

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: 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Sunday, July 19, 2020

The mysterious growth of the Reign

God's patience

Matthew 13: 24-43

1. Opening prayer

Spirit of Truth, sent by Jesus to guide us to the whole truth, enlighten our minds so that we may understand the Scriptures. You who overshadowed Mary and made her fruitful ground where the Word of God could germinate, purify our hearts from all obstacles to the Word. Help us to learn like her to listen with good and pure hearts to the Word that God speaks to us in life and in Scripture, so that we may observe the Word and produce good fruit through our perseverance.

2. Reading

a) Division of the text:

The text is made up of three parables, a break, and the explanation of the first parable. The three parables of the darnel and the wheat (13: 24-30), the mustard seed (13: 31-32) and the leaven (13:33), have the same purpose. They wish to correct the expectations of Jesus' contemporaries who thought that the Reign of God would come with vehemence and immediately eliminate whatever was contrary to it. Through these parables, Jesus wishes to explain to His listeners that He did not come to restore the Reign by force, but to inaugurate a new era gradually, in the day-to-day history, in a way often unobserved. And yet His work has an inherent strength, dynamism and a transforming power that gradually changes history from inside according to God's plan...if one has eyes to see!

In 13:10-17, between the parable of the sower and its explanation, the evangelist inserts a dialogue between Jesus and His disciples where the Master explains to them why it is that He speaks to the crowds only in parables. Here too, between the parables and the explanation, the evangelist inserts a brief comment on the reason why Jesus speaks in parables (13: 34-35).

Then follows the explanation of the parable of the darnel and the wheat (13: 36-43). What is striking in this explanation is that, while many of the details of the parable are interpreted, not a single reference is made to the core of the parable, that is, the dialogue between the owner and his servants concerning the darnel that grew together with the wheat. Many scholars deduce that the explanation of the parable is not from Jesus, but from the evangelist who changes the original sense of the parable. While Jesus meant to correct the messianic impatience of his contemporaries, Matthew addresses lukewarm Christians and exhorts them, almost threatens them, with God's judgement. However, the parable and the explanation are part of the canonical text and, therefore, both should be considered because both contain the Word of God addressed to us today.

b) The text:

24-30: He put another parable before them, "The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off. When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, then the darnel appeared as well. The owner's laborers went to him and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?" He said to them, "Some enemy has done this." And the laborers said,

"Do you want us to go and weed it out?" But he said, "No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest; and at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn." ' "

31-32: He put another parable before them, 'The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches.'

33: He told them another parable, 'The kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.'

34-35: In all this Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; indeed, He would never speak to them except in parables. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: I will speak to you in parables, unfold what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.

36-43: Then, leaving the crowds, He went to the house; and His disciples came to Him and said, 'Explain to us the parable about the darnel in the field.' He said in reply, 'The sower of the good seed is the Son of man. The field is the world; the good seed is the subjects of the kingdom; the darnel, the subjects of the Evil One; the enemy who sowed it, the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; the reapers are the angels. Well then, just as the darnel is gathered up and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of man will send his angels and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of falling and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the upright will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Anyone who has ears should listen!



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.

- What is your reaction towards the evil that you see in the world and in yourself? Is it the reaction of the servants or that of the owner?
- What are the signs of the presence of the Reign that you can see in the world and in your life?
- What image of God appears from these three parables? Is this your image of God?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

- The Reign of God:

In the two compendia that Matthew offers us on the ministry of Jesus, he presents Him preaching the Gospel or the good news of the Reign and healing (4:23; 9:35). The expression "Reign of Heaven" appears 32 times in Matthew. It is the same as the "Reign of God", found only once in Matthew, whereas it is the more usual expression found in the rest of the New Testament. As a matter of respect, the Jews avoid not only the use of the Name of God as revealed to Moses (see Ex 3:13-15), but also the word "God" which is substituted by various expressions such as "Heaven" or "The heavens". Matthew, the most Jewish of the Gospels, conforms to this practice.

