

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:

Sunday, December 6, 2020 - The preaching of John the Baptist

How the proclamation of the Good News began Mark 1:1-8

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 in us silence 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 from 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 to us the Father and sent us Your Spirit. Amen.

Reading

A Key to the Reading:

The literary purpose of Mark 1:1-13, of which our text is a part (Mk 1:1-8), is a short introduction to the proclamation of the Good News of God. There are three main points: (i) The Good News is prepared by the events of John the Baptist (Mk 1:2-8), (ii) it is proclaimed on the occasion of the baptism of Jesus (Mk 1:9-11), and (iii) it is tested at the time of the temptations of Jesus in the desert (Mk 1:12- 13).

In the 70's, the time when Mark was writing his Gospel, the communities were living through difficult times. They were persecuted from outside by the Roman Empire. From inside, they lived with doubts and tensions. Some groups said that John the Baptist was equal to Jesus (Acts 18:26, 19:3). Others wanted to know how to begin proclaiming the Good News of Jesus. In these few verses, Mark begins to answer them by telling them how the Good News of God that Jesus proclaimed began, and what the place of John the Baptist is in God's plan. As we read, let us try to notice how the Good News penetrates into the lives of the people.

A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:

Mark 1:1: Opening and title of Mark's Gospel

Mark 1:2-3: Quoting the prophets Malachi and Isaiah

Mark 1:4-5: Content of John the Baptist's preaching and its repercussions

Mark 1:6-8: Meaning of John the Baptist's preaching

Text

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the prophet Isaiah: Look, I am going to send my messenger in front of you to prepare your way before you. A voice of one that cries in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord, make His paths straight. John the Baptist was in the desert, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptized by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, "After me is coming

someone who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of His sandals. I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

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

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What pleased or struck you most in the text?
- What does the text say of John the Baptist’s mission?
- Why does the Gospel quote the two prophets of the Old Testament? ocarm.org 14
- What does the text tell us concerning the person of Jesus and His mission?
- What does that teach us today?

For Those Who Wish to Go Deeper into the Theme

The Context of Then and of Today:

Mark’s Gospel begins like this: The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God! (Mk 1:1). Everything has a beginning, even the Good News of God that Jesus communicates to us. The text we propose for our meditation shows us how Mark sought this beginning. He quotes the prophets Isaiah and Malachi and mentions John the Baptist, who prepared the coming of Jesus. Mark thus tells us that the Good News of God, revealed by Jesus, did not suddenly come down from Heaven, but came from long ago, through history. And it has a precursor, someone who prepared the coming of Jesus.

For us too, the Good News comes through people and events that point the way that leads to Jesus. That is why, while meditating Mark’s text, it is good not to forget this question: “In the story of my life, who showed me the way to Jesus?” Again, another question: “Have I helped anyone to discover the Good News of God in his or her life? Have I been the precursor for anyone?”

A Commentary on the Text:

- Mark 1:1: The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

In the first sentence of his Gospel, Mark says: The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, Son of God! (Mk 1:1). At the end of the Gospel, when Jesus is dying, a soldier exclaims: Truly this man was the Son of God (Mk 15:39). At the beginning and at the end we come across this title, Son of God. Between the beginning and the end, throughout the pages of his Gospel, Mark explains how this central truth of our faith, that Jesus is the Son of God, has to be understood and proclaimed.

- Mark 1:2-3: The seed of the Good News is hidden in the hope of people.

To point to the beginning of the Good News, Mark quotes the prophets Malachi and Isaiah. In the texts of these two prophets we see the hope that dwelt in the hearts of the people in the time of Jesus. The people hoped that the messenger, proclaimed by Malachi, would come to prepare the way of the Lord (Mal 3:1) as was proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah who said: “A voice cries, 'Prepare in the desert a way for Yahweh. Make a straight path in the wilderness'” (Is 40:3). For Mark, the seed of the Good News is the hope raised in people by the great promises that Jesus had made in the past through the two prophets. To this day, the hope of the people is the

hook on which the Good News of God hangs. In order to know how to begin proclaiming the Good News, it is important to discover the hope that the people hold in their hearts. Hope is the last to die!

- Mark 1:4-5: The popular movement begun by John the Baptist increases peoples' hope.

Mark does what we still do today. He uses the Bible to shed light on the facts of life. John the Baptist had started a great popular movement. All Judea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to John! Mark uses the texts from Malachi and Isaiah to shed light on this popular movement begun by John the Baptist. He shows that with the coming of John the Baptist, the hope of the people had begun to find an answer, to be realized. The seed of the Good News begins to sprout and grow.

