

# 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: Jesus Christ, King of the Universe (A)

Sunday, November 22, 2020

Jesus identifies Himself with the least of His brethren The criterion for entering the Realm Mt 25:31-46

## 1. Opening Prayer

Spirit of truth, sent by Jesus to guide us to the whole truth, enlighten our minds so that we may understand the Scriptures. You who overshadowed Mary and made her fruitful ground where the Word of God could germinate, purify our hearts from all obstacles to the Word. Help us to learn like her to listen with good and pure hearts to the Word that God speaks to us in life and in Scripture, so that we may observe the Word and produce good fruit through our perseverance.

## 2. Reading

### a) The context:

Our text is part of a long eschatological discourse (Mt 24:1-25, 46) given by Jesus on the Mount of Olives to His disciples privately (Mt 24:3). The discourse begins with the proclamation of the destruction of Jerusalem in order to speak of the end of the world. The two events become confused as though they were one. This part of the discourse ends with the coming of the Son of man with great power and glory. He will send His angels to gather His elect (Mt 24:30-31). Here the chronological flow of the events proclaimed is interrupted by the insertion of some parables on the need to watch so as not to be caught by surprise at the coming of the Son of man (Mt 24:24-25,30). The eschatological discourse comes to its literary and theological peak in our text. This text ties up with (Mt 24:30-31) and speaks once more of the coming of the Son of man accompanied by His angels. The gathering of the elect here takes the form of a final judgment.

### b) The text:

When the Son of man comes in His glory, escorted by all the angels, then He will take His seat on His throne of glory. All nations will be assembled before Him and He will separate people one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on His right hand and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me." Then the upright will say to Him in reply, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome, lacking clothes and clothe you? When did we find you sick or in prison and go to see you?" And the King will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me." Then He will say to those on His left hand, "Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and His angels. For I was hungry and you never gave me food, I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink, I was a stranger and you never made me welcome, lacking clothes and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you never visited me." Then it will be their turn to ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or lacking clothes, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?" Then He will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me." And they will go away to eternal punishment, and the upright to eternal life.

## 3. A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so that the Word of God may enter into us and enlighten our life.

## 4. Some Questions

. . . to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) Which criterion does Jesus use for the separation?
- b) Who are the least of the brethren with whom Jesus identifies Himself?
- c) How did Jesus, in His life, show preference for the least?
- d) Who are the least of Jesus' brethren that I meet?
- e) Am I capable of seeing, loving and serving Jesus in them?

## 5. A Key to the Reading

For those who wish to go deeper into the text.

### ● The Son of Man:

The Son of man is a Semitic expression that simply means a human being (see for instance the parallelism between "man" and "son of man" in Psalm 8:5). The book of Ezekiel often uses this term with this meaning when God addresses Himself to the prophet as "son of man" (Mt 2:1, 3, 6, 8; 3: 1, 2, 4, 10, 16+) in order to emphasize the distance between God who is transcendent and the prophet who is but a man. However, in Daniel 7:13-14 the expression acquires a special meaning. The prophet sees "coming on the clouds of heaven, one like a son of man" who receives from God "sovereignty, glory and kingship". This text is still talking of a human being, however, who is introduced into the sphere of God. The text has been interpreted both in a personal and a collective sense, but always in a messianic sense. Thus, whether we are dealing with one person or with all of the People of God, the Son of man is the Messiah who gives rise to the Realm of God, an eternal and universal realm. The application of the term "Son of man" to Jesus as it is used in Daniel 7:13-14 is very common in the Gospels. We also find it in Acts 7:56 and the Apocalypse 1:13 and 14:14. Scholars think that Jesus gave Himself this title. In the Gospel of Matthew this term is attributed to Jesus especially when He speaks of His passion (Mt 17:12, 22; 20:18, 28), His resurrection as an eschatological event (Mt 17: 19; 26:64) and His glorious return (Mt 24:30 and 25:31, the beginning of our text).

### ● Jesus King, Judge, and Shepherd:

Matthew also gives Jesus the title of king (Mt 1:23; 13:41; 16:28; 20:21). The kingship of God is a theme very dear to the Bible. Because Jesus is the Son of God, He rules together with the Father. In our text, the king is Jesus, but He exercises His royal power in close relationship with the Father. The elect are "blessed of my Father" and the realm to which they are invited is the realm prepared for them by God, as the passive form of the verb indicates. This form of the verb, called the divine passive, is often found in the Bible and always has God as its implicit subject. In this text, the realm points to eternal life.

