

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: 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Sunday, October 25, 2020

The greatest commandment

To love God is to love one's neighbor

Matthew 22:34-40

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 key to the reading:

In the Gospel of the 30th Sunday of ordinary time, the Pharisees want to know what Jesus thinks is the greatest commandment of the law. This theme was much discussed among the Jews of those days. It was a regular debate. Today too, people wish to know what defines a person as a good Christian. Some say that this consists in being baptized, praying and going to Mass on Sunday. Others say it consists in practicing justice and living out fraternity. Each has his or her opinion. According to you, what is the most important thing in religion and in the life of the Church? When reading this text try to pay close attention to the way Jesus answers the question.

b) Text:

34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees they got together 35 and, to put Him to the test, one of them put a further question, 36 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?' 37 Jesus said to him, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. 38 This is the greatest and the first commandment. 39 The second resembles it: You must love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets too.'

3. A moment of prayerful silence

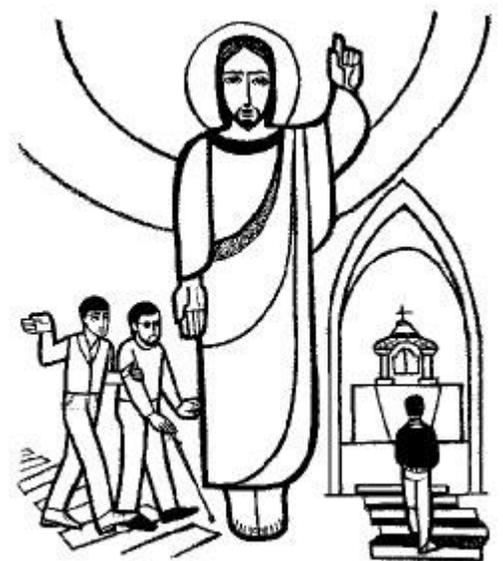
so that the Word of God may penetrate and enlighten our life.

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

a) What did you like most in this text or what touched you most? Why?

b) Who were the Pharisees then? Who are the Pharisees today?



- c) How could the question asked of Jesus by the Pharisees put Him to the test?
- d) What is the relationship between the first and the second commandment?
- e) Why is it that the love of God and the love of neighbor constitute a summary of the law and the prophets?

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

a) The context of this text as it appears in the Gospel of Matthew:

This is one of the many discussions Jesus had with the religious authorities of that time. This time it was with the Pharisees. First, the Pharisees had tried to discredit Jesus with the people by spreading theories about Him saying that He was possessed by devils with which He drove out Beelzebub (Mt 12:24). Now, in Jerusalem, they enter once more into a discussion with Jesus concerning the interpretation of the law of God.

b) A commentary on the text:

Matthew 22:34-36: A question put by the Pharisees.

First, to put Jesus to the test, the Sadducees had asked Him about belief in the resurrection and were firmly silenced by Jesus (Mt 22:23-33). Now the Pharisees come to the fore. The Pharisees and Sadducees were enemies, but they become friends in criticizing Jesus. The Pharisees come together and one of them represents them by asking for a clarification: "Master, which is the greatest commandment of the law?" In those days, the Jews had a huge number of norms, customs, and laws, great and small, to regulate the observance of the Ten Commandments. One point concerning two commandments of the law of God was a matter of great discussion among the Pharisees. Some said, "All the laws, great or small, have equal value because they all come from God. We cannot make distinctions in matters concerning God". Others said, "Some laws are more important than others and thus they deserve greater observance!" The Pharisees want to know where Jesus stands in this debate.

Matthew 22:37-40: Jesus' reply.

Jesus replies by quoting some words from the Bible: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might!" (cf. Deut 6:4-5). In Jesus' days, pious Jews recited this phrase three times a day, morning, noon and night. It was a well-known prayer among them, as the Our Father is for us today. And Jesus goes on quoting the Old Testament: "This is the greatest and first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18). And He concludes: "On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets too". In other words, this is the way to God and the neighbor. There is no other. The greatest temptation of human beings is that of trying to separate these two loves, because in this way the poverty of others would not discomfort their consciences.

c) A deepening:

i) Pharisees:

The word "Pharisees" means "separate" because their rigid way of observing the Law of God separated them from others. Among themselves they called each other companions because they formed a community whose ideal was that of observing absolutely the norms and all the commandments of the Law of God. The way of life of most of them was a witness to the people because they lived by their labor and dedicated many hours every day to study and meditation on the law of God. But there was something very negative: they sought their safety not in God but in the rigorous observance of the Law of God. They trusted more in what they did for God than in what God did for them. They had lost the notion of gratuity, which is the source and fruit of love. Before such a false attitude towards God, Jesus reacts firmly and insists on the practice of love that makes the observance of the law, and of its true meaning, relative. In an age of change and uncertainty, such as now, the same temptation reappears: to seek safety before God, not

in the goodness of God towards us, but in the rigorous observance of the Law. If we succumb to such a temptation, then we deserve the same censure from Jesus.

