

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: 4th Sunday of Easter (A)

Sunday, May 3, 2020

Jesus, the Good Shepherd

I came that they may have life, and have it to the full!

John 10:1-10

1. Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to help us 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.

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

This Sunday's Gospel presents us with the familiar image of the Good Shepherd. When speaking of the sheep of God's flock, Jesus uses several images to describe the attitude of those who look after the flock. The text of the liturgy is taken from verses 1 to 10. In our commentary we add verses 11 to 18 because these contain the image of the "Good Shepherd" and help us better understand the sense of verses 1 to 10. During the reading, try to pay attention to the various images or similes that Jesus uses to present to us the way a true shepherd ought to be.

b) A division of the text as a help to the reading:

The text contains three interrelated similes:

John 10:1-5: The simile of the bandit and the shepherd

John 10:6-10: The simile of the door of the sheepfold

John 10:11-18: The simile of the good shepherd

c) The Text:

1 'In all truth I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a bandit. 2 He who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; 3 the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all those that are his, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. 5 They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him because they do not recognise the voice of strangers.'

6 Jesus told them this parable but they failed to understand what he was saying to them. 7 So Jesus spoke to them again: In all truth I tell you, I am the gate of the sheepfold. 8 All who have come before me are thieves and bandits, but the sheep took no notice of them. 9 I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: such a one will go in and out and will find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. 12 The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and runs away, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; 13 he runs away because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep. 16 And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and I must lead these too. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, one shepherd. 17 The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 18 No



one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as I have power to lay it down, so I have power to take it up again; and this is the command I have received from my Father.

3. A moment of prayerful silence

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

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) What part of the text most touched you? Why?
- b) What images does Jesus apply to himself? How does he do that and what is their significance?
- c) In this text, how many times does Jesus use the word *life* and what does he say about life?
- d) **Pastor-Pastoral.** Do our *pastoral* actions carry on from the mission of Jesus-Pastor?
- e) How can we acquire a clear view of the true Jesus of the Gospels?

5. For those who wish to enter deeper into the theme

a) The context within which the Gospel of John was written:

This is a further example of the way John's Gospel was written and organised. Jesus' words on the Shepherd (Jn 10:1-18) are like a brick placed in an already built wall. Just before this text, in John 9:40-41, Jesus was speaking the blindness of the Pharisees. Immediately after, in John 10:19-21, we come across the conclusion of the discussion on blindness. Thus, the words concerning the Good Shepherd show how to remove such blindness. This brick renders the wall stronger and more beautiful.

John 10:1-5: *The simile of the bandit and the shepherd*

Jesus begins his discourse with the simile of the gate: "I tell you most solemnly, I am the gate of the sheepfold. All others who have come are thieves and brigands; but the sheep took no notice of them. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe!" To understand this simile, we need to remember what comes after. In those days, shepherds took care of the sheep during the day. At night, they brought the sheep into a large sheepfold or common enclosure, well protected against thieves and wolves. All the shepherds within a region brought their flocks there. There was a guard who watched over the flock throughout the night. In the morning the shepherd would come and knock on the gate and the guard would open the gate. The shepherd then called the sheep by name. The sheep recognised the voice of their shepherd and so they got up and followed him to pastures. The sheep of other shepherds would hear the voice, but stayed where they were, because they did not recognise the voice. Every now and then there was the danger of an attack. Thieves went into the sheepfold through a kind of loophole by removing stones from the wall around and stole the sheep. They did not enter by the gate, because the guard was there watching.

John 10:6-10: *The simile of the gate of the sheepfold*

Those who were listening, the Pharisees, (Jn 9:40-41), could not understand what "entering by the gate" meant. Jesus explains: "I am the gate! All others who have come are thieves and brigands". To whom do these hard words of Jesus refer? Considering his way of speaking about brigands, he was probably referring to religious leaders who dragged people after them, but did not fulfil their expectations. They were not interested in the welfare of the people, but rather in their money and their own interests. They deceived people and abandoned them to their fate. The basic criterion for discerning between the shepherd and the brigand is the defence of the *life of the sheep*. Jesus says: "I have come so that they may have life, and have it to the full!" To enter by the gate, means imitating Jesus' attitude of defending the life of his sheep. Jesus asks people to take the initiative by not following those who pretend to be shepherds and who are not interested in their lives.