- Mark 1:6-8: John the Baptist is the prophet Elijah expected by the people.

It was said of Elijah that he would come to prepare the way of the Messiah, and that "He will reconcile parents to their children and children to their parents" (Mal 3:24; cf Lk 1:17). In other words, they hoped that Elijah would come to rebuild community life. Elijah was known as "a man wearing a hair cloak...and a leather loincloth" (2 Kg 1:8). Mark says that John wore camel hair. He was saying clearly that John the Baptist had come to fulfill the mission of the Prophet Elijah (Mk 9:11-13).

In the 70's, the time when Mark was writing, many people thought that John the Baptist was the Messiah (cf. Acts 19:1-3). To help them discern, Mark reports John's own words: After me is coming someone who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Mark says that John points the way to Jesus. He tells the community that John was not the Messiah, but his precursor.

Further Information:

- * The wider context of the beginning of Mark's Gospel (Mk 1:1-13)

The solemn proclamation of the Good News (Mk 1:9-11).

People thought that John's baptism came from God! (Mk 11:32). Jesus saw that God was manifesting Himself in John's message and left Nazareth, went to the Jordan, and stood in line to be baptized. As He was baptized, Jesus had a deep experience of God. He saw the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descending on him, and the voice of the Father saying: You are my beloved Son, my favor rests on you. These few words include three very important points.

- Jesus experienced God as Father and himself as Son. Herein lies the great novelty that He communicates to us: God is Father. The God who was distant as the Most High Lord, draws near to us as Father, quite close as Abbà, Dad. This is the heart of the Good News that Jesus brings to us.
- There is a phrase that Jesus heard from the Father and from the prophet Isaiah where the Messiah is proclaimed as the Servant of God and of the people (Is 42:1). The Father was announcing to Jesus His mission as Messiah Servant, and not as glorious King. Jesus took on this mission of service and was faithful to it even to dying and dying on the cross! (cf. Phil 2:7-8) He said: "I did not come to be served, but to serve!" (Mk 10:45). iii) Jesus saw the heavens open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending on Him. It is precisely when Jesus is confirmed in His mission as Messiah Savior that He receives the Holy Spirit to enable Him to carry out his mission. The gift of the Spirit had been promised by the prophets (Is 11:1-9; 61:1-3; Joel 3:1). The promise begins to take place solemnly when the Father proclaims Jesus as His beloved son.

The Good News is tried and verified in the desert (Mk 1:12-13).

After the baptism, the Spirit of God takes possession of Jesus and takes Him into the desert, where He prepares Himself for His mission (Mk 1:12ff). Mark says that Jesus stayed in the desert for 40 days and was tempted by the devil, Satan. Matthew 4:1-11 makes the temptations explicit. These were the temptations that assaulted the people in the desert after their exodus from Egypt: the temptation of the bread, the temptation of prestige, the temptation of power (Dt 8:3; 6:16; Dt 6:13). Temptation is anything that assaults someone on the way to God. By allowing the Word of God to guide Him, Jesus meets the temptations and will not allow Himself to be turned aside (Mt 4:4.7.10). In all things He is like us, even in matters of temptation, except for sin (Heb 4:15). Immersed among the poor and one with the Father through prayer, faithful to the Father and to prayer, He resists and follows the way of the Messiah-Servant, the way of service to God and the people (Mt 20:28).

- The Beginning of the Good News of Jesus, Today! The Seed of the Good News Among Us.

Mark begins his Gospel by describing the beginning of the proclamation of the Good News of God. We might have expected a precise date, but what we have is what seems to be a confused answer. Mark quotes Isaiah and Malachi (Mk 1:2-3), speaks of John the Baptist (Mk 1:4-5), alludes to the prophet Elijah (Mk 1:4), refers to the prophecy concerning the Servant of Yahweh (Mk 1:11), and calls our attention to the temptations of the people in the desert after the exodus from Egypt (Mk 1:13). We ask: "But, Mark, when was the precise moment of the beginning: at the exodus from Egypt, with Moses, Isaiah, Malachi, John the Baptist? When?" The beginning, the seed, could be all of these at once. What Mark wants to suggest is that we must learn to read our history from a different perspective. The beginning, the seed of the Good News of God, is hidden in our lives, our past, and the history that we live. The people of the Bible were convinced that God is present in our lives and our history. That is why they kept recalling the facts and people of the past. Anyone who loses the memory of his or her identity, does not know where he or she comes from or where he or she is going. The people of the Bible read the history of the past to learn how to read the present and to discover the signs of the presence of God. This is what Mark is doing at the beginning of his Gospel. He tries to discover the facts and focuses on the thread of hope that came from the exodus, from Moses, through the prophets Elijah, Isaiah and Malachi, down to John the Baptist who sees in Jesus the one who fulfills the hope of the people.