ii) A parallel between Mark and Matthew:

In the Gospel of Mark, it is a doctor of the law who asks the question (Mk 12:32-33). After listening to Jesus' reply, the doctor agrees with Him and draws the following conclusion: "Yes, to love God and neighbor is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice". Or else, the commandment of love is the most important among all the commandments concerned with cult and sacrifices of the Temple and with external observances. This statement already existed in the Old Testament from the time of the prophet Hosea (Hos 6:6; Ps 40:6-8; Ps 51:16-17). Today we would say that the practice of love is more important than novenas, promises, fasts, prayers and processions. Jesus approves of the conclusion reached by the doctor of the law and says: "You are not far from the Kingdom!" The Kingdom of God consists of this: acknowledging that the love of God is equal to the love of neighbor. We cannot reach God without giving ourselves to the neighbor!

iii) The greatest commandment:

The greatest commandment and the first is this: "You must love God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might" (Mk 12:30; Mt 22:37). As far as the people of God, throughout the centuries, understood the meaning of this love did they become aware that the love of God is real and true only if it is made concrete in the love of one's neighbor. That is why the second commandment resembles the first (Mt 22:39; Mk 12:31). "Anyone who says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, is a liar" (1Jn 4:20). "On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also" (Mt 22:40). Because of this identification of the two loves, there has been an evolution in three phases:

1st Phase: "neighbor", is the relative of the same race

The Old Testament already taught that we must "love our neighbor as ourselves!" (Lev 19:18) Then the word neighbor was synonymous with relative. They felt obliged to love all those who were part of the same family, the same clan, the same people. As for strangers, that is, those who did not belong to the Jewish people, the book of Deuteronomy says, "From a foreigner you may exact payment, but you must remit whatever claim you have on your brother (relative, neighbor)!" (Deut 15:3).

2nd Phase: "neighbor" is the one I approach or who approaches me.

The concept of neighbor is broadened. In Jesus' time, there was a whole discussion as to "who is my neighbor?" Some doctors of the law thought the concept of neighbor had to be extended beyond the limits of race. Others would not hear of this. So a doctor turns to Jesus and asks this vexed question: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus replies with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37), where the neighbor is neither the relative nor the friend, but all those who approach us, irrespective of religion, color, race, gender or language! You must love him!

3rd Phase: The measure of our love for the "neighbor" is the love with which Jesus loves us.

Jesus had said to the doctor of the law, "You are not far from the Kingdom!" (Mk 12:34). The doctor was already close because in fact, the Kingdom consists in uniting the love of God with the love of neighbor as the doctor had solemnly declared before Jesus (Mk 12:33). But to enter the Kingdom he had to take one more step. In the Old Testament, the criterion of love for neighbor was the following: "love your neighbor as yourself". Jesus stretches the criterion further and says, "This is My commandment: love one another, as I have loved you! A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends!" (Jn 15:12-13). Now, in the New Testament, the criterion is: "Love your neighbor as Jesus loved us!" Jesus interpreted the exact meaning of the Word of God and showed us the way to a more just and fraternal way of life.

6. Psalm 62

In God alone there is rest for my soul

In God alone there is rest for my soul,
from Him comes my safety;
He alone is my rock, my safety,
my stronghold so that I stand unshaken.
How much longer will you set on a victim,
all together, intent on murder,
like a rampart already leaning over,
a wall already damaged?
Trickery is their only plan,
deception their only pleasure,
with lies on their lips they pronounce a blessing,
with a curse in their hearts.

Rest in God alone, my soul!
He is the source of my hope.
He alone is my rock, my safety, my stronghold,
so that I stand unwavering.
In God is my safety and my glory,
the rock of my strength.
In God is my refuge;
trust in God, you people, at all times.
Pour out your hearts to Him;
God is a refuge for us.
Ordinary people are a mere puff of wind,
important people a delusion;
set both on the scales together,
and they are lighter than a puff of wind.

Put no trust in extortion,
no empty hopes in robbery;
however much wealth may multiply,
do not set your heart on it.
Once God has spoken,
twice have I heard this:
Strength belongs to God,
to You, Lord, faithful love;
and You repay all as their deeds deserve.

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.

