

# 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: 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

**Sunday, July 26, 2020**

*Three parables of the Kingdom of God  
Discovering the signs of God in daily life  
Matthew 13:44-52*

## 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 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

a) A division of the text as an aid to the reading:

Matthew 13:44: The parable of the hidden treasure

Matthew 13:45-46: The parable of the merchant looking for precious pearls

Matthew 13:47-50: The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea

Matthew 13:51-52: A parable to conclude the discourse of the parables

b) A key to the reading:

On this 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time we meditate on the three parables that make up the final section of the Discourse of the Parables: the hidden treasure, the merchant of precious pearls and the dragnet cast into the sea. Jesus' parables help us adjust our sight to better see the presence of the Kingdom of God in the most ordinary things of life. As we read, it would be good to keep in mind the following: "What is for me a hidden treasure, a merchant of precious pearls or a dragnet cast into the sea? How does my experience help me understand the parables of the treasure, of the pearl and of the dragnet?"

c) The Text:

44 'The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off in his joy, sells everything he owns and buys the field. 45 'Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; 46 when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it. 47 'Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that is cast in the sea and brings in a haul of all kinds of fish. 48 When it is full, the fishermen bring it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in baskets and throw away those that are of no use. 49 This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the upright, 50 to throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.



51 'Have you understood all these?' They said, 'Yes.' 52 And He said to them, 'Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old.'

### **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 struck me most? Why?
- b) In my experience of life, what do I understand by a hidden treasure, a merchant of precious pearls, or a dragnet cast into the sea?
- c) How does this experience of mine help me understand the parables of the treasure, the pearl and the dragnet?
- d) What difference is there between the parable of the treasure and that of the pearl?
- e) What does the text say about the mission to be carried out as disciples of Christ?

### **5. For those who wish to go deeper into the theme**

- a) The context of the parables told by Jesus:

The Gospels contain many parables of Jesus. Matthew even says, "All these things Jesus said to the crowd in parables and did not speak to them unless in parables" (Mt 13:34). This was a common method of teaching used in those days. It was in this way that Jesus made Himself understood by the people. In the parables, He starts from very ordinary things of life and uses them as terms of comparison to help people better understand the less known things of the Kingdom of God. In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus starts with three well-known things in the lives of people: the treasure hidden in the field, the merchant who seeks pearls, and the dragnet that fishermen cast into the sea.

- b) A commentary on the text:

Matthew 13:44: The parable of the hidden treasure

Here the term of comparison used to shed light on the things of the Kingdom of God is the treasure hidden in the field. No one knows that there is a treasure in that field. By chance, a man finds it. He did not know he was going to find it. He finds it and rejoices and gratefully welcomes the unexpected. The discovered treasure does not belong to him yet, it will be his if he succeeds in buying the field. Such were the laws in those days. So he goes, sells all he owns and buys that field. By buying the field he also acquires the treasure.

Jesus does not explain the parable. The same applies here as was said on previous occasions: "He who has ears to hear let him hear" (Mt 13:9, 43). Or: "The Kingdom of God is this. You have heard. Now try to understand!" If Jesus does not explain the parable, nor will I. This is the task for each one of us. But I would like to offer a suggestion beginning from what I have understood. The field is our life. In our lives there is no hidden treasure, no precious treasure, more precious than all else. Will anyone who comes across such a treasure give away everything that he or she owns in order to buy this treasure? Have you found it?

Matthew 13:45-46: The parable of the merchant of precious pearls

In the first parable, the term of comparison is "the treasure hidden in the field". In this parable, the accent is different. The term of comparison is not the precious pearl, but the activity, the effort of the merchant who seeks precious pearls. We all know that such pearls exist. What is important is not to know that they exist, but to seek them ceaselessly until we come across them.

Both parables have some common and some different elements. In both cases, it is about something precious: a treasure and a pearl. In both cases there is a finding of the object desired, and in both cases the person goes and sells all he owns so as to be able to buy the precious thing found. In the first parable, the finding is by chance. In the second, the finding is the result of the effort of seeking. Here we see two basic aspects of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom exists, it is hidden in life, waiting for those who will find it. The Kingdom is the result of a seeking (obtaining). These are the two basic dimensions of human life: gratitude of love that welcomes us and comes to meet us, and the faithful observance that brings us to meet the Other.