The expression is not found in the Old Testament, where, however, we often find the idea of the royalty of God over Israel and over the universe and the verbal equivalent of the New Testament's "God reigns". In fact, the Reign of God, as presented also in the New Testament, is above all the action of God who rules and the new situation as a consequence of His ruling. God has always been ruler, but because of sin, Israel and the whole of humanity avoid His royalty and create a situation opposed to His original plan. The Reign of God will be established when everything will be once more subjected to His dominion, that is, when humanity will accept His sovereignty and thus realize His plan.

Jesus proclaimed the coming of this new era (see for example Mt 3: 2). Somehow the reality of God's Reign is made present and anticipated in Him and in the community He founded. But the Church is not yet the Reign. The Reign grows mysteriously and gradually until it reaches its fulfillment at the end of time.

b) God's logic:

The reality of the Reign and its growth, as described by Jesus, place us before the mystery of God whose thoughts are not our thoughts. We confuse royalty and force, and impositions, and triumphalism. We like things done on a grand scale. We see success as an undertaking praised and involving many people. However, these are temptations which seduce even the community, and instead of serving the Reign, the community finds itself opposing it. God, on His part, prefers to advance His plan through small, poor and insignificant things and while we are always in a hurry to complete our plans, God waits with great patience and forbearance.

6. Psalm 145

Hymn to the Lord Ruler

I will extol Thee, my God and King,
and bless Thy name for ever and ever.
Every day I will bless Thee,
and praise Thy name for ever and ever.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,
and His greatness is unsearchable.
One generation shall laud Thy works to another,
and shall declare Thy mighty acts.
On the glorious splendor of Thy majesty,
and on Thy wondrous works, I will meditate.
Men shall proclaim the might of Thy terrible acts,
and I will declare Thy greatness.
They shall pour forth the fame of Thy abundant goodness,
and shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.
The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The Lord is good to all,
and His compassion is over all that He has made.

All Thy works shall give thanks to Thee,
O Lord, and all Thy saints shall bless Thee!
They shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom,
and tell of Thy power,
to make known to the sons of men Thy mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of Thy kingdom.

Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and Thy dominion endures throughout all generations.

The Lord is faithful in all His words, and gracious in all His deeds.
The Lord upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.
The eyes of all look to Thee,
and Thou givest them their food in due season.
Thou openest Thy hand,
Thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

The Lord is just in all His ways,
and kind in all His doings.
The Lord is near to all who call upon Him,
to all who call upon Him in truth.
He fulfills the desire of all who fear Him,
He also hears their cry, and saves them.
The Lord preserves all who love Him;
but all the wicked He will destroy.

My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,
and let all flesh bless His holy name for ever and ever.

7. Closing prayer

For Thou lovest all things that exist,
and hast loathing for none of the things which Thou hast made,
for Thou wouldst not have made anything if Thou hadst hated it.
How would anything have endured if Thou hadst not willed it?
Or how would anything not called forth by Thee have been preserved?
Thou sparest all things, for they are Thine,
O Lord who lovest the living.
Therefore Thou dost correct little by little those who trespass,
and dost remind and warn them of the things wherein they sin,
that they may be freed from wickedness
and put their trust in Thee, O Lord.

Thou art righteous and rulest all things righteously,
deeming it alien to Thy power to condemn him
who does not deserve to be punished.
For Thy strength is the source of righteousness,
and Thy sovereignty over all causes Thee to spare all.
For Thou dost show Thy strength
when men doubt the completeness of Thy power,
and dost rebuke any insolence among those who know it.
Thou who art sovereign in strength dost judge with mildness,
and with great forbearance Thou dost govern us;
for Thou hast power to act whenever Thou dost choose.

Wisdom 11: 24-12: 2, 15-18



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

19JUL2020 - SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

With friends like this . . . we're blessed!

We tend to find what we're looking for. First Bishop of Boston John Cheverus, who died this day in 1836, always sought—and brought—friendship. Forced to flee France after his ordination because of the French Revolution, he arrived in the United States to become the trusted pastor of native peoples in Maine. Named Bishop of Boston, he drew resistance from Protestant leaders there, who later wept and protested when Cheverus was called back to France. His priests followed him, laypeople trusted him, poor families relied on him. However you lead, do it with love and friendship.

Today's readings:

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19; Romans 8:26-27; Matthew 13:24-43 ([106](#)).

“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed . . . until the whole batch was leavened.”

