

# 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: 5th Sunday of Lent (A)

Sunday, March 29, 2020 *Season of Lent*

*The resurrection of Lazarus*

*In the "House of the Poor"*

*Jesus reveals himself as the source of life*

*John 11: 1-45*

## 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: John 11:1-45

### a) A key to guide the reading:

Let us read the text, which describes the resurrection of Lazarus. During the reading, try to follow the group, the disciples who follow Jesus from Galilee to Bethany. You must follow attentively all the events, from the time that the announcement of the sickness of Martha and Mary's brother was sent to Jesus who was in Galilee, to the time of the resurrection of Lazarus.

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

John 11:1-16: Jesus hears the news and sets out for Bethany to raise Lazarus.

John 11:17-31: Jesus meets the two sisters and Martha's profession of faith.

John 11:32-45: The great sign of the resurrection of Lazarus.

### c) The text:

1-16: There was a man named Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister, Martha, and he was ill. It was the same Mary, the sister of the sick man Lazarus, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair. The sisters sent this message to Jesus: 'Lord, the man you love is ill.' On receiving the message, Jesus said, 'This sickness will not end in death, but it is for God's glory so that through it the Son of God may be glorified.' Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when He heard that he was ill He stayed where He was for two more days before saying to the disciples, 'Let us go back to Judaea.' The disciples said, 'Rabbi, it is not long since the Jews were trying to stone You; are You going back there



again?' Jesus replied, 'Are there not twelve hours in the day? No one who walks in the daytime stumbles, having the light of this world to see by; anyone who walks around at night stumbles, having no light as a guide.' He said that and then added, 'Our friend Lazarus is at rest; I am going to wake him.' The disciples said to Him, 'Lord, if he is at rest he will be saved.' Jesus was speaking of the death of Lazarus, but they thought that by 'rest' he meant 'sleep'; so Jesus put it plainly, 'Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad I was not there because now you will believe. But let us go to him.' Then Thomas -- known as the Twin -- said to the other disciples, 'Let us also go to die with Him.'

17-31: On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went to meet Him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but even now I know that God will grant whatever You ask of Him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection. Anyone who believes in Me, even though that person dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes, Lord,' she said, 'I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.' When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, 'The Master is here and wants to see you.' Hearing this, Mary got up quickly and went to Him. Jesus had not yet come into the village; He was still at the place where Martha had met Him. When the Jews who were in the house comforting Mary saw her get up so quickly and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

32-45: Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw Him she threw herself at His feet, saying, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.' At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who had come with her, Jesus was greatly distressed, and with a profound sigh He said, 'Where have you put him?' They said, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept; and the Jews said, 'See how much He loved him!' But there were some who remarked, 'He opened the eyes of the blind man. Could he not have prevented this man's death?' Sighing again, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, 'Take the stone away.' Martha, the dead man's sister, said to Him, 'Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day since he died.' Jesus replied, 'Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?' So they took the stone away. Then Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, 'Father, I thank You for hearing my prayer. I myself knew that You hear me always, but I speak for the sake of all these who are standing around Me, so that they may believe it was You who sent Me. When He had said this, He cried in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with strips of material, and a cloth over his face. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, let him go free.' Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what he did, believed in Him.

### **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) What drew your attention most in this very detailed account? Why?
- b) What is the central and most important point of the whole narrative? Why?
- c) What was the attitude of the disciples? What did they say and do?
- d) What was the attitude of Martha and Mary? What did they say and do?
- e) What was the attitude of the Jews? What did they say, do and plan?
- f) With whom can you identify yourself most: the disciples, the sisters, the Jews, or none of these?
- g) Have you ever experienced times when despair and hope, life and death got confused in your thought? In times such as these, what kept up your faith?

h) How does Lazarus rise to life today? How does resurrection take place today, giving new life to the poor?

## 5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

The difference between the Gospel of John and that of the other three Evangelists.