Small as we are, what threads of hope exist today in our history that point to a better and more just future? Here are some possible suggestions: (1) resistance and a general awareness in the world of oppressed ethnic groups seeking life and dignity for all; (2) a new awareness in many men and women that reveals new opportunities in life that were not perceived before; (3) a new ecological sensibility that grows everywhere, above all among the young and children; (4) a growing awareness of citizenship that seeks new forms of democracy; (5) discussion and debate on social problems that give rise to a greater desire for a transforming participation even among those who, in the midst of their work and study, still find time to dedicate themselves to serve others freely; (6) a growing search for new relationships with compassion and respect among peoples and nations; (7) a growing indignation towards corruption and violence. In a word, there is something new that is growing and that does not allow for indifference before political, social, cultural, class and gender abuses. There is a new hope, a new dream, and a desire for change! The proclamation of the Good News brings this newness that is beginning to grow among people. Helping people to open their eyes to see this newness, committing the community of faith to seek this utopia, means recognizing the liberating and transforming presence of God acting in the daily events of our lives.

Praying Psalm 72 (71)

The Hope of the Messiah in the Heart of the People

God, give Your judgment to the king;

Your justice to the king's son;

That he may govern your people with justice, your oppressed with right judgment,

That the mountains may yield their bounty for the people, and the hills great abundance,

That he may defend the oppressed among the people, save the children of the poor and crush the oppressor.

May they fear You with the sun, and before the moon, through all generations. May he be like rain coming down upon the fields, like showers watering the earth, that abundance may flourish in his days, great bounty, till the moon be no more.

May he rule from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth. May his foes kneel before him, his enemies lick the dust.

May the kings of Tarshish and the islands bring tribute, the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. May all kings bow before him, all nations serve him.

For he rescues the poor when they cry out, the oppressed who have no one to help. He shows pity to the needy and the poor and saves the lives of the poor.

From extortion and violence he redeems them, for precious is their blood in his sight.

Long may he live, receiving gold from Sheba, prayed for without cease, blessed day by day. May wheat abound in the land, flourish even on the mountain heights. May his fruit be like that of Lebanon, and flourish in the city like the grasses of the land. May his name be forever; as long as the sun, may his name endure. May the tribes of the earth give blessings with his name; may all the nations regard him as favored. Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does wonderful deeds. Blessed be His glorious name forever; may He fill all the earth with His glory.

Amen and amen.

(Author's translation: God, endow the king with your own fair judgment, the son of the king with your own saving justice, that he may rule your people with justice, and your poor with fair judgment.

Mountains and hills bring peace to the people! With justice he will judge the poor of the people, he will save the children of the needy and crush their oppressors. In the sight of the sun and the moon he will endure, age after age.

He will come down like rain on mown grass, like showers moistening the land. In his days, uprightness shall flourish, and peace in plenty till the moon is no more. His empire shall stretch from sea to sea, from the river to the limits of the earth.

The Beast will cower before him, his enemies lick the dust; the kings of Tarshish and the islands will pay him tribute. The kings of Sheba and Saba will offer gifts; all kings will do him homage, all nations become his servants.

For he rescues the needy who calls to him, and the poor who has no one to help. He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the needy from death.

From oppression and violence, he redeems their lives, their blood is precious in his sight. [Long may he live; may the gold of Sheba be given him!]

Prayer will be offered for him constantly, and blessings invoked on him all day. May wheat abound in the land, waving on the heights of the hills, like Lebanon with its fruits and flowers at their best, like the grasses of the earth.

May his name be blessed forever and endure in the sight of the sun.

In him shall be blessed every race in the world, and all nations call him blessed. Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who alone works wonders; blessed forever his glorious name.

May the whole world be filled with his glory! Amen! Amen!)

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for the word that has enabled us to better understand the will of the Father. May Your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which 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.

06DEC2020 - SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Begin at the end

Beginnings are really the Act II of endings. That's why we hear so much Apocalypse in the early Advent readings. Something has to give way for the new thing to arrive. In order to move into the new house, you have to leave the old one. That goes for the life of the world to come, as well. So when John the Baptist summons us to prepare the Lord's way, he simultaneously obliges us to repent our former way. Consider what obstacles need to "pass away" to "make straight" the path of the Christ child's arrival into your heart.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8 ([5](#)).