Matthew 13:47-50: The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea

Here the Kingdom is likened to a dragnet, not any kind of net, but a net cast into the sea and gathers fish of all kinds. It is something typical of the life of those who were listening, most of whom were fishermen who lived by fishing. This is an experience they are familiar with, the casting of the net that gathers all, some good and some less good. The fisherman cannot prevent the less good fish from entering the net, because he cannot control what happens in the deep waters of the sea where he drags his net. He will only know when he pulls up the net and sits with his mates to sort the fish out. Then they will separate what is worthwhile from what is worthless. Again, Jesus does not explain the parable. He just gives a hint: "This is how it will be at the end of time". Then the good will be separated from the evil.

Matthew 13:51-52: Conclusion of the discourse of parables

In Matthew's Gospel, the discourse of parables ends with a brief dialogue between Jesus and His listeners and that acts as a key to the reading of all the parables. Jesus asks, "Have you understood all these?" The people reply, "Yes!" Then Jesus concludes with these very beautiful words, "Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old". These closing words are another parable. "The things new as well as old that the householder brings out from his storeroom" are the things of the life that Jesus has just suggested in the parables: seeds cast in the field (Mt 13:4-8), the mustard seed (Mt 13:31-32), the leaven (Mt 13:33), the treasure hidden in the field (Mt 13:44), the merchant of precious pearls (Mt 13: 45-46), the dragnet cast into the sea (Mt 13:47-48). Each person's experience of these things is his or her treasure. It is in such experiences that each person finds the term of comparison that will permit him or her to understand the things of the Kingdom of God! Sometimes when the parables do not mean much to us and do not yield their message, the cause may not be a lack of study, but a lack of experience in life or a lack of depth in one's life. Those who live superficially without any depth of the experience of life, have no storeroom from which to bring out things new as well as old.

c) A deepening: The teaching of the parables

The parables of Jesus are a pedagogical device that uses daily life to show us how the things of daily life speak to us of God. The parables make reality transparent and reveal the presence and action of God. They transform one's sight into a contemplative gaze. A parable is about the things of life and thus is an open teaching that involves us. We all have experience of the things of life. The teaching in parables begins with a person's experience of common things so as to be able to understand the Kingdom: seed, salt, light, sheep, flowers, woman, children, father, net, fish, treasure, pearl, etc.

Jesus did not usually explain His parables. Generally He ended with this exhortation: "He who has ears to hear let him hear!" (Mt 11:15; 13:9, 43), or, "That's it. You've heard! Now try to understand!" Jesus left His parables open ended; He did not finish them. This is a sign that Jesus believed in the ability of people to discover the meaning of the parable starting from their own experience of life. Occasionally, at the request of His disciples, He would explain the meaning. (Mt 13:10, 36). For instance, verses 36-43 explain the parable of the wheat and the weeds. It is also possible that these explanations are the reflection of the catechesis given to the communities of first Christians. The communities met and discussed the parables of Jesus, seeking to understand what Jesus meant to say. Thus, gradually, the teaching of Jesus

started to be assimilated into the catechesis of the community and this then becomes an explanation of the parable.

## **6. Palm 19:7-14**

The Law of Yahweh is perfect

The Law of Yahweh is perfect,  
refreshment to the soul;  
the decree of Yahweh is trustworthy,  
wisdom for the simple.

The precepts of Yahweh are honest,  
joy for the heart;  
the commandment of Yahweh is pure,  
light for the eyes.

The fear of Yahweh is pure, lasting forever;  
the judgements of Yahweh are true,  
upright, every one,  
more desirable than gold,  
even than the finest gold;  
His words are sweeter than honey,  
that drips from the comb.

Thus Your servant is formed by them;  
observing them brings great reward.  
But who can detect his own failings?  
Wash away my hidden faults.  
And from pride preserve Your servant,  
never let it be my master.  
So shall I be above reproach,  
free from grave sin.

May the words of my mouth always find favor,  
and the whispering of my heart,  
in Your presence, Yahweh,  
my rock, my redeemer.

## **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.*

**26 JUL** 2020-SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## Treat the children well

Happy Parents' Day! Children are the treasure in every society. For a viable future, we have to invest deeply in their upbringing. Golden-mouthed saint John Chrysostom offered tips on child-rearing: Let the saints enter your home through the naming of your children. Teach your kids Bible stories. Raise them singing psalms and hymns. Encourage in them a bold, not timid, spirit. Disciplined self-possession will benefit them all their lives. Show them actions have consequences, now and in eternity. Finally, give more care to your children than you do for your job, home, wealth, and possessions.

