

# 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: The Ascension of the Lord (A)

Sunday, May 24, 2020

*Go into the whole world*

*Universal mission*

*Matthew 28:16-20*

## 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 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 guide the reading:

The text reports the last words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. This is like a testament, his last wish for the community, that which is uppermost in his mind. In our reading, let us try to pay attention to the following: What does Jesus insist on most in his final words?

b) A division of chapter 14 to help with the reading:

Mt 28:16 – Geographical indication: return to Galilee

Mt 28:17 – Jesus' apparition and the reaction of the disciples

Mt 28:18-20a – Jesus' final instructions

Mt 28:20b – The great promise, source of all hope.

c) The text:

16: Meanwhile the eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them.

17: When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated.

18-20a: Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.

20b: And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'



## 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 struck you and touched your heart most?

b) Identify the chronological and geographical information in this text.

c) How do the disciples react? What is the content of Jesus' words to the disciples?

d) What is this "all power in heaven and on earth" given to Jesus?

e) What does it mean, "to become a disciple" of Jesus?

f) In this context, what does the baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" mean?

g) What do the words "I am with you always, even to the end of time" remind us of in the OT?

## 5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

a) The context of Matthew's Gospel

\* Matthew's Gospel, written about the year 85, is addressed to a community of converted Jews who lived in Syria-Palestine. They were going through a deep identity crisis concerning their past. When they accepted Jesus as the awaited Messiah, they continued to go to the synagogue and to observe the law and the ancient traditions. Moreover, they had a certain affinity with the Pharisees, and after the revolution of the Jews in Palestine against the Romans (65 to 72), they and the Pharisees were the only two groups to have survived the Roman oppression.

\* From the 80s, these Jewish brothers, Pharisees and Christians, only survivors, began to fight among themselves as to who had inherited the promises of the OT. Each claimed to be the inheritors. Gradually, tension grew between them and they began to excommunicate each other. The Christians could no longer attend the synagogue and were cut off from their past. Each group began to regroup: the Pharisees in the synagogue, the Christians in church. This added to the identity problem of the community of Jewish Christians because it raised serious questions in need of urgent solutions. "Who has inherited the promises of the OT, those of the synagogue or those of the church? On whose side is God? Who are really the people of God?"

\* Now, Matthew writes his Gospel to help these communities overcome their crisis and to find an answer to their problems. His Gospel is, first of all, a Gospel of revelation showing how Jesus is the true Messiah, the new Moses, the culmination of the whole of the history of the OT and its promises. It is also the Gospel of consolation for those who felt excluded and persecuted by their Jewish brothers. Matthew wants to console and help them to overcome the trauma of the split. It is the Gospel of the new practice because it shows the way to achieve a new justice, greater than that of the Pharisees. It is the Gospel of openness and shows that the Good News of God that Jesus brought cannot be hidden, but must be placed on a candlestick so that it may enlighten the life of all peoples.

b) Commentary on the text of Matthew 28: 16-20

\* Matthew 28:16: Returning to Galilee: It was in Galilee that it all began (Mt 4:12). It was there that the disciples first heard the call (Mt 4:15) and it was there that Jesus promised to reunite them again after the resurrection (Mt 26:31). In Luke, Jesus forbids them to leave Jerusalem (Acts 1:4). In Matthew they are commanded to leave Jerusalem and go back to Galilee (Mt 28: 7.10). Each evangelist has his own way of presenting the person of Jesus and his plans. For Luke, after the resurrection of Jesus, the proclamation of the Good News has to begin in Jerusalem in order to reach to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). For Matthew, the proclamation begins in Galilee of the pagans (Mt 4:15) in order to prefigure the passage from the Jews to the pagans.

The disciples had to go to the mountain that Jesus pointed out to them. The mountain reminds us of Mount Sinai, where the first Covenant took place and where Moses received the tablets of the Law of God (Ex 19 to 24; 34:1-35). It also reminds us of the mountain of God, where the prophet Elijah took refuge in order to find again the meaning of his mission (1Kings 19:1-18). It also reminds us of the mountain of the Transfiguration, where Moses and Elijah, that is, the Law and the Prophets, appear with Jesus, thus confirming that he is the promised Messiah (Mt 17:1-8).

\* Matthew 28:17: Some doubted: The first Christians had great difficulty in believing in the resurrection. The evangelists insist in saying that they doubted a lot and did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus (Mk 16:11.13.14; Lk 24:11.21.25.36.41; Jn 20:25). Faith in the resurrection was a slow and difficult process, but ended by being the greatest certainty of Christians (1Cor 15:3-34).

\* Matthew 28:18: All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me: The passive form of the verb shows that Jesus received his authority from the Father. What is this authority? In the Apocalypse, the Lamb (the risen Jesus) received from the hand of God the book with seven seals (Ap 5:7) and became the Lord of history, he who must assume the responsibility for the execution of God's project as described in the sealed book, and as such is adored by all creatures (Ap 12:11-14). By his authority and power he conquers the Dragon, the power of evil (Ap 12:1-9). And captures the Beast and the false prophet, symbols of the Roman Empire (Ap 19:20). In the Creed at Mass we say that Jesus ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, thus becoming the judge of the living and the dead.