20JUL2020 - MEMORIAL OF APOLLINARIS, BISHOP, MARTYR

Stay the course

According to tradition, the Syrian Saint Apollinaris was made a bishop of Ravenna, Italy by Saint Peter himself. The miracles and preaching of Apollinaris won over many converts, and the Romans in charge tortured and drove him from his city multiple times, but nothing could stop him from returning to his flock, until he eventually died from his beatings. If you need help persevering in the face of great challenges, look to this early Christian leader and pray for a dose of the strength he found in staying unwaveringly true to his faith and his church.

Today's readings:

Micah 6:1-4, 6-8; Matthew 12:38-42 ([395](#)).

“There is something greater than Solomon here.”

21JUL2020 - MEMORIAL OF LAWRENCE OF BRINDISI, PRIEST, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Operate out of love

Lawrence of Brindisi, an Italian priest, surrendered everything he had to God's will. His offering consisted not only of the poverty, chastity, and obedience required of his Capuchin religious order, but also his compassion and considerable intellect. Lawrence's fluency in Latin, Hebrew, Greek, German, Bohemian, Spanish, and French meant he was tasked to translate the Bible as well as negotiate peace with other countries. None of these lofty pursuits kept him from showing love to everyone he met. May we all practice what he preached: “God is love and all his operations proceed from love.”

Today's readings:

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Matthew 12:46-50 ([396](#)).

“Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

22JUL2020 - FEAST OF MARY MAGDALENE, APOSTLE OF THE APOSTLES

Be the bearer of Good News

Contrary to the mistaken legend that arose later, Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute. She was a friend and follower of Jesus who accompanied him during his ministry and remained with him through the agony of his death. Compelled by unbearable grief, she is the first person in all four gospels to witness the empty tomb. In 2016, Pope Francis issued a decree that elevated

this day from a memorial to a feast day as he called Mary Magdalene the Apostle to the Apostles. What good news of Jesus can you bring to others today?

Today's readings:

Song of Songs 3:1-4b or 2 Corinthians 5:14-17; John 20:1-2, 11-18 ([603](#)).

“Jesus then said . . . ‘Go to my brothers and tell them . . .’ ”

23JUL2020

Your turn to keep the faith going

In today’s gospel Jesus notes that the crowd hears him but doesn’t understand. Misunderstanding the message of Jesus was a problem from the beginning, which is why we all can use help in understanding matters of faith, help that is available from the Christian community. Catholics do not isolate scripture alone as the sole basis of faith but also emphasize tradition as essential to our understanding; tradition handed on through the church. You are part of the living Body of Christ that carries on the tradition. Today recall that you help express and form the tradition through your actions—make them good ones!

Today's readings:

Jeremiah 2:1-3, 7-8, 12-13; Matthew 13:10-17 ([398](#)).

“The disciples approached Jesus and said, ‘Why do you speak to the crowd in parables?’ ”

24JUL2020 - MEMORIAL OF SHARBEL MAKHLŪF, PRIEST

Healing measures

Legend says healing might be gained by traveling to Lebanon and praying at the tomb of Sharbel Makhlūf (1828-98), a Maronite monk known for his virtue and holiness. Closer to home, there’s a mosaic shrine to Saint Sharbel located in New York City’s St. Patrick Cathedral. Throughout the world, there are more than 3 million Maronite Christians, an Eastern Catholic Church established in the fifth century and in full communion with Rome. In a world with so much illness, today is a good day to ask Saint Sharbel to lend a healing hand. And we should all do the same.

Today's readings:

Jeremiah 3:14-17; Matthew 13:18-23 ([399](#)).

“The seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it.”

25JUL2020 - FEAST OF JAMES, APOSTLE

Let the storm subside

The apostle James, along with his brother John, members of Jesus’ inner circle, were nicknamed the “sons of thunder” perhaps because of their fiery personalities. At one point in the gospels they asked Jesus if they should call “fire down from heaven” on a village that does not welcome them. Fortunately for the villagers (and for us) Jesus had a different idea of how power should be used—not for vengeance but for healing. Pray that those who wield great power in our own nation and world might take their cue on this point from Jesus rather than James.

Today's readings:

2 Corinthians 4:7-15; Matthew 20:20-28 ([605](#)).

“Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant.”