

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: 3rd Sunday of Lent (A)

Sunday, March 15, 2020

The Meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman

A Dialogue that brings new life

John 4:5-42

1. Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us read the Scriptures in the same way that You read them to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. With the light of the Word in the Bible, You helped them to discover the presence of God in the distressing events surrounding Your condemnation to death. The cross, which seemed to put an end to all hope, was revealed to them as the source of life and resurrection.

Create in us the silence necessary to hear Your voice in creation and in the Scriptures, in the events of daily life and in people, above all in the poor and the suffering. May Your word give us direction, just as it did to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, so that we too will experience the power of Your resurrection and bear witness to others that You are alive in our midst as the source of community, of justice and of peace. We ask this of You, Jesus, son of Mary, You who revealed the Father to us and sent us Your Spirit. Amen.

2. Reading

a) A key for unlocking the text:

The text describes the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. It is a very human conversation, which shows how Jesus related to people and how He Himself learned and became enriched in talking with others. While reading the text, try to be aware of what surprises you most about the attitude both of Jesus and the woman.

b) A division of the text to assist a careful reading:

Jn 4:5-6: Sets the scene in which the dialogue takes place

Jn 4:7-26: Describes the dialogue between Jesus and the woman

7-15: about water and thirst

16-18: about the husband and family

19-25: about religion and the place for adoration

Jn 4:27-30: Describes the effect of the conversation on the woman

Jn 4:31-38: Describes the effect of the conversation on Jesus

Jn 4:39-42: Describes the effect on the mission of Jesus in Samaria

c) The text:

5-6: So He came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as He was from His journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

7-15: There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." The woman said to Him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" Jesus said to "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."



her,

16-18: Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered Him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly."

19-26: The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

27-30: Just then His disciples came. They marvelled that He was talking with a woman, but none said, "What do you wish?" or, "Why are You talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the city and were coming to Him.

31-38: Meanwhile the disciples besought Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." So the disciples said to one another, "Has any one brought Him food?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

39-42: Many Samaritans from that city believed in Him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to Him, they asked Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His word. They said to the

woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

3. A moment of silent prayer

so that the Word of God can enter into us and light up our lives.

4. Some questions

to help us in our meditation and prayer.

- a) What most attracted your attention in Jesus' attitude toward the woman during the dialogue? What method did Jesus use to help the woman become aware of a deeper dimension to life?
- b) What most attracted your attention about the attitude of the Samaritan woman during her conversation with Jesus? How did she influence Jesus?
- c) Where in the Old Testament is water associated with the gift of life and the gift of the Holy Spirit?
- d) How does Jesus' attitude during the conversation question me or touch something within me or correct me?
- e) The Samaritan woman led the discussion towards religion. If you could come across Jesus and talk to Him, what would you like to talk about? Why?
- f) Do I adore God in spirit and in truth or do I find my security in rituals and regulations?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper.

a) The symbolism of water:

* Jesus uses the word water in two senses. The first sense is the material, normal sense of water that one drinks; the second is the symbolic sense as the source of life and the gift of the Spirit. Jesus uses a language that people can understand and, at the same time, awakens in them the desire to go deeper and to discover a more profound meaning to life.

* The symbolic sense of water has its roots in the Old Testament, where it is frequently a symbol for the action of the Spirit of God in people. For example, Jeremiah compares running water to water in a cistern (Jer 2:13). The more water is taken from a cistern, the less it has; the more water is taken from a stream of living water, the more it has. Other texts from the Old Testament: Isa 12:3; 49:10; 55:1; Ezek 47:1-3. Jesus knew the traditions of His people and He uses these in His conversation with the Samaritan woman. Suggesting the symbolic meaning of water, He suggests to her (and to the readers) various episodes and verses from the Old Testament.

b) The dialogue between Jesus and the woman:

* Jesus meets the woman at the well, a traditional place for meetings and conversations (Gen 24:10-27; 29:1-14). He starts off from His own very real need because He is thirsty. He does this in such a way that the woman feels needed and she serves Him. Jesus makes Himself needy in her regard. From His question, he makes it possible for the woman to become aware that He depends on her to give Him something to drink. Jesus awakens in her the desire to help and to serve.

* The conversation between Jesus and the woman has two levels.

(i) **The superficial level**, in the material sense of water that quenches someone's thirst, and in the normal sense of husband as the father of a family. At this level the conversation is tense and difficult and does not flow. The Samaritan woman has the upper hand. At the beginning, Jesus tries to meet her by talking about daily chores (fetching water), but He does not succeed. Then He tries

by talking about family (call your husband), and still there is no breakthrough. Finally the woman speaks about religion (the place of adoration). Jesus then gets through to her by the door she herself has opened.