\* Matthew 28:19-20a: Jesus' last words: three commands to the disciples: Vested with supreme authority, Jesus passes on three orders to the disciples and to all of us: (i) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations; (ii) baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; (iii) teach them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you.

i) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations: To be a disciple is not the same as being a student. A disciple is in relation to the master. A student is in relation to the teacher. The disciple lives with the master 24 hours a day; the

student receives lessons from the teacher for a few hours then goes back home. The disciple presupposes a community. The student presupposes being present in a classroom for lessons. The state of discipleship in those days was marked by the expression to follow the master. In the Carmelite Rule we read: To live in obedience to Jesus Christ. For the first

Christians, to follow Jesus meant three connected things:

- To imitate the example of the Master: Jesus was the model to imitate and to be repeated in the life of the disciple (Jn 13:13-15). Living together every day meant a constant meeting. In this School of Jesus only one subject was taught: the Kingdom! This Kingdom could be seen in the life and practice of Jesus.

- Sharing in the fate of the Master: Those who followed Jesus, had to commit themselves to "stay with him in temptations" (Lk 22:28), and in persecution (Jn 15:20; Mt 10:24-25) and had to be willing to take up the cross and die with him (Mk 8:34-35; Jn 11:36).

- To possess in oneself the life of Jesus: After Easter, a third dimension was added: "I live now not I but Christ lives in me". The first Christians sought to identify themselves with Jesus. This is the mystical dimension in the following of Jesus, fruit of the Spirit's action.

ii) Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: The Trinity is the source, the end and the way. Those baptized in the name of the Father, revealed in Jesus, commit themselves to live as brothers and sisters in fraternity. And if God is Father, we are all brothers and sisters. Those baptized in the name of the Son, Jesus, commit themselves to imitate Jesus and to follow him even unto the cross in order to rise with him. And the power that Jesus received from the Father is a creative power that conquers death. Those baptized in the Holy Spirit, given by Jesus on the day of Pentecost, commit themselves to interiorising fraternity and the following of Jesus, allowing themselves to be led by the Spirit alive in the community.

iii) Teaching them to observe all my commands: For us Christians, Jesus is the New Law of God, proclaimed from on high in the mountain. Jesus is the chosen of the Father as the new Moses, whose word is law for us. "Hear him" (Mt 17:15). The Spirit sent by him will remind us of all the things he taught us (Jn 14:26; 16:13). The observance of the new Law of love is balanced by the gratuitous presence of Jesus in our midst, till the end of time.

\* Matthew 28:20b: I am with you always, even to the end of time: When Moses was sent to free the people from Egypt, he received a guarantee from God, the only guarantee that offers complete certainty: "Go, I shall be with you!" (Ex 3:12). It is the same certainty promised to the prophets and other persons sent by God to undertake an important mission in God's plan (Jer 1:8; Jud 6:16). Mary received the same guarantee when the angel said to her, "The Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28). The person of Jesus is the living expression of this guarantee, because his name is Emmanuel, God with us (Mt 1:23). He will be with his disciples, with all of us, even to the end of time. Here we see Jesus' authority. He controls history and time. He is the first and the last (Ap 1:17). Before the first, nothing existed and after the last, nothing is. This guarantee sustains people, nourishes their faith, sustains hope and generates love and the gift of oneself.

c) Highlighting the words of Jesus: The universal mission of the community.

Abraham was called to be the source of blessings not only for his descendants, but for all families on earth (Gen 12:3). The slave people were called not only to restore the tribe of Jacob, but also to be light to the nations (Is 49:6; 42:6). The prophet Amos said that God not only freed Israel from Egypt, but also the Philistines from Kaftor and the Aramaians from Quir (Am 9:7). God, then, looks after and is concerned for the Israelites as well as for the Philistines and the Aramaians who were the greatest enemies of the people of Israel! The prophet Elijah thought he was the only defender of God (Kings 19:10.14), but he had to be told that apart from himself there were seven thousand others! (1Kings 19:18) The prophet Jonah wanted Yahweh to be only the God of Israel, but had to admit that he is the God of all nations, even the inhabitants of Niniveh, the bitterest enemies of Israel (Jo 4:1-11). In the New Testament, John, the disciple, wanted Jesus only for the little group, for the community, but Jesus corrected him and said, He who is not against me is for me! (Mk 9:38-40).

At the end of the first century after Christ, the difficulties and persecutions could have driven the Christian communities into losing the missionary impetus and to close in on themselves, as if they were the only ones defending the values of the Kingdom. But Matthew's Gospel, faithful to this long tradition of openness to all nations, tells the communities that they cannot close in on themselves. They cannot claim for themselves a monopoly on the action of God in the world. God is not the community's property; rather the community is Yahweh's property (Ex 19:5). In the midst of humanity that struggles against and resists oppression, the communities must be salt and yeast (Mt 5:13; 13:33). They must proclaim aloud to the whole world, among all nations, the Good News that Jesus brought us. God is present in our midst, the same God who, in Exodus, commits himself to free those who call on his name! (Ex 3:7-12). This is our mission. If this salt loses its savor, what will it be good for? "It is of no use for the earth or for the fertiliser" (Lk 14:35)

## **6. Psalm 150**

Universal praise

Hallelujah!