25OCT₂₀₂₀ - THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Worship the God of glory

Leadership earns public honors, and the best leaders exercise humility in accepting them. Pope Francis began his papacy by donning simple attire and asking for our prayers before offering his first blessing. Genuine leadership recognizes that all authority comes from God. Today is Priesthood Sunday, honoring the multitudes of pastors who did their job this year with passion, grace, and ingenuity under extraordinary circumstances. Pray the Rosary's Glorious Mysteries for those who lead us to: rise up from despair, lift our gaze upward, encounter the Spirit's power, give ourselves body and soul, and accept honor with grace.

Today's readings:

Exodus 22:20-26; 1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10; Matthew 22:34-40 ([148](#)).

"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

26OCT₂₀₂₀

Slow down, you're moving too fast

Too many people work too much. Some have a psychological compulsion to work incessantly. Some work excessively to acquire money and success. Some have no identity outside of their jobs. Some are driven by guilt and fear of being lazy. Some think that an overly busy work life makes them look important. And far too many are forced to work too much in order to make ends meet. None of these reasons are healthy or holy. God wants us to rest and enjoy life too—thus, the sabbath day. Let's work together to create a just society where all can get some rest.

Today's readings:

Ephesians 4:32—5:8; Luke 13:10-17 ([479](#)).

"Ought she not to have been set free on the sabbath day from this bondage?"

27OCT₂₀₂₀

Console the consolers

Prayerful words from the National Association of Catholic Chaplains, written by NACC member Lisa Ecks: "May the wilderness of this time, and the uncertainty we may feel, strengthen our resolve to lean on your word, abide in your presence, and be guided by your enduring and powerful Spirit." The NACC helps priests, religious women, and laypeople bring a trained, professional experience to their ministry of caring for the sick. Pray for all hospital chaplains during this Pastoral Care Week. They're consoling not just COVID-19 patients but medical workers on the front lines.

Today's readings:

Ephesians 5:21-33; Luke 13:18-21 ([480](#)).

"Jesus said, 'What is the kingdom of God like? To what can I compare it?'"

28OCT₂₀₂₀ - FEAST OF SIMON AND JUDE, APOSTLES

Obscure but still important

Much of what we know about apostles Jude and Simon is who they are *not*. Simon was called the Zealot—someone passionate, and perhaps revolutionary, about his Jewish faith. Calling him the Zealot also helped to distinguish him from the more famous Simon Peter. We find Jude (along with Judas, variant translations of the name Judah) mentioned in the list of the apostles in Luke and Acts, but he is called Thaddeus in Matthew and Mark, perhaps to distinguish him from the traitor Judas Iscariot. Regardless of their relative obscurity, Jude and Simon were chosen by Jesus to share the Good News and there is every indication they did just that. Even if your life seems quiet and unremarkable to you in some ways, the call to discipleship is your call as well. Saint Jude and Saint Simon, pray for us.

Today's readings:

Ephesians 2:19-22; Luke 6:12-16 ([666](#)).

“Jesus called the disciples to himself. . . . Simon who was called the Zealot and Judas the son of James.”

29 OCT 2020

Do the right thing

Even in this day and age, Christians standing up for what is right have been killed for their efforts. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. comes to mind. So does Sister Dorothy Stang, SNDdeN, of Dayton, Ohio, who was murdered in 2005 for defending the poor and protected lands in the Amazon rain forest in Brazil. Would you allow yourself to be inconvenienced (or more) to do the right thing? Look for a way to stand up for a good cause today, even if it feels inconvenient.

Today's readings:

Ephesians 6:10-20; Luke 13:31-35 ([482](#)).

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.”

30 OCT 2020

A time for healing

One of the comforting takeaways from our experience of church during the pandemic is that people are more important than rules. The obligation to physically participate in Sunday Mass has been dispensed during the pandemic by our bishops. We are given the opportunity to make a “spiritual communion” instead. We don’t have to go to Confession to be absolved of our sins. A sincere Act of Contrition and a resolve to celebrate the sacrament when it once again becomes available is sufficient. Just as Jesus set aside the sabbath commandment in order to heal, so too our bishops set aside the precepts so that we may be healed. Let’s pray today for our bishops, and for a time of healing.

Today's readings:

Philippians 1:1-11; Luke 14:1-6 ([483](#)).

“The one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it.”

31 OCT 2020

Meal ministry

One of the many things to be longed for during this extended time of physical distancing is the free and easy sharing of meals with family and friends, in groups large and small. Shared meals hold a special place in family life, and in Catholic life as well. It’s no mystery why meals are central. Something magical happens at mealtime, the communion among people is palpable. And in Catholic life, Communion is sacred. Pray we may safely gather again without appointment or extra precautions in the not distant future and freely share the mysteries of our faith in the bread and wine, the Body and Blood. Until then, let us raise a glass in remembrance of Christ.

Today's readings:

Philippians 1:18b-26; Luke 14:1, 7-11 ([484](#)).

“On a sabbath Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully.”