on the greatest commandment of all (Mt 22:34-40) and the Messiah as son of David (Mt 22:41-45).

Like Jesus, the Christians of the communities in Syria and Palestine for whom Matthew was writing his Gospel were accused and questioned by the authorities, by other groups, and by their neighbors who felt uncomfortable because of the witness of the disciples. When reading these episodes of conflict with the authorities, they felt comforted and encouraged to continue on their journey.

b) A commentary on the text:

Matthew 22:15-17: The question of the Pharisees and Herodians.

The Pharisees and Herodians were the local authorities who did not enjoy popular support in Galilee. They had decided that it was time to kill Jesus (Mt 12:14; Mk 3:6). Now, by order of the priests and elders, they want to know whether Jesus is in favor of, or against, paying tribute to the Romans: a deliberate question and full of malice! Under the guise of fidelity to the law of God, they seek reasons for accusing Him. If Jesus were to say, “You must pay!” they would accuse Him, together with the people, of being a friend of the Romans. If He were to say, “You must not pay!” they would accuse Him of being a subversive. A dead end!

Matthew 22:18-21a: Jesus’ reply: Show Me a coin.

Jesus is aware of their hypocrisy. In His reply, He wastes no time in useless discussion and goes directly to the heart of the question: “Whose portrait is this? Whose title?” They answer, “Caesar’s!”

Matthew 22:21b: Jesus’ conclusion

Jesus then draws the conclusion: “Pay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God!”. In fact, they had already acknowledged Caesar’s authority. They already paid Caesar what belonged to Caesar since they used his money to buy and sell and even to pay the tribute to the Temple!

Hence, the question was useless. Why ask something whose answer was clear in practice? They, who by their question pretended to be servants of God, were in fact forgetting the most important thing: they forgot to give God what belongs to God! What mattered to Jesus was that “they pay to God what belongs to God”, that is, they misled the people that they had led away from God through their own fault, because through their teachings they prevented people from entering the Kingdom (Mt 23:13). Rather say, “Pay to God what belongs to God”, which is, practice justice and honesty according to the demands of the law of God, because by your hypocrisy you are denying God what is due to Him. The disciples must be aware of this, because it was the hypocrisy of these Pharisees and Herodians that was blinding their eyes! (Mk 8:15).

c) A deepening: Levies, tributes, taxes and tithes:

In Jesus' time, the people of Palestine paid very many levies, taxes, tributes, fines, contributions, donations and tithes. Some scholars calculate that half of a family's income went to pay levies. Here is a list that gives an idea of all that the people paid in levies:

*** Direct levies on properties and persons:**

Levy on property (tributum soli). The taxation officers of the government checked on properties, production, the number of slaves and then fixed the amount to be paid. Periodically, new taxation amounts were set in accordance with census taken.

Levies on persons (tributum capitis): for the poor without land, which included women and men between the ages of 12 and 65 years. The levy on the workforce was 20% of the income of every individual.

*** Indirect levies on various transactions:**

Golden crown: Originally this was a gift to the emperor, but then became a compulsory levy. It was paid on special occasions such as feasts or visits of the emperor.

Salt levy: Salt was the emperor's monopoly. The tribute was paid on salt for commercial use, for instance, salt used by fishermen to salt fish. That is the origin of the word “salary”.

Levy on buying and selling: For each commercial transaction there was a levy of 1%. It was the taxation officers who collected this money. For the purchase of a slave they asked for 2%.

Levy on professional practice: For anything at all one needed a permit. For instance, a shoemaker in Palmira paid one denarius per month. One denarius was equivalent to a day's salary. Even prostitutes had to pay.

Levy on the use of public utilities: Emperor Vespasian introduced a levy on the use of public baths in Rome. He used to say, “Money has no smell!”

*** Other taxes and obligations:**

Toll: This was a levy on the movement of merchandise, collected by Publicans. Tolls were paid on the road. At certain points there were soldiers who forced those who were reluctant to pay.

Forced labor: Everyone could be forced to render some service to the State for five years, without remuneration.

Special subsidy for the armed forces: People were obliged to offer hospitality to soldiers. People also had to pay a certain amount of money for the nourishment and support of the troops.

*** Levy for the Temple and for Cult:**

Shekalim: This was the levy for the upkeep of the Temple.

Tithe: This was the levy for the upkeep of the priests. “Tithe” means the tenth part!

First fruits: This was the levy for the upkeep of the cult. The authorities collected the first fruits of all land products.

6. Psalm 12

Against lying lips
Help, Yahweh! No one loyal is left,
the faithful have vanished from among the children of Adam.
Friend tells lies to friend, and, smooth-tongued,
speaks from an insincere heart.
May Yahweh cut away every smooth lip,
every boastful tongue,
those who say, 'In our tongue lies our strength,
our lips are our allies; who can master us?'
'For the poor who are plundered,
the needy who groan, now will I act,' says Yahweh,
'I will grant salvation to those who sigh for it.'
Yahweh's promises are promises unalloyed,
natural silver which comes from the earth seven times refined.
You, Yahweh, will watch over them,
you will protect them from that brood for ever.
The wicked will scatter in every direction,
as the height of depravity among the children of Adam.

7. Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice what Your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, Your mother, not only listen to but also practice the Word, You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.



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

18OCT 2020 - TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Share the suffering, ease the burden

People in love behave differently. They “never stand still,” Pope Francis declares. “They’re drawn out of themselves; they’re attracted and attract others in turn.” Believers are lovers in this way, feeling the irresistible urge to share the blessings of faith. That is why, the pope concludes, we must all be missionaries. On this World Mission Sunday, we embrace the call to be lovers of our suffering world. The Rosary’s Sorrowful Mysteries hold the keys: Bring global suffering to prayer, be willing to suffer for the truth, bear wrongs patiently, share the burdens of others, and know what’s worth sacrificing for.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b; Matthew 22:15-21 ([145](#)).

“For our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and the Spirit and with much conviction.”

19OCT 2020 - MEMORIAL OF JOHN DE BRÉBEUF AND ISAAC JOGUES, PRIESTS, AND COMPANIONS, MARTYRS

Heal the breach

Jean de Brébeuf was a French Jesuit missionary who worked with the Huron in what is today Canada and was martyred in an Iroquois raid. Brébeuf was a skilled linguist and not only learned the Huron language but also the spiritual beliefs already held by the Huron. His fellow Jesuits wrote about how easily Brébeuf adapted himself to the Huron way of life. While he was not always respectful of Huron culture, we can emulate his effort to create bridges of mutual understanding, as our own country is today torn by differences.

Today's readings:

Ephesians 2:1-10; Luke 12:13-21 ([473](#)).

“You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?”

20OCT 2020 - MEMORIAL OF PAUL OF THE CROSS, PRIEST

How deep is your love?

Paul of the Cross, Italian mystic and founder of the Passionist religious order in 1725, was taught by his mother to look to the crucified Jesus as a way to make sense out of suffering. Most of his siblings died; his father’s business barely scraped by. But no matter what hardships the family endured, his mother said, they were nothing compared to God’s deep love. What a seed she planted in her son! “The holy sufferings of Jesus is a sea of sorrows, but it is also a sea of love,” wrote Paul. “Ask the Lord to teach you to fish in this sea.”

Today's readings:

Ephesians 2:12-22; Luke 12:35-38 ([474](#)).

“Be like servants who await their master’s return from a wedding, ready to open.”

21OCT 2020

People, get ready

“Be Prepared” is a motto for the Boy and Girl Scouts that is explained in this way: “You are always in a state of readiness in mind and body to do your duty.” That motto could very well be a motto for Christian life. Jesus expects his followers to be alert to the assistance of the Spirit and to act in ways that bear witness to Christian duty. It is a Christian’s duty to use the gifts of time and talent to build up Jesus’ kingdom of love. When you review the past week, can you find evidence that you are doing your Christian duty by responding to Jesus’ call to love unconditionally?

Today's readings:

Ephesians 3:2-12; Luke 12:39-48 ([475](#)).

“You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”

22OCT2020 - MEMORIAL OF JOHN PAUL II, POPE

Small acts can have great impact

Saint John Paul II’s quarter-century as pope greatly influenced both church and state. Many times his personal witness is what moved people’s hearts. Christians and those of other faiths alike were moved by his willingness to meet with his would-be assassin, Mehmet Ali Ağca. While most people’s lives are not lived on the world stage, each of us can bear witness through acts of love, forgiveness, and reverence. What gesture of yours today can bear witness to God?

Today's readings:

Ephesians 3:14-21; Luke 12:49-53 ([476](#)).

“I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!”

23OCT2020 - MEMORIAL OF JOHN OF CAPISTRANO, PRIEST

Fly back when the time is right

The cliff swallows of San Juan Capistrano, California depart the mission town on or around this date, the Memorial of Saint John, the town’s namesake. They return every spring after their 6,000-mile winter migration to Argentina. Pray that, like the swallows of Capistrano, everyone will be able to safely come back to the place they call home, after war, famine, natural disaster, or separation due to pandemic.

Today's readings:

Ephesians 4:1-6; Luke 12:54-59 ([477](#)).

“Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.”

24OCT2020 - MEMORIAL OF ANTHONY MARY CLARET, BISHOP

Let your light shine!

As a young man, Anthony Claret was torn between his talent in the textile business and the emerging call he felt to religious life. Seeing his talent, his father offered to share leadership of the family business with him. Anthony was famously short of stature, and he pointed out that workers likely would resist taking orders from him. His father suggested they could hide Anthony behind a desk to come up with ideas and put a larger man in charge of the workers. That sealed the deal for Anthony—he wasn’t interested in hiding. Thereafter he was a tireless and talented preacher, confessor, author, and publisher in the service of God. Don’t hide your own gifts—they are God-given and the world needs them!

Today's readings:

Ephesians 4:7-16; Luke 13:1-9 ([478](#)).

“It may bear fruit in the future.”