In Daniel 7 (see especially verses 22, 26 and 27) and in our text, the royal status of the Son of man is connected with the judgment. The king, especially in ancient times, was always considered the supreme judge. The judgment that Jesus exercises is a universal judgment, a judgment that involves all peoples (see v.32). And yet it is not a collective judgment. It is not the peoples that are judged but individual persons.

In the same way, the pastoral symbolism is connected with royal status. In ancient times, the king was often presented as shepherd of his people. The Old Testament also speaks of God, king of Israel, as shepherd (see for instance Psalm 23, Is 40:11; Ez 34) and the New Testament applies the title to Jesus (Mt 9:36; 26:31; Jn 10) as well. The shepherds of the Holy Land, in the time of Jesus, shepherded mixed flocks of sheep and goats. However, at night they were separated because sheep sleep in the open while goats prefer to sleep under shelter. In our text the sheep represent the elect because of their valuation over goats and because of their white color that often stands for salvation in the Bible.

### ● The Least of My Brethren:

Traditionally, this Gospel passage was interpreted to mean that Jesus identified Himself with the poor and marginalized. Jesus will judge everyone, and especially those who have not had the chance to know His Gospel, according to the mercy they have shown towards the needy. All have the opportunity to welcome or reject him, if not personally, at least in the person of the needy with whom Jesus identifies Himself. Modern exegesis tends to read the text in a more ecclesiastical sense. It is placed next to Matthew 10:40-42 and exegetes insist that it is not a question of philanthropy but of a response to the Gospel of the Realm that is spread by Jesus' brethren, even the

most insignificant of them, and not only by the leaders of the Church. The nations (the pagans) are therefore invited to welcome the disciples of Jesus who preach the Gospel to them and suffer for its sake, as if they were welcoming Jesus Himself. Christians, on their part, are invited to practice generous hospitality towards their brothers who are itinerant preachers of the Gospel and who suffer persecution (see 2Jn 5-8). In this manner, they would show the authenticity of their commitment as disciples. In the context of Matthew's Gospel, this latter interpretation is probably more accurate. However, in the context of the whole of the Bible (see for instance Is 58:7; Jer 2:1-9; 1Jn 3:16-19) the first interpretation cannot be set aside entirely.

## **6. Psalm 72**

### **The Messiah-King Promotes Justice and Peace**

Give the king thy justice,  
O God, and thy righteousness to the royal son!  
May He judge thy people with righteousness,  
and thy poor with justice!

Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people,  
and the hills, in righteousness!  
May He defend the cause of the poor of the people,  
give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor!  
May He live while the sun endures,  
and as long as the moon,  
throughout all generations!

May He be like rain that falls on the mown grass,  
like showers that water the earth!  
In His days may righteousness flourish,  
and peace abound, till the moon be no more!  
May He have dominion from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth!

May His foes bow down before Him,  
and His enemies lick the dust!  
May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render Him tribute,  
may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts!  
May all kings fall down before Him,  
all nations serve Him!

For He delivers the needy when He calls,  
the poor and Him who has no helper.  
He has pity on the weak and the needy,  
and saves the lives of the needy.  
From oppression and violence He redeems their life;  
and precious is their blood in His sight.

Long may He live, may gold of Sheba be given to Him!  
May prayer be made for Him continually,  
and blessings invoked for Him all the day!  
May there be abundance of grain in the land;  
on the tops of the mountains may it wave;  
may its fruit be like Lebanon;  
and may men blossom forth from the cities like the grass of the field!  
May His name endure for ever,

His fame continue as long as the sun!  
May men bless themselves by Him,  
all nations call Him blessed!

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,  
who alone does wondrous things.  
Blessed be His glorious name for ever;  
may His glory fill the whole earth! Amen and Amen!

## **7. Closing Prayer**

Lord God, you have set Jesus, your Son, to be universal king and judge. He will come at the end of time to judge all the nations. He comes to us every day in a thousand ways and asks us to welcome Him. We meet Him in the Word and in the broken bread. But we also meet Him in our broken brothers and sisters, disfigured by hunger, oppression, injustice, sickness and the stigma of our society. Open our hearts that we may welcome Him today in our lives so that we may be welcomed by Him in the eternity of His realm.

We ask this through the same Christ our Lord. Amen



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

**22**NOV2020 - SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

## You decide

The church year ends this week. Along with that we're invited to consider another ending: our mortality. What goes on in eternity, anyway? Thomas Aquinas declares that God and eternity are the same. When we go from here, we go to God. How we experience the Divine Presence depends on whether our lives have become fully compatible with Love. Francis de Sales envisions Jesus saying to us: "Be it done as you desire; and because of what you have done, come, enjoy eternity." The desire of my heart will be answered: Will the choice be a life of love?