\* A comparison in order to understand the difference. Photo and X-Ray. You are in wonder at the beauty of nature before a sunrise. You see and contemplate what your eyes look at. This is the photo! Next to you, a friend says to you, "Have you noticed how that small cloud changed into a deeper color? Our friendship is like this!" She saw more than that which the eyes were looking at. This is the X-Ray. Love for and faith in one another have expanded her vision. The Gospel of John is like this; it is the Gospel of the beloved disciple. He teaches us how to read the other Gospels and to discover in them a deeper dimension. The other three Gospels take photos of the miracles. John takes an X-Ray and reveals his deep sense of the divine, that which only faith can see by the working of the Spirit (John 14:26; 16:19).

\* For instance, the synoptics mention twenty-eight different miracles. John only mentions seven and he calls them "signs". Of the seven, only three are found in the synoptics. The other four are exclusive to John: the marriage feast in Cana (Jn 2:1-11), the healing of the paralytic at the pool of Siloe (Jn 5:1-9), the healing of the man born blind (Jn 9:1-7) and the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44). In the way he presents these "signs", John does much more than simply tell the miracle. He expands the facts so that they manifest Jesus as the revelation of the Father. John's Gospel tries to throw light on Jesus' saying, "To have seen Me is to have seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). When we hold up to the light the X-Ray of Jesus in John's Gospel, we see the face of the Father.

Lazarus' resurrection in the scheme of John's Gospel

\* The scheme of the seven signs:

1<sup>st</sup> Sign: the marriage feast of Cana (Jn 2:1-12)

2<sup>nd</sup> Sign: the healing of the nobleman's son (Jn 4:46-54)

3<sup>rd</sup> Sign: the healing of the paralytic (Jn 5:1-18)

4<sup>th</sup> Sign: the multiplication of the bread (Jn 6:1-15)

5<sup>th</sup> Sign: Jesus walks on the water (Jn 6:16-21)

6<sup>th</sup> Sign: the healing of the blind man (Jn 9:1-40)

7<sup>th</sup> Sign: the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44)

The great sign is the HOUR of Jesus' glorification.

\* The seven signs are seven prefigurations of the glorification of Jesus, which will take place at the Hour of His passion, death and resurrection. Each sign symbolizes one aspect of the meaning of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus for us. It is in "meditating day and night" through Lectio Divina or Prayerful Reading that we shall discover this meaning, which will enrich our lives.

\* The resurrection of Lazarus, the seventh sign, opens the way for the coming of the Hour, the glorification, which takes place through death (Jn 12:23; 17:1). One of the reasons why Jesus is condemned will be the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11:50; 12:10). Thus, the seventh sign will be in order to manifest the glory of God (Jn 11:4): "This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory and through it the Son of God will be glorified". The disciples cannot understand this (Jn 11:6-8). But even though they

do not understand, they are ready to go and die with Jesus (Jn 11:16). Their understanding is slight, but their faith is right.

### The meaning of Lazarus' resurrection

\* In Bethany: Everything happens in Bethany, a small village at the foot of the Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem. In the story, Lazarus' family, where Jesus liked to go, is the mirror of the community of the Beloved Disciple at the end of the first century. Mirror also of our communities. Bethany means "House of the Poor". Martha means "Lady" (coordinator); a lady who coordinates the community. Lazarus means "God helps" the poor community, which hoped for everything from God. Mary means "beloved of Yahweh", the image of the community. The story of the resurrection of Lazarus wants to communicate this certainty: Jesus brings life to the community of the poor; He is the source of life for those who believe in Him.

\* Between life and death: Lazarus is dead. Many Jews are at Martha and Mary's house to comfort them for the loss of their brother. Those who represent the Old Testament do not bring new life. They just console. Jesus is the one who brings new life! In John's Gospel, the Jews are also the enemies who wish to kill Jesus (Jn 10:31). So we have on one side the threat of death against Jesus, and on the other Jesus who comes to conquer death! It is in this context of conflict between life and death that the seventh sign of the resurrection of Lazarus, of victory over death, takes place.

\* Two ways of believing in the resurrection: The central point is the contrast between the old way of believing in the resurrection at the end of times, and the new brought by Jesus, which until now conquers death. Martha, the Pharisees and the majority of the people believed in the resurrection (Acts 23:6-10; Mk 12:18). They believed, but did not reveal it, because their faith was only in the resurrection at the end of times and not in the present resurrection of the story, here and now. That resurrection did not renew life. A link was missing. The new life of the resurrection comes with Jesus.

\* Profession of faith in Jesus and profession of faith in life: Jesus challenges Martha to take that step. It is not enough to believe in the resurrection at the end of times. We must believe that Resurrection is already here today in the person of Jesus and in those who believe in Him. Death no longer holds power over these, because Jesus is the "resurrection and the life". And, Martha, even though she has not yet seen the concrete sign of the resurrection of Lazarus, professes her faith: "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world".

\* Human, very human, equal to us in all things: After her profession of faith, Martha calls Mary, her sister. Mary goes to meet Jesus, who was still where Martha had met him. She repeats Martha's expression: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (Jn 11:21). Mary weeps, everyone weeps. Jesus is moved. When the poor weep, Jesus is moved and weeps. When they see Jesus weeping, the others say, "See how much He loved him!" This is the characteristic of the community of the Beloved Disciple: love between Jesus and the members of the community. Some do not believe and still doubt: "He opened the eyes of the blind; could He not have prevented this man's death?" For the third time, Jesus is moved (Jn 11:33,35,38). Thus, John stresses Jesus' humanity against those who, at the end of the first century, spiritualized the faith and denied the humanity of Jesus.

\* For us, there only remains to remove the stone so that God may give life back to us: Jesus orders the stone to be removed. Martha reacts: "Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day!" Once more, Jesus challenges her recalling her faith in the resurrection, here and now, as a sign of God's glory: "Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?" They removed the stone. Before the open tomb and before the incredulity of those standing there, Jesus turns to the Father. First, He thanks the Father, "Father, I thank You for hearing my prayer. I knew indeed that You always hear Me". The Father of Jesus is the same God who always hears the cry of the poor (Ex 2:24; 3:7). Jesus knows the Father and trusts Him. But now He asks for a sign for the sake of those who stand there, so that they may believe that

He, Jesus, was sent by the Father. Then, He shouts aloud, "Lazarus, here. Come out!" And Lazarus comes out. This is the victory of life over death, of faith over unbelief! A farmer in the interior of Brazil commented, "It is up to us to remove the stone! And so God resurrects the community. There are those who do not want to remove the stone, and so in their community there is no life!"

## **6. Psalm 16 (15)**

God is our birthright forever  
Protect me, O God, in You is my refuge.  
To Yahweh I say, 'You are my Lord,  
my happiness is in none of the sacred spirits of the earth.'  
They only take advantage of all who love them.  
People flock to their teeming idols.  
Never shall I pour libations to them!  
Never take their names on my lips.

My birthright, my cup is Yahweh;  
You, You alone, hold my lot secure.  
The measuring-line marks out for me a delightful place,  
my birthright is all I could wish.

I bless Yahweh who is my counsellor,  
even at night my heart instructs me.  
I keep Yahweh before me always,  
for with Him at my right hand, nothing can shake me.

So my heart rejoices, my soul delights,  
my body too will rest secure,  
for You will not abandon me to Sheol,  
You cannot allow Your faithful servant to see the abyss.  
You will teach me the path of life,  
unbounded joy in Your presence,  
at Your right hand delight for ever.

## **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.*

## Sunday, Mar 29, 2020

### FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT; THIRD SCRUTINY OF THE ELECT

#### The nightmare is over

The moment of waking from a nightmare is suffused with relief. Whoever was chasing you dissolves, and whatever threatened harm has vanished. Grief and loss, however, can be living nightmares from which we're unable to shake ourselves awake. Yet as the Scrutiny prayers for our Elect this Sunday affirm, the "horror of sin, which distorts life" is indeed an evil from which we can escape. Death has an end, and love will have its victory. We pray with our Elect for freedom from all paths that lead to death and a greater attraction to the ways that restore life.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 37:12-14; Romans 8:8-11; John 11:1-45 (34)*. "Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live."

## Monday, Mar 30, 2020

### LENTEN WEEKDAY

#### Get into the Spirit

On this day in 1990, Sister Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A. died but the voice that nurtured countless thousands was not silenced. Before Sister Thea, black Catholics were expected to give up their music, dance, and spiritual testifying because these were suspiciously "Protestant" customs. She restored their identity, shaped it through the Institute of Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University, and shared it with those of other backgrounds. Shortly before her death, Thea spoke to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops from her wheelchair. In the last five minutes of that talk, Thea the visibly moved bishops in singing "We Shall Overcome." Thea called the spirituals she grew up with "bonfires to warm chilly nights." Such songs of hope warm a few hearts as well. Sing a spirit-filled song, today, in honor of Sister Thea.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 or 13:41c-62; John 8:1-11 (251)*. "Neither do I condemn you."

## Tuesday, Mar 31, 2020

### LENTEN WEEKDAY

#### I am vs. I AM

John's gospel uses the term "I AM" to identify Jesus. That's a reference to the Exodus story when God revealed the divine presence to Moses using the name "I AM." So the presence of Christ in us, in our humanity, is the "I AM" who is with us. Of course there's another "I am" who is the self, our ego. That's the conflict. Just as John the Baptist said, "He must increase and I must decrease," the best thing we can do is surrender the "I am" in us to the "I AM" who is Christ.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Numbers 21:4-9; John 8:21-30 (252)*. "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM."

## Wednesday, Apr 01, 2020

### LENTEN WEEKDAY

#### Freedom's not just another word

"Truth will set you free" and other heady thoughts about freedom are abundant in today's gospel. Across the centuries, the Catholic Church has had a lot to say about freedom (though, admittedly, it also has remained silent at times when it should have spoken out). A foundation for much of that thought springs from the concept that God has granted human beings freedom to choose between good and evil, and the "more one does what is good, the freer one becomes," as the Catechism

of the Catholic Church puts it ([http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc\\_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a3.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a3.htm)). In a world that often glorifies power and money, it is hard to believe that truth and goodness are the keys to freedom. But have a little faith and see where it gets you.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95; John 8:31-42 (253). "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

## Thursday, Apr 02, 2020

### MEMORIAL OF FRANCIS OF PAOLA, HERMIT

#### Vegan before vegan was a thing

The movement toward organic farming and more humane animal husbandry has helped raise our awareness of the impact of our food production on the vast chain of creation. Saint Francis of Paola intuited all this more than 500 years ago, when he founded the religious order of Minims, "the least," in the spirit of the "Lesser Brothers" of Saint Francis of Assisi. In addition to the usual monastic vows, Minims take a fourth vow to abstain from meat, eggs, and all dairy products, not only to practice a "Lenten way of life," but also in an effort to "do no harm" to other living beings. Bring a bit of the spirit of the Minims to your dining table and daily life.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 17:3-9; John 8:51-59 (254). "They picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the temple area."*

## Friday, Apr 03, 2020

### LENTEN WEEKDAY; DAY OF ABSTINENCE

#### Banish the bullying

Growing up, it seemed that every school, every playground had that kid—you know the one, the bully. That child taunted, picked on, and terrorized others. Unfortunately, as adults, we see bullies too in our workplaces, our relationships, on social media, in political life, and so on. As Catholics, we have a religious duty to take a stand against bullies. "Life, especially human life, belongs to God; whoever attacks human life attacks God's very self" (*Evangelium vitae* §9). The church calls us to stop bullying in all its forms, including the ways we might bully others. Pope Francis challenges us: "What is it within us that pushes us to mock and mistreat others weaker than we are?" Be especially conscious today of the way you treat others.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 20:10-13; John 10:31-42 (255). "I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you trying to stone me?"*

## Saturday, Apr 04, 2020

### MEMORIAL OF ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

#### Go down in history

It is amazing the impact one learned person can have on the course of history. Because sixth-century Isidore of Seville was a dedicated scholar and shared his erudition with others in dictionaries, encyclopedias, and great histories, much of the ancient world's wisdom was preserved during the chaotic Middle Ages. He was sometimes called the "Schoolmaster of the Middle Ages" because his writings were used as textbooks for nine centuries! Perhaps more remarkable, he combined this great learning with an equal sense of compassion and charity toward those less fortunate. Be wise and kind and you will earn your place in salvation history.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 37:21-28; John 11:45-56 (256). "What are we going to do? This man is performing many signs."*