Praise God in his holy sanctuary;  
give praise in the mighty dome of heaven.

Give praise for his mighty deeds,  
praise him for his great majesty.

Give praise with blasts upon the horn,  
praise him with harp and lyre.

Give praise with tambourines and dance,  
praise him with flutes and strings.

Give praise with crashing cymbals,  
praise him with sounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath  
give praise to the Lord!

Hallelujah!

## **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.*

24May2020 - SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Right where you belong

We each have a need to belong that doesn't start with the playground or end with the work shift. Psychologist Abraham Maslow categorized the need to belong as number three on a hierarchy of essentials: right behind physical needs (food, clothing, and shelter) and safety. Catalog the people who are essential to your happiness and the social groups that include you as a member. Then consider this: God has chosen you to be one of God's people. And Jesus counts you as one who belongs especially to him.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 1:12-14; 1 Peter 4:13-16; John 17:1-11a ([59](#)).

*"They belonged to you, and you gave them to me."*

[Sunday Spanish Translation](#)

25May2020 - MEMORIAL OF GREGORY VII, POPE

Cherish your freedoms

Pope Gregory VII fought hard for the separation of church and state because he lived in a time (11th century) when the church was subject to civil authorities, and abuses of power were rampant. In the face of enormous opposition, this great reformer extricated the church from the control of external rulers and strengthened the unity of the whole church under the centrality of the papacy. On this Memorial Day, remember that religious freedom is one of the founding principles of our country, worthy of the sacrifice of many. And one that our faith demands that we respect for all.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 19:1-8; John 16:29-33 ([297](#)).

*"In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world."*

26May2020 - MEMORIAL OF PHILIP NERI, PRIEST

God provides

It's fitting Philip Neri was canonized in 1622 with Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, and Teresa of Ávila. Ignatius was a friend, Francis was an influence, and Philip took to heart Teresa's quip: "From . . . sour-faced saints, good Lord, deliver us!" The affable Philip won over so many different kinds of people for Christ in 1500s Rome—using humor, humbleness, and holiness—that he's called, with Peter and Paul, an apostle of Rome. "Cast yourself into the arms of God," he said, "and be very sure that if he wants anything of you, he will fit you for the work and give you strength." That is comforting at a time when many of us feel stretched to the limit.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 20:17-27; John 17:1-11a ([298](#)).

*"I revealed your name to those whom you gave me."*

27May2020 - MEMORIAL OF AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY, BISHOP

Look for God in unexpected places

Lest Saint Augustine of Canterbury be confused with Saint Augustine of Hippo: the two are not the same. Augustine of Hippo was a fourth-century doctor of the church. Augustine of Canterbury was a sixth-century Benedictine missionary sent by Pope Gregory the Great to Christianize the British Isles. He is known as the "Apostle to the English," and his legacy includes an approach to evangelization and conversion that shows a

respect for indigenous practices. Rather than condemning, he consecrated and incorporated popular Anglo-Saxon rites into Christianity. What practices from popular culture today might we consecrate into contemporary Christian practice?

**Today's readings:**

Acts 20:28-38; John 17:11b-19 ([299](#)).

*“As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.”*

28May2020 - EASTER WEEKDAY

Celebrate our finest gifts

Shavuot, or the Feast of Weeks, which our Jewish friends observe today, has a connection to the Catholic Solemnity of Pentecost. Just as Pentecost this Sunday comes seven weeks after Easter, Shavuot is celebrated seven weeks after Passover. In the biblical era, important dates for planting and harvesting were marked by religious holidays. Shavuot celebrated the wheat harvest seven weeks after Passover. Christians thank God for the abundant gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 22:30; 23:6-11; John 17:20-26 ([300](#)).

*“I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.”*

29May2020 - EASTER WEEKDAY

Keeping the peace

In 1972, Pope Saint Paul VI declared, “If you want peace, work for justice.” Today we observe the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. The U.N. deploys peacekeepers around the world to provide “a unique and dynamic instrument . . . to help countries torn by conflict to create the conditions for lasting peace.” The work of Catholic social justice organizations like Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Worker, and Cross Catholic Outreach go a step further by “tending the sheep” of the poor, the oppressed, the refugee, the dispossessed. Do your part today to support the social outreach of your church.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 25:13b-21; John 21:15-19 ([301](#)).

*“Tend my sheep.”*

30May2020 - EASTER WEEKDAY

Just do it!

Some argue that “believing the right things” is enough of a response to the call to discipleship. But Jesus emphasized *doing*. *Orthopraxy* (right practice) goes hand in hand with *orthodoxy* (right belief). In this time of global suffering, our faith response is required. It flows out of our faith *assent*, but we can’t stop with professions of faith. Take your faith out to meet the great need you find around you today.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 28:16-20, 30-31; John 21: 20-25 ([302](#)).

*“There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written.”*