"The heavens will pass away with a mighty roar, and the Earth and everything done on it will be found out."

07DEC2020 - MEMORIAL OF AMBROSE, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

To the moon and beyond

You think you're busy? Ambrose, one of the four first doctors of the church, challenged emperors and combated heresies. He converted Saint Augustine and championed celibacy. He was a prolific theologian and contributed to the music of the church. He was so admired he was made a bishop by popular acclaim. Ambrose did a lot of different things—who of us could keep up?—but he had one vision that we can all get behind: that the church rise "like a growing moon" above fleeting worldliness.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 35:1-10; Luke 5:17-26 ([181](#)).

"We have seen incredible things today."

08DEC2020 - SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY (PATRONAL FEAST DAY OF THE USA)

Original grace

The Immaculate Conception is so key to Catholic consciousness, it's hard to believe it hasn't been around forever. The teaching—that Mary was born without original sin—was in fact opposed by scholarly saints like Anselm, Aquinas, Bernard, and Bonaventure. They insisted that, because sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, Mary would need salvation as much as the rest of us. But the Council of Trent concluded that Mary had been spared, and popular piety began to revere her Immaculate Conception. The significance? Perhaps, as theologian Elizabeth Johnson eloquently points out, it's that "grace is more original than sin."

Today's readings:

Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38 ([689](#)).

"Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you."

09DEC2020 - MEMORIAL OF JUAN DIEGO CUAUHTLATOATZIN

Celebrate the messenger of love

Born in 1474 near modern-day Mexico City, Saint Juan Diego was named Cuauhtlatoatzin (Talking Eagle) and according to tradition lived among his Chichimeca people until the conquest of Mexico in 1521. At the age of 50, Juan Diego was baptized by Franciscan missionaries and began attending daily Mass. While he walked to Mass on December 9, 1531, the Blessed Mother appeared to him with a special request. So begins the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose feast we celebrate in three days. Today, we honor Juan Diego, the first indigenous saint of the Americas, canonized in 2002, who spent the rest of his life as a prayerful hermit tending the first shrine built to Guadalupe. On this Advent day, we pray for the grace to imitate his humility, trust, and faithfulness.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 40:25-31; Matthew 11:28-30 ([183](#)).

"They that hope in the LORD will . . . soar as with eagles' wings."

10DEC2020 - ADVENT WEEKDAY

Walk the simple but elusive path to peace

As Christians await the Prince of Peace, today the world celebrates this year's Nobel Peace Prize awardee—the U.N. World Food Program—for their heroic efforts in war-torn lands in the midst of the pandemic. Human beings are prone to conflict, but the craving for peace and reconciliation runs deep across cultures and faiths. The perennial question is how to achieve it. Here's a simple but profound answer that has been put forth by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development for decades: "If you want peace, work for justice." Ask yourself what step toward justice you can take today.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 41:13-20; Matthew 11:11-15 ([184](#)).

"Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist."

11DEC2020 - MEMORIAL OF DAMASUS I, POPE

Stormy weather

If we think we've got it tough—juggling the gift list, social schedule, family feuds, and ailing bank account—consider Damasus. He embodied the truism that faith is more a compass than an insurance policy. When he was elected pope, another faction chose someone else. What followed were violent battles, scandals, accusations, heresies, and troubled relations with the Eastern Church. While we might sing carols about the Prince of Peace, the hard reality of human life has, since the Incarnation, also involved moments of hurricane-force wind. Today, let's welcome whatever problem we're reluctant to engage, knowing it might be our teacher.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 48:17-19; Matthew 11:16-19 ([185](#)).

"If you would hearken to my commandments, your prosperity would be like a river."

12DEC2020 - FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

Celebrate the feast!

The apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Mexico City's Tepeyac Hill in 1531 was a game changer. Images of the Virgin had typically carried a distinctly European flavor. The Virgin of Guadalupe, however, had indigenous features. She would become the first *Mestiza* image, for a people who comprise the racially and culturally diverse population of modern-day Mexico. Under her spiritual care and influence, a variety of peoples could unite at least in spirituality. For Mexican Americans, and Latinos everywhere, *la Fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* is among the biggest religious celebrations of the year. Join the *fiesta*.

Today's readings:

Zechariah 2:14-17 or Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab; Luke 1:26-38 or Luke 1:39-47 ([690A](#)).

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord."