

# 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: 2nd Sunday of Easter (A)

Sunday, April 19, 2020

*The mission of the disciples and  
the witness of Thomas the apostle John 20:19-31*

## 1. Opening prayer

Father, who on the Lord's day gather Your people to celebrate the One who is the First and the Last, the living One who conquered death, grant us the strength of Your Spirit so that, having broken the chains of evil, calmed our fears and indecisions, we may render the free service of our obedience and love, to reign in glory with Christ.

## 2. LECTIO

### a) A key to the reading:

We are in the so-called "book of the resurrection" where we are told, in a not-so-logical sequence, several matters concerning the risen Christ and the facts that prove it. In the fourth Gospel, these facts take place in the morning (20:1-18) and evening of the first day after the Saturday and eight days later, in the same place and on the same day of the week. We are before an event that is the most important in the history of humanity, an event that challenges us personally. "If Christ has not been raised then our preaching is useless and your believing it is useless... and you are still in your sins" (1Cor 15:14, 17) says Paul the apostle who had not known Jesus before His resurrection, but who zealously preached Him all his life. Jesus is sent by the Father. He also sends us. Our willingness to "go" comes from the depth of the faith we have in the Risen One. Are we prepared to accept His "mandate" and to give our lives for His Kingdom? This passage is not just about the faith of those who have not seen (the witness of Thomas), but also about the mission entrusted to the Church by Christ.

### b) A suggested division of the text to facilitate its reading:

John 20:19-20: appearance to the disciples and showing of the wounds

John 20:21-23: gift of the Spirit for the mission

John 20:24-26: special appearance to Thomas eight days later

John 20:27-29: dialogue with Thomas

John 20:30-31: the aim of the Gospel according to John

### c) The text:

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in His



hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in His side, I will not believe."

26 Eight days later, His disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side; do not be faithless, but believing." 28 Thomas answered Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

### **3. A moment of silence**

to allow the Word to enter into our hearts

### **4. MEDITATIO**

#### **a) A few questions to help in our meditation:**

Who or what drew my interest and wonder in the reading? Is it possible for someone to profess being Christian and yet not believe in the Resurrection of Jesus? Is it so important to believe in the resurrection? What would be different if we stopped at His teaching and witness of life? What does the gift of the Spirit for the mission mean to me? How does Jesus' mission in the world continue after the Resurrection? What is the content of the missionary proclamation? What value has Thomas' witness for me? What are, if any, my doubts concerning the faith? How do I meet them and still carry on? Am I able to give reasons for my faith?

#### **b) Comment:**

*In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week:* the disciples are living through an extraordinary day. For the community, at the time of the writing of the fourth Gospel, the day after the Sabbath is already "the Lord's day" (Rev 1:10), Dies Domini (Sunday), and is more important than the Sabbath was in the tradition of the Jews.

*The doors were closed:* a detail which shows that the body of the risen Jesus, even though recognizable, is not subject to the ordinary laws of human life.

*Peace be with you:* this is not just a wish, but the actual peace promised to them when they were saddened by His departure (Jn 14:27; 2Thess 3:16; Rom 5:3), the messianic peace, the fulfillment of the promises made by God, freedom from all fear, victory over sin and death, reconciliation with God, fruit of His passion, free gift of God. This peace is repeated three times in this passage as well as in the introduction (20:19) further on (20:26) in the exact same way.

*He showed them His hands and His side:* Jesus provides evident and tangible proof that he is the one who was crucified. Only John records the detail of the wound in the side caused by the spear of a Roman soldier, whereas Luke mentions the wound of the feet (Lk 24:39). In showing his wounds, Jesus wants to say that the peace he gives comes from the cross (2Tim 2:1-13). They are part of his identity as the risen One (Ap 5:6).

*The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord:* This is the same joy expressed by the prophet Isaiah when he describes the divine banquet (Is 25:8-9), the eschatological joy foreshadowed in the farewell speech and that no one can take away (Jn 16:22; 20:27). Cfr. also Lk 24:39-40; Mt 28:8; Lk 24:41.

*As the Father sent me, so am I sending you:* Jesus is the first missionary, “the apostle and high priest of the faith we profess” (Rev 3:1). After the experience of the cross and the resurrection, Jesus’ prayer to the Father comes true (Jn 13:20; 17:18; 21:15, 17). This is not a new mission, but the mission of Jesus extended to those who are His disciples, bound to Him like branches are bound to the vine (15:9), so also they are bound to His Church (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-18; Lk 24:47-49). The eternal Son of God was sent so that “the world might be saved through Him” (Jn 3:17) and the whole of His earthly existence, fully identified with the saving will of the Father, is a constant manifestation of that divine will that all may be saved. He leaves as an inheritance this historical project to the whole Church, especially to ordained ministers within that Church.

*He breathed on them:* this action recalling the life-giving breath of God on man (Gen 2:7), does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. It marks the beginning of a new creation.

*Receive the Holy Spirit:* after Jesus was glorified, the Holy Spirit was bestowed (Jn 7:39). Here the Spirit is transmitted for a special mission, whereas at Pentecost (Acts 2) the Holy Spirit comes down on the whole people of God.

*For those whose sins you forgive they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained:* we find the power to forgive or not forgive sins also in Matthew in a more juridical form (Mt 16:19; 18:18). According to the Scribes and Pharisees (Mk 2:7), and according to tradition (Isa 43:25), God has the power to forgive sins. Jesus gives this power (Lk 5:24) and passes it on to his Church. In our meditation, it is better not to dwell on this text’s theological development in church tradition and the consequent theological controversies. In the fourth Gospel the expression may be taken in a wide sense. Here it is a matter of the power of forgiving sins in the Church as salvation community and those especially endowed with this power are those who share in the apostolic charism by succession and mission. In this general power is included the power to forgive sins also after baptism, what we call “the sacrament of reconciliation” expressed in various forms throughout the history of the Church.

*Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve:* Thomas is one of the main characters of the fourth Gospel and his doubting character, easily discouraged, is emphasized (11:16; 14:5). “One of the twelve” is by now a stereotyped expression (Jn 6:71), because in fact they were only eleven. “Didymus” means “the Twin”, and we could be his “twins” through our difficulty in believing in Jesus, Son of God who died and rose again.

*We have seen the Lord!* When Andrew, John and Philip had found the Messiah, they had already run to announce the news to others (Jn 1:41-45). Now there is the official proclamation by eye-witnesses (Jn 20:18).

*Unless I see the holes that the nails made in His hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into His side, I refuse to believe:* Thomas cannot believe the eye-witnesses. He wants to experience the event himself. The fourth Gospel is aware of the difficulty that some may have in believing in the Resurrection (Lk 24; 34-40; Mk 16:11; 1Cor 15:5-8), especially those who have not seen the risen One. Thomas is their (and our) interpreter. He is willing to believe, but he wants to resolve personally any doubt, for fear of being wrong. Jesus does not see in Thomas an indifferent sceptic, but a man in search of truth and satisfies him fully. This is, however, an occasion to express an appreciation of future believers (verse 29).

*Put your finger here, look, here are My hands. Give Me your hand; put it into My side. Doubt no longer but believe!* Jesus repeats the words of Thomas and enters into a dialogue with him. He understands Thomas’ doubts and wishes to help him. Jesus knows that Thomas loves Him and therefore has compassion for him because Thomas does not yet enjoy the peace that comes from faith. Jesus helps him to grow in faith. In order to enter deeper into this theme, see the parallels in: 1Jn 1-2; Ps 78:38; 103:13-14; Rom 5:20; 1Tim 1:14-16.

*My Lord and my God!* This is a profession of faith in the risen One and in his divinity as is also proclaimed in the beginning of John's Gospel (1:1). In the Old Testament "Lord" and "God" correspond respectively to "Yahweh" and "Elohim" (Ps 35:23-24; Rev 4:11). It is the fullest and most direct paschal profession of faith in the divinity of Jesus. In Jewish circles these terms had greater value because they applied to Jesus texts concerning God. Jesus does not correct the words of Thomas as He corrected the words of the Jews who accused Him of wanting to be "equal to God" (Jn 5:18ff) thus approving the acknowledgement of His divinity.

*You believe because you can see Me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe!* Jesus cannot stand those who look for signs and miracles in order to believe (Jn 4:48) and He seems to take Thomas to task. Here we must remember another passage concerning a more authentic faith, a "way of perfection" towards a faith to which we must aspire without the demands of Thomas, a faith received as gift and as an act of trust, like the exemplary faith of our ancestors (Rev 11) and of Mary (Lk 1:45). We, who are two thousand years after the coming of Jesus, are told that, although we have not seen Him, yet we can love Him and believing in Him we can exult with "an indescribable and glorious joy" (1Pet 1:8).

*These (signs) are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through His name.* The fourth Gospel, like the other Gospels, does not mean to write a complete biography of Jesus, but only to show that Jesus was the Christ, the awaited Messiah, the Liberator, and that He was the Son of God. Believing in Him means that we possess eternal life. If Jesus is not God, then our faith is in vain!

## **5. ORATIO**

### **Psalm 118 (117)**

O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;  
His steadfast love endures for ever!

Let Israel say,

"His steadfast love endures for ever."

Let the house of Aaron say,

"His steadfast love endures for ever."

Let those who fear the LORD say,

"His steadfast love endures for ever."

I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,  
but the Lord helped me.

The Lord is my strength and my song;

He has become my salvation.

Hark, glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous.

The stone which the builders rejected  
has become the head of the corner.

This is the Lord's doing;

it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day which the Lord has made;

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we beseech Thee, O Lord! O Lord,

we beseech Thee, give us success!

## **6. CONTEMPLATIO**

### **Closing prayer**

I thank You Jesus, my Lord and my God, that You have loved me and called me, made me worthy to be Your disciple, that You have given me the Spirit, the One sent to proclaim and witness to Your resurrection, to the mercy of the Father, to salvation and pardon for all men and women in the world. You truly are the way, the truth and the life, the dawn without a setting, the sun of justice and peace. Grant that I may dwell in Your love, bound to You like a branch to its vine. Grant me Your peace so that I may overcome my weaknesses, face my doubts and respond to Your call and live fully the mission You entrusted to me, praising You forever, You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.



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

## 19Apr2020 SOLEMNITY OF THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER; DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

Empty chairs, full hearts

On this day 25 years ago, 168 people died in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The footprint of the building is now ringed by trees providing a living threshold for ground made sacred by grief. A surviving wall records the names of those who lived through the tragedy, while a Field of Empty Chairs recalls the adults and children who perished. Violence created the need for this memorial. But the chairs, which become vigil lights of memory through each night, attest that a light shines in every darkness. Be that light.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31 ([43](#)).

*“They devoted themselves . . . to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.”*

[Sunday Spanish Translation](#)

## 20Apr2020 EASTER WEEKDAY

Give life the last word

Today is the 21st anniversary of the Columbine school shooting. How to cope with the sorrow and outrage of that incident and so many similar ones? We begin to rebuild our society when we allow the Spirit to flow through us and see the face of God in others. “Every human being . . . , however weak, is created ‘in the image and likeness of God,’” Pope Benedict XIV said in Cameroon in 2009. “Every person must live! . . . Death will never have the last word!” Acknowledge the right of those around you to live, no matter their differences, their weakness or strengths, their failings or successes.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 4:23-31; John 3:1-8 ([267](#)).

*“You do not know where [the wind] comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

## 21Apr2020 MEMORIAL OF ANSELM, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Our Redeemer, in the flesh

In 1098, Saint Anselm wrote the treatise “Why the God-Man?” to champion a core Christian tenet: the Incarnation—the belief that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. Incarnation is a big deal. Nearly every heresy tackled by the Early Church concerned errant beliefs about Jesus’ true nature. No, we don’t believe that Jesus was merely human (Arianism) or that he was all divine, only pretending to be human (Docetism). We believe that the second person of the Trinity took on human flesh to save us. Imagine that!

**Today's readings:**

Acts 4:32-37; John 3:7b-15 ([268](#)).

*“You must be born from above.”*

## 22Apr2020 EASTER WEEKDAY

Give your sister some breathing space

“Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life. . . . This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.” Thus opens *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical "On Care for Our

Common Home." Do we really want to live in darkness? Shine a light on what each of us can do to clean up the planet. And plant a tree for good measure!

**Today's readings:**

Acts 5:17-26; John 3:16-21 ([269](#)).

*"The light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light."*

## 23Apr2020 MEMORIAL OF GEORGE, MARTYR

Face the dragon

The legend of Saint George the dragon slayer is a famous one, but it's not as rooted in historical fact as is the manner of his martyrdom. Yes, George had the courage to face a monster—but the monster was the Roman emperor Diocletian, whose persecution of Christians in the early 300s martyred not only George but well-known saints Sebastian, Agnes, Lucy, and Philomena, among countless others. George, a soldier, remained joyous even when tortured for his belief. What negative influences threaten your own joyous practice of Christian faith today—and are you willing to face them, as George was?

**Today's readings:**

Acts 5:27-33; John 3:31-36 ([270](#)).

*"One who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of earthly things."*

## 24Apr2020 MEMORIAL OF FIDELIS OF SIGMARINGEN, PRIEST, MARTYR

Clothes make the saint

Holding a law degree from Germany, Fidelis of Sigmaringen (1577-1622) was known as the "poor man's lawyer" who sometimes would give his destitute clients the clothes off his back. But he tired of the adversarial nature of the law profession, so he joined the Capuchin Friars. Ordained a priest in 1612, Fidelis was sent to Switzerland to convert Calvinist reformers. In violent reaction to his successful efforts, Fidelis was set upon and murdered. He was canonized in 1746 by Pope Benedict XIV. *Fidelis* means "faithful" in Latin. Exercise your faith today by donating clothes to the poor in memory of Fidelis.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 5:34-42; John 6:1-15 ([271](#)).

*"This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world."*

## 25Apr2020 FEAST OF MARK, EVANGELIST

Write the Good News with the ink of your life

Mark was an early follower of Jesus but not one of the 12 apostles. Most scholars think that he was the "John who is called Mark" referenced in Acts 12:12 who joined in mission work with Paul and Barnabas. Today's first reading mentions that he had a special sonlike relationship with Peter. Beyond that, little is known except that he used the gifts he had been given to write the shortest and earliest gospel a few decades after Jesus' death. His gospel became the inspiration for Matthew and Luke to write theirs. How will those who come after you take inspiration from your life and the way you shared the Good News?

**Today's readings:**

1 Peter 5:5b-14; Mark 16:15-20 ([555](#)).

*"Go into the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation."*