John 10:11-15: *The simile of the Good Shepherd*

Jesus changes the simile. First he was the *gate*, now he is the *shepherd*. Everyone knew what a shepherd was like, how he lived and worked. But Jesus is not just any shepherd, he is the *good* shepherd! The image of the *good* shepherd comes from the Old Testament. When Jesus says that he is the Good Shepherd, he is presenting himself as the one who comes to fulfil the promises of the prophets and hopes of the people. He insists on two points: (a) In defending the life of his sheep, the *good shepherd gives his life*. (b) In the mutual understanding between shepherd and sheep, *the Shepherd knows his sheep and the sheep know their shepherd*.

The false shepherd who wants to overcome his blindness, has to confront his own opinion with that of the people. This is what the Pharisees did not do. They looked down on the sheep and called them cursed and ignorant people (Jn 7:49; 9:34). On the other hand, Jesus says that the people have an infallible perception in knowing who is *the good shepherd*, because they recognise his voice (Jn 10:4) "My own know me" (Jn 10:14). The Pharisees thought they could discern

the things of God with certainty. In truth they were blind.

The discourse on the Good Shepherd includes two important rules for removing pharisaic blindness from our eyes: (a) Shepherds are very attentive to the reaction of the sheep so that they may recognise the voice of the shepherd. (b) The sheep must be very attentive to the attitude of those who call themselves shepherds so as to verify whether they are really interested in the lives of the sheep and whether they are capable of giving their lives for their sheep. What about today's shepherds?

John 10:16-18: *Jesus' aim: one flock and one shepherd*

Jesus opens out the horizon and says that there are other sheep that are not of this sheepfold. They will not hear Jesus' voice, but when they do, they will realise that he is the Shepherd and will follow him. Here we see the ecumenical attitude of the community of the "Beloved Disciple".

b) Further comments:

i) The image of the Shepherd in the Bible:

In Palestine, people largely depended on raising sheep and goats for their living. The image of the shepherd who leads his sheep to pasture was well known to all, just as today we all know the image of the driver of a coach or of a train. It was common to use the image of the shepherd to illustrate the function of one who ruled and led the people. The prophets criticised kings because they were shepherds who did not take care of their flock and did not lead the flock to pasture (Jer 2:8; 10:21; 23:1-2). Such criticism of bad shepherds grew in the measure that, through the fault of kings, the people saw themselves dragged into slavery (Ez 34:1-10; Zac 11:4-17).

Before the frustration experienced because of the lack of leadership on the part of the bad shepherds, there grew the desire or the hope of one day having a shepherd who would be really good and sincere and who would be like God in the way of leading his people. Thus the Psalm says, "The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want!" (Ps 23:1-6; Gen 48:15). The prophets hope that, in some future time, God himself would be the shepherd who would lead his flock (Is 40:11; Ez 34:11-16). They also hope that at such a time, the people would be able to recognise the voice of their shepherd: "Listen today to his voice!" (Ps 95:7). They hope that God will come as a Judge to judge the sheep of the flock (Ez 34:17). They wish and hope that one day God will raise good shepherds and that the messiah would be a good shepherd for the people of God. (Jer 3:15; 23:4).

Jesus turns this hope into reality and presents himself as the Good Shepherd, different from the brigands who were despoiling the people. He presents himself as a Judge, who, at the end, will judge as a shepherd who will separate the sheep from the goats (Mt 25:31-46). In Jesus is fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah who says that the good shepherd will be persecuted by the bad shepherds who are disturbed by his denunciations: "I am going to strike the shepherd so that the sheep may be scattered!" (Zec 13:7). Finally Jesus is everything: he is the gate, the shepherd and the lamb!

ii) The community of the Beloved Disciple: open, tolerant and ecumenical:

The communities lying behind the Gospel of John were made up of various groups. Among them there were open-minded Jews with a critical view of the Temple of Jerusalem (Jn 2:13-22) and the law (Jn 7:49-50). There were Samaritans (Jn 4:1-42) and pagans (Jn 12:20) who became converts, both with their historical origins and cultural customs, quite different from those of the Jews. Even though they were made up of such different groups, John's communities will see the following of Jesus as a concrete lived love in solidarity. By respecting each other's differences, they will be aware of the problems arising from pagans and Jews living together, problems which troubled other communities at the time (Acts 15:5). Challenged by the realities of their own time, the communities sought to deepen their faith in Jesus, sent by the Father who wishes that all should be brothers and sisters (Jn 15:12-14,17) and who says: "In my Father's house there are many mansions!" (Jn 14:2). This deepening facilitated dialogue with other groups. Then there were open, tolerant and ecumenical communities (Jn 10:16).

6. Psalm 23 (22)

Yahweh is my shepherd

Yahweh is my shepherd,

I lack nothing.

In grassy meadows he lets me lie.

By tranquil streams he leads me

to restore my spirit.

He guides me in paths of saving justice

as befits his name.

Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death

I should fear no danger,

for you are at my side.
Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me.
You prepare a table for me
under the eyes of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup brims over.
Kindness and faithful love pursue me
every day of my life.
I make my home in the house of Yahweh
for all time to come.

7. Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank 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 that which your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also practise 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.

03May2020 FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER; GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY

Follow the leader

When we were kids, playing “follow the leader” was easy. One child was designated as the pattern to imitate, and we just did whatever they did. In these days of crisis, it can seem harder to tell who the designated leader is. Is it the president or the pope, the pastor or the medical expert? Do we do what our parents advised, or listen to the recommendations of trusted friends? What do we do when media experts disagree? If we call ourselves Christians, then Christ is the ultimate authority for our values and criteria. Make a verse of scripture your daily companion.

Today's readings:

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; 1 Peter 2:20b-25; John 10:1-10 ([49](#)).

“For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.”

[Sunday Spanish Translation](#)

04May2020 EASTER WEEKDAY

Stand your ground

“The shepherd cannot run at the first sign of danger,” said Father Stanley Rother, and he didn’t, which made him a martyr in 1981 in civil war-torn Guatemala. Even though he knew his name was on a death list, this priest from Oklahoma stayed with the people he had been serving since 1968, during which time he built a farmer’s co-op, a school, a hospital, and a radio station. He was beatified in 2017. Learn more about this inspiration for faith in the book [The Shepherd Who Didn’t Run](#).

Today's readings:

Acts 11:1-18; John 10:11-18 ([279](#)).

“A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

05May2020 EASTER WEEKDAY

Keep things in context

Catholics celebrate 50 days of Easter with a special emphasis on the Gospel of John. But with the Gospel of John comes a particular concern. At Mass, we hear—amid the evangelist’s poetic prose—some jarring references to “the Jews.” Historically, such language sadly led to a legacy of hate and harm. With anti-Semitism making headlines again, look to the short Vatican II document called [Nostra aetate](#). It honors the Jewish people as our faithful forebears, tapping a truth right out of John 10: Jesus was an observant. Honor our religious ancestors by learning more about them.

Today's readings:

Acts 11:19-26; John 10:22-30 ([280](#)).

“Jesus walked about in the temple area.”

06May2020 EASTER WEEKDAY

Follow the Light

“This Little Light of Mine” has been young Christians’ joyful favorite for nearly a century. It has also been an anthem for civil and human rights movements. For people of faith, we who believe that Jesus has come into the world as light, the song serves as a directive to allow God’s light to shine through the example of our lives. Reflect today on the example you have set during difficult times. Have you given into darkness and despair or served as a beacon of hope and support for those around you?

Today's readings:

Acts 12:24—13:5a; John 12:44-50 ([281](#)).

"I have come into the world as light, to keep anyone who believes in me from remaining in the dark."

07May2020 EASTER WEEKDAY

A masquerade to take seriously

In today's gospel Jesus says, "Whoever receives the one I send, receives me." It is in keeping with our tradition to see the poor, the migrant, the refugee as sent by God to stretch our hearts and open us to the Good News. Mother Teresa often referred to seeing Jesus "in the distressing disguise of the poor." Indeed, how distressing it is to see the suffering being endured by those with the least. Take a step today to "receive" Jesus in the disguise of the poor.

Today's readings:

Acts 13:13-25; John 13:16-20 ([282](#)).

"Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

08May2020 EASTER WEEKDAY

Youthful mystic

Imagine growing up with a saint in your hometown! New Jersey-native Teresa Demjanovich, honored today, was like many young people with responsibility for caring for aging parents while also getting an education and a job. She then became a religious sister but died just two years later at age 26. Known as a prayerful, holy woman, Teresa was deeply spiritual and considered a mystic. "Our heart is the compass that magnetically follows the north star of desire," Teresa wrote. "To locate my treasure I have but to unearth the lodging of my desires." As you pray this day, consider how God is leading you through your heart and desires.

Today's readings:

Acts 13:26-33; John 14:1-6 ([283](#)).

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me."

09May2020 EASTER WEEKDAY

Light a fuse!

Peter Maurin, who founded the Catholic Worker movement with Dorothy Day, was born on this day in 1877. He longed for a world where it would be easier for people to be good to each other. While he was the visionary, Day translated his ideals of justice into practical actions: a newspaper, houses of hospitality, and farms. He found "dynamite" in the gospels, which could solve the problems of society if someone would "blow the lid off." Day lit the fuse, and their flame continues today in Catholic Worker houses.

Today's readings:

Acts 13:44-52; John 14:7-14 ([284](#)).

"The one who believes in me . . . will do greater works than these."