(ii) **The deeper level**, in the symbolic sense of water as the image of the new life brought by Jesus, and of the husband as the symbol of the union of God with the people. At this level, the conversation flows perfectly. After revealing that He Himself is offering the water of new life, Jesus says, "Go and get your husband and then return". In the past, the Samaritans had five husbands, or five idols, attached to the five groups of people who were taken off by the King of Assyria (2 Kings 17:30-31). The sixth husband, the one the woman had at present, was not truly her husband: "the one you have now is not your husband" (Jn 4:18). What the people had did not respond to their deepest desire: union with God, as a husband who unites himself to his spouse (Isa 62:5; 54:5). The true husband, the seventh, is Jesus, as promised by Hosea: "I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy. I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord." (Hos 2: 21-22). Jesus is the bridegroom who has arrived (Mk 2: 19) to bring new life to the woman who has been searching for it her whole life long, and until now, has never found it. If the people accept Jesus as "husband", they will have access to God wherever they are, both in spirit and in truth (vv. 23-24).

* Jesus declares His thirst to the Samaritan woman but He does not drink. This is a sign that we are talking about a symbolic thirst, which had to do with His mission: the thirst to accomplish the will of His Father (Jn 4:34). This thirst is ever present in Jesus and will be until His death. At the moment of His death, He says, "I am thirsty" (Jn 19: 28). He declares His thirst for the last time and so He can say, "It is accomplished." Then He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. (Jn 19:30). His mission had been accomplished.

c) The importance of women in the Gospel of John:

* In John's Gospel, women feature prominently seven times, which are decisive for the spreading of the Good News. To women are given functions and missions, some of which, in the other Gospels, are attributed to men:

- At the wedding feast in Cana, the mother of Jesus recognizes the limits of the Old Testament and affirms the law of the Gospel, "Do whatever He tells you". (Jn 2:1-11).
- The Samaritan woman is the first person to have revealed to her by Jesus the great secret, that He is the Messiah. "It is I who speak to you." (Jn 4:26). She then becomes the evangelizer of Samaria (Jn 4: 28-30, 39-42).
- The woman, who is called an adulteress, at the moment of receiving the forgiveness of Jesus, becomes the judge of the patriarchal society (or of male power) that seeks to condemn her. (Jn 8:1-11).
- In the other Gospels it is Peter who makes the solemn profession of faith in Jesus (Mt 16: 16; Mk 8:29; Lk 9:20). In the Gospel of John, it is Martha, sister of Mary and Lazarus, who makes the solemn profession of faith (Jn 11:27).
- Mary, the sister of Martha, anoints the feet of Jesus for the day of his burial (Jn. 12:7). At the time of Jesus, the one who died on a cross was not buried nor embalmed. Mary anticipated the anointing of Jesus' body. This means that she accepted Jesus as the Messiah-Suffering Servant, who must die on the cross. Peter did not accept this (Jn.13:8) and sought to dissuade Jesus from this path (Mt. 16:22). In this way, Mary is presented as a model for the other disciples.

- At the foot of the cross, Jesus says, "Woman, behold your son; son, behold your mother" (Jn. 19:25-27). The Church is born at the foot of the cross. Mary is the model for the Christian community.

- Mary Magdalene must announce the Good News to the brothers (Jn. 20:11-18). She receives an order, without which all the other orders given to the apostles would have no effect or value.

* The Mother of Jesus appears twice in John's Gospel: at the beginning, at the wedding feast in Cana (Jn. 2:1-5), and at the end, at the foot of the cross (Jn. 19:25-27). In both cases, she represents the Old Testament that waits for the arrival of the New, and, in both cases, assists its arrival. Mary unites what has gone before with what would come later. At Cana, it is she, the Mother of Jesus, symbol of the Old Testament, who perceives its limits and takes steps so that the New will arrive. At the hour of Jesus' death, it is the Mother of Jesus, who welcomes the "Beloved Disciple". In this case the Beloved Disciple is the new community, which has grown around Jesus. It is the child that has been born from the Old Testament. In response to Jesus' request, the son, the New Testament, welcomes the Mother, the Old Testament, into his home. The two must journey together. The New Testament cannot be understood without the Old. It would be a building without a foundation. The Old without the New would be incomplete. It would be a tree without fruit.

6. Psalm 19 (18)

God speaks to us through nature and through the Bible
The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims His handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.

There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In them He has set a tent for the sun,
which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and there is nothing hid from its heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is Thy servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can discern his errors?
Clear thou me from hidden faults.

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord,
my rock and my redeemer.

7. Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your word, which has helped us see better the will of the Father. Let Your Spirit illumine all that we do and give us the strength to carry out what Your Word has made us see. Let us, like Mary, Your Mother, not only listen to the Word but also put it into practice. 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.

Sunday, Mar 15, 2020

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT; FIRST SCRUTINY OF THE ELECT

Great expectations

The view from today is limited. From here, some things may look irreparably broken, from personal relationships to global ones. Yet Jesus promises a future of hope available to anyone who reaches out for it. A Samaritan woman at a well had endured a loop of failure and disappointment that seemed impossible to transcend. When Jesus invited her to step out of it, she did—and was reborn as an apostle to her people. Today, we pray for our Elect (those in the process of joining the Catholic Church) as they choose the way of rebirth and hope. Let's choose the same, with them!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Exodus 17:3-7; Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; John 4:5-42 (28). "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth."*

Monday, Mar 16, 2020

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Stand with the prophets

Prophets have never had an easy time of it. It's been pointed out that we often assassinate prophets when they speak out too forcefully, and then once they are safely silenced and buried, we might later build a monument to honor them (or perhaps to flatter ourselves for honoring them?). Jesus saw all this and yet continued to speak out despite the resistance and hostility he often faced from his own people. Not all of us are gifted prophets, but each of us can do our best to recognize the prophets in our midst and stand with them when they speak the truth, even against the angry mob.

TODAY'S READINGS: *2 Kings 5:1-15b; Luke 4:24-30 (237). "No prophet is accepted in his own native place."*

Tuesday, Mar 17, 2020

MEMORIAL OF PATRICK, BISHOP

A feast of merriment and mercy

How odd it seems that the feast of Saint Patrick falls during Lent. But despite the merriment of the day, Patrick's story is a serious one—of captivity and freedom, of cruelty and forgiveness—starting with his teen years as a slave to his escape and return to the Emerald Isle where he became a shepherd to his people and shared the Good News. Patrick even set out on a mission of mercy and forgiveness to see his cruel former master. Join Patrick by reciting his lorica (prayer of protection) against the dark forces we battle during Lent, asking "God's host to secure me against snares of devils, against temptations of vices, against inclinations of nature, against everyone who shall wish me ill."

TODAY'S READINGS: *Daniel 3:25, 34-43; Matthew 18:21-35 (238). "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him?"*

Wednesday, Mar 18, 2020

MEMORIAL OF CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

People come first

Saint Cyril (c. 318-386) was between a rock and a hard place. A severe food shortage was afflicting Jerusalem

and the people were starving. As bishop he had to do something. So he sold church treasures, in violation of the rules, to buy food for his people. That got him into trouble with church higher-ups, and he was deposed for a time as punishment. Jesus taught that the rules are there for the sake of people, not people for the rules. Cyril understood that. It's good for us to be mindful of it as well.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9; Matthew 5:17-19 (239)*. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets."

Thursday, Mar 19, 2020

SOLEMNITY OF JOSEPH, HUSBAND OF MARY

Watch for signs

There are times in all of our lives when we face dilemmas or challenges: How to help a child struggling with tantrums. How to guide a teen who is making bad friend choices. How to recognize and act on the need to make a job change. How to listen to a friend who is negative about so much of life. How to support a spouse who is unhappy and grumpy. God is present in all things and will help us if we ask and pay attention to the signs that are sent our way.

TODAY'S READINGS: *2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16; Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22; Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a or Luke 2:41-51a (543)*. "When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had directed him."

Friday, Mar 20, 2020

LENTEN WEEKDAY; DAY OF ABSTINENCE

Go where no (wo)man has gone before

Mother Catherine Spalding, who died on this day in 1858, was a pioneer in every sense. Not only did she live on the Kentucky frontier, but she was elected to lead a new community, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth—at a time when female leaders, especially young ones, were almost nonexistent. To top it off, she broke ground bringing education to girls and healthcare and social services to those who received none. Her legacy, alive in her sisters and in groups who do the same work, now spans the globe. Where do you see unfulfilled needs, and how can you blaze new trails to meet them?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Hosea 14:2-10; Mark 12:28-34 (241)*. "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Saturday, Mar 21, 2020

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Walk humbly

Truly humble people know that in the scheme of life, they have a unique role to play that is theirs alone—but it is no more significant than that of any other human being. Scripture tells us to bring that spirit of humility to prayer, comparing ourselves to no one. We may use words. We may sit in silence. We may tell God what we are thinking, or trust that God knows. We may ask for help or express gratitude. We may share our feelings of sorrow, frustration, contentment, anger, or joy. The most important step is to show up with head bowed. There God awaits you with a crown of love and forgiveness.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Hosea 6:1-6; Luke 18:9-14 (242)*. "For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, while he who humbles himself shall be exalted."