### Today's readings:

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12; Romans 8:28-30; Matthew 13:44-52 ([109](#)).  
*“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field.”*

**27 JUL** 2020

## What is the parable of your life?

Jesus used a lot of parables to teach his followers—so many that his disciples asked him why. So that the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are revealed to you,” he answered. Parables offer a relatable way to understand an abstract spiritual lesson. Most of us know what it is like to plant, cook, eat, manage money, run a business, deal with relationship conflict. What Christian truths would you like your own simple life story to reveal to others? How that parable unfolds is up to you.

### Today's readings:

Jeremiah 13:1-11; Matthew 13:31-35 ([401](#)).  
*“All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables.”*

**28 JUL** 2020

## Sow the seeds of faith

Blessed Stanley Rother, a missionary and the first U.S. priest to be declared a martyr, died this day in 1981. Not only did he love and serve his flock of indigenous Guatemalans, he helped build a medical clinic, school, and radio station. But it was his upbringing as an Oklahoma farm boy that endeared him even more to his modest agricultural community—a priest who preached but also plowed their fields. As a farmer, he understood the parables of Jesus more than most: how seeds must die, how flocks need a shepherd, how the harvest requires extra help—our help. Play your part.

### Today's readings:

Jeremiah 14:17-22; Matthew 13:36-43 ([402](#)).  
*“The field is the world, the good seed the children of the Kingdom.”*

**29 JUL** 2020

MEMORIAL OF MARTHA

# Let Martha be an inspiration

We remember today a friend of Jesus who with her brother, Lazarus, and her sister, Mary, provided a home of friendship that was a place of respite for the Lord. She could prepare a meal and manage the many details of hosting a gathering of friends. She could speak her mind honestly and trust that she would be heard. She recognized that Jesus was the Messiah. She was human enough to be crabby yet faithful enough to believe that Jesus was able to bring life out of death. Saint Martha, in these challenging days, pray for us.

## Today's readings:

Jeremiah 15:10, 16-21 ([403](#)); John 11:19-27 or Luke 10:38-42 ([607](#)).  
*"Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Messiah."*

## 30 JUL 2020

# Deliver us from evil

The United Nations has declared today "World Day Against Trafficking in Persons." Church leaders have been outspoken on this global issue that targets poor and marginalized people, robbing them of their God-given dignity. In today's gospel Jesus envisions the kingdom of heaven as devoid of wickedness. Today is a good moment to oppose the wickedness of trafficking by adding your voice to the many who are committed to raising awareness and rooting out this evil.

## Today's readings:

Jeremiah 18:1-6; Matthew 13:47-53 ([404](#)).  
*"The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous."*

## 31 JUL 2020-MEMORIAL OF IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, PRIEST

# Soldier us through

Saint Ignatius of Loyola died in 1566 of Roman fever, a type of malaria. During a time of pandemic, it seems appropriate to call on the aid of a saint known for his survival instincts and spiritual prowess. After all, most thought Ignatius, a Castilian soldier, would die from injuries sustained in battle at age 30, but instead he lived another 35 years. During his time of convalescence, he experienced a spiritual conversion that led to the development of his popular *Spiritual Exercises* and the founding of the Jesuit order that has as its motto "For the greater glory of God." What can you do today, following Ignatius' example, to give God glory despite times of confinement and uncertainty?

## Today's readings:

Jeremiah 26:1-9; Matthew 13:54-58 ([405](#)).  
*"A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and in his own house."*

## 01 AUG 2020-MEMORIAL OF ALPHONSUS LIGUORI, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

# Speak plainly

Alphonsus was a bright and gifted youth, earning doctorates in both civil and canon law in Naples at 16. He was so small at the time of his graduation, he later wrote, that his doctoral robes swallowed him up, causing spectators to erupt in laughter. But faith was no laughing matter to the young man, who in short order left the legal profession and dedicated his life to the church to serve those on the margins. This brilliant doctor of the church believed in plain speech. "I have never preached a sermon which the poorest old woman in the congregation could not understand," he said. Let your own witness be simple and direct.

## Today's readings:

Jeremiah 26:11-16, 24; Matthew 14:1-12 ([406](#)).  
*"For in truth it was the LORD who sent me to you, to speak all these things for you to hear."*