### Today's readings:

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28; Matthew 25:31-46 ([160](#)).

*"These will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*

**23**NOV2020 - MEMORIAL OF BLESSED MIGUEL AUGUSTÍN PRO, PRIEST, MARTYR

## ¡Viva Cristo Rey!

Mexican Jesuit priest Miguel Pro was executed on fabricated charges in 1927 by a fiercely anti-clerical government. Pro had served the persecuted church by secretly celebrating the sacraments. He was killed by firing squad while holding a rosary in one hand and a crucifix in the other, his arms stretched out in imitation of the crucified Christ, shouting "Long live Christ the King!" His death energized the resistance. We may not be called to such dramatic sacrifice, but can we give up some comfort and convenience to fight for the greater good?

### Today's readings:

Revelation 14:1-3, 4b-5; Luke 21:1-4 ([503](#)).

*"This poor widow put in more than all the rest."*

**24**NOV2020 - MEMORIAL OF ANDREW DŨNG-LẠC, PRIEST, AND COMPANIONS, MARTYRS

## Holiness in high numbers

Nine times in the liturgical lineup of feast days we memorialize a canonized person or two "and companions." All were martyrs and many had been foreign missionaries. Today's memorial honors Andrew Dũng-Lạc, a Vietnamese priest beheaded in 1839 for promoting Christianity instead of the official state religion; he's joined by another 117 killed in Vietnam, tortured and martyred during the 18th and 19th centuries. Just as we began this month with the feast of All Saints—honoring a multitude of holy unknowns—may every instance of "and companions" encourage us to call to mind the "great cloud of witnesses."

### Today's readings:

Revelation 14:14-19; Luke 21:5-11 ([504](#)).

*"Reap the harvest, for the time to reap has come."*

**25**NOV2020 - MEMORIAL OF CATHERINE OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGIN, MARTYR

## Raise your voice

Christian tradition holds that Catherine of Alexandria (287-305) was an eloquent young Christian convert who challenged the Emperor Maxentius' persecution of Christians. That faithful courage led to her own martyrdom. The United Nations has declared today the [International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women](#), asking the world to recognize that "violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread, persistent, and devastating human rights violations in our world today." We honor the courage of Saint Catherine by paying attention to the violence that others endure, speaking up in defense of the voiceless, and adding our prayers for those whose suffering too often goes unnoticed.

**Today's readings:**

Revelation 15:1-4; Luke 21:12-19 ([505](#)).

*"They will seize and persecute you . . . they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name."*

## 26 NOV 2020 - THANKSGIVING DAY

### Give thanks, indeed

This Thanksgiving won't be celebrated the way many of us hoped and imagined back when the pandemic started. And yet, we are alive. Most of us reading these words can breathe freely. The virus has reminded us to never again take these simple matters for granted. One of our wisest teachers about prayer, Dominican priest Meister Eckhardt (1260-1329), said: If the only prayer you ever said in your entire life is thank you, that would suffice. Even amid hard times, giving thanks to God is appropriate. Let it be your prayer today.

**Today's readings:**

Revelation 18:1-2, 21-23; 19:1-3, 9a; Luke 21:20-28 ([506](#)).

*"But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand."*

## 27 NOV 2020

### Turn the page

The "Book of Life" is mentioned several times in the Bible. A bit like the contact list you keep on your phone, the Book of Life is the figurative expression of how God is said to keep track of those heading for heavenly repose united with the Divine. According to Jewish tradition, God opens the Book of Life on Rosh Hashanah and leaves it open for 10 days, until Yom Kippur. During those days, believers spend time repenting of their sins and amending their lives in order to be written into the Book of Life. If there's something you need to repent, today is a good day to turn the page.

**Today's readings:**

Revelation 20:1-4, 11—21:2; Luke 21:29-33 ([507](#)).

*"Then another scroll was opened, the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to their deeds."*

## 28 NOV 2020 - OPTIONAL MEMORIAL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

### Call forth your best self

Perhaps you've heard that Jesus' life was foreshadowed in passages from the Hebrew scripture that predated him. But were you aware that Mary's life and role in salvation history might have been as well? The prophet Isaiah (7:14) speaks of a young woman (sometimes translated as a "virgin") who will give birth to a son she will name Emmanuel, meaning "God with us." Mary has been "going ahead" of us for generations, a role model beckoning us to live our best lives, regardless of how improbable, even miraculous, that might turn out to be.

**Today's readings:**

Revelation 22:1-7; Luke 21:34-36 ([508](#)).

*"These words are trustworthy and true."*