

# 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: 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Sunday, August 16, 2020

*Welcoming the excluded*

*The Canaanite woman helps Jesus discover the will of the Father Matthew 15:21-28*

## 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 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 key to guide the reading:

In today's text, Jesus meets a foreign woman, something forbidden by the religion of that time. At first Jesus would not pay attention to her, but the woman insisted and got what she wanted. This text helps us to understand how Jesus went about knowing and putting into practice the will of God.

### b) A division of the text to help with the reading:

Mt 15: 21-22: The pained cry of the woman

Mt 15: 23-24: The strange silence of Jesus and the reaction of the disciples

Mt 15: 25-26: The repeated request of the woman and Jesus' renewed refusal

Mt 15: 27-28: The third try of the woman who obtains the healing of her daughter.

### c) The text:

**21-22:** Jesus left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And suddenly out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting, 'Lord, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.'

**23-24:** But He said not a word in answer to her. And His disciples went and pleaded with Him, saying, 'Give her what she wants, because she keeps shouting after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.'

**25-26:** But the woman had come up and was bowing low before Him. 'Lord,' she said, 'help me.' He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.'

**27-28:** She retorted, 'Ah yes, Lord; but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your desire be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.



### 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 caught my attention most and what did I like most in this episode?
- b) Four characters appear in the text: the woman, the daughter, the disciples and Jesus. What does the text say about each one's attitude? With which of the four do you identify yourself most? Why?
- c) Jesus says that His mission does not permit Him to listen to the woman's request. However, soon after, He grants her request. How do you explain this sudden change in Jesus' attitude?
- d) How did the woman's reply concerning the dogs and the scraps influence Jesus?
- e) Why do those words reveal the woman's great faith?
- f) How can Jesus' words help our community to grow in faith?

### 5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text.

#### a) The context within which Matthew preserves the words of Jesus:

\* Matthew's Gospel, written about 85 AD, is addressed to a community of pious and observant Jews, converted to faith in Jesus. After Jesus' example, they continued to live according to the traditions of the Jewish people, observing the Law of Moses in its fullness. But now in the 80s they find themselves in an ambivalent situation. After the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD), the Pharisees, their racial brothers, had started to reorganize Judaism, and, in the name of fidelity to that same Law of Moses, sought to block the ever increasing spread of Christianity. They came to the point of expelling them from the synagogues. This unforeseen hostility brought the community of Christian Jews into deep crisis. Both the Pharisees and the Christians claimed to be faithful to the law of God. Who was right? On whose side was God? To whom did the inheritance of the Jewish people belong, to the *synagogue* or to the *ecclesia*?

\* It is precisely to encourage and support this group of Jewish-Christians that Matthew writes his Gospel. He writes to *confirm* them in the faith by showing that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the culmination of the whole history of the Old Testament. He writes to *strengthen* them in the midst of hostility, helping them to overcome the trauma of the break with the brothers. He writes to *call* them to a new practice of life, showing them the way to a new form of justice, better than that of the Pharisees.

\* In this context, the episode of the Canaanite woman served to show the community how this same Jesus took concrete steps to go beyond the limitations of a religion turned in on itself and how He went about discerning the will of God beyond the traditional scheme.

#### b) A commentary on the words of Jesus as preserved in Matthew:

Matthew 15: 21: *Jesus moves away from the Jewish territory.*

In the discussion concerning what is pure and what is not, Jesus had taught that which was contrary to the tradition of the ancients, declaring all foods to be clean, and helped the people and the disciples free themselves of the chains of the laws on purity (Mt 15:1-20). Now, in this episode of the Canaanite woman, He moves away from Galilee, goes beyond the frontiers of the national territory and welcomes a foreign woman who did not belong to the people and with whom it was forbidden to talk. The Gospel of Mark informs us that Jesus did not want to be known. He wanted to remain anonymous. But it is evident that His fame had already preceded Him (Mk 7:24). The people knew Him and a woman begins to present Him with a request.

Matthew 15:22: *The anguished cry of the woman.*

The woman was from another race and religion. She begins to beg for the healing of her daughter who was possessed by an unclean spirit. The pagans had no problem having recourse to Jesus. The Jews, however, had problems co-existing with the pagans! The Law forbade them to make contact with a person of another religion or race.

Matthew 15:23-24: *The strange silence of Jesus and the reaction of the disciples.*

The woman shouts, but Jesus does not respond. A strange attitude! Because, if there is one sure thing throughout the Bible, from beginning to end, it is that God always listens to the cry of the oppressed. But here Jesus does not listen. He does not want to listen. Why? Even the disciples are surprised by Jesus' attitude and ask Him to say something to the woman. They want to get rid of that shouting: "Give her what she wants, they said, because she is shouting after us". Jesus explains His silence, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel". His silence is connected to an awareness of His mission and His fidelity to the law of God. The passive form shows that the subject of the verb's action is the Father. It is as though He had said, "The Father does not want Me to listen to this woman, because He has sent Me only to the lost sheep of Israel!" For the same reason, at the time of Matthew's writing of the Gospel, the Pharisees were saying, "We cannot have contact with pagans!"

Matthew 15:25-26: *The woman repeats her request and Jesus again refuses her.*

The woman is not worried by Jesus' refusal. The love of a mother for her sick daughter does not take notice of religious rules or other people's reactions, but seeks healing wherever her intuition leads her to a solution, namely, in Jesus! She draws closer. She throws herself at Jesus' feet and goes on begging, "Lord, help me". Faithful to the rules of His religion, Jesus answers with a parable and says that it is not right to take the bread of one's children and give it to dogs. The parallel is taken from everyday life. Even today, we find many children and dogs in the houses of the poor. Jesus says that no mother will take bread from the mouths of her children and give it to dogs. Concretely, the children are the Jewish people and the dogs are the pagans. End of story! Obedient to the Father and faithful to His mission, Jesus goes on His way and takes no notice of the woman's pleading!

Matthew 15:27-28: *At the third attempt, the woman obtains the healing of her daughter.*

The woman will not yield. She agrees with Jesus, but she amplifies the parallel and applies it to her case, "Ah, yes, sir; but even house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table". She simply draws the conclusion from that image, showing that in the houses of the poor (and so also in the house of Jesus) the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of the children. Most probably, Jesus Himself as a young boy would have given bits of bread to dogs that roamed under the table where He ate with His parents. And in "Jesus' house", that is, in the Christian community of Matthew's time, at the end of the first century, there were "twelve baskets full" left over (Mt 14:20) for the "dogs", that is, for the pagans! Jesus' reaction is immediate, "Woman, you have great faith!" The woman got what she asked for. From that moment her daughter was healed. The reason Jesus responded was that He understood that the Father wanted Him to grant the woman's request. The meeting with the Canaanite woman freed Him from the racial prison and opened Him to the whole of humanity. This means that Jesus discovered the will of the Father by listening to the reactions of people. This pagan woman's attitude opened new horizons for Jesus and helped Him take an important step in the fulfillment of the Father's plan. The gift of life and salvation is for all who seek life and who try to free themselves from the chains that bind vital energy. This episode helps us to perceive a little of the mystery that surrounded the person of Jesus, the manner in which He was in communion with the Father and how He discovered the will of the Father in the events of life.

## **6. Psalm 6**

**Let us unite ourselves to the shouts of all mothers  
for their sons and daughters**

O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy anger,  
nor chasten me in Thy wrath.  
Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;  
O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled.  
My soul also is sorely troubled.  
But Thou, O Lord, how long?  
Turn, O Lord, save my life;  
deliver me for the sake of Thy steadfast love.  
For in death there is no remembrance of Thee;  
in Sheol who can give Thee praise?  
I am weary with my moaning;  
every night I flood my bed with tears;  
I drench my couch with my weeping.  
My eye wastes away because of grief,  
it grows weak because of all my foes,  
from me, all you workers of evil;  
for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.  
The Lord has heard my supplication;  
the Lord accepts my prayer.  
All my enemies shall be ashamed and sorely troubled;  
they shall turn back, and be put to shame in a moment.

## **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.*

**16AUG**2020-TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## Believe outside the box

A natural tension exists between the familiar and unfamiliar, the neighbor and stranger, our kind and every other kind. Even Jesus seems initially to have limited his mission to “the lost sheep” of Israel. A clever woman, a Canaanite, persuades him to think outside the box on this issue. Later, Saint Paul abandons the box altogether, taking the gospel to the Gentiles outright. We’re the beneficiaries of that decision. These days, as we wrestle with how much we’re obliged to share our land and its richness with others, we might consider the crumbs that fell from the table to us.

### Today's readings:

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7; Romans 11:13-15, 29-32; Matthew 15:21-28 ([118](#)).

*“It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.”*

**17AUG**2020

## Be a good steward

When it comes to Christian stewardship, there’s an awful lot we are supposed to take care of—the whole world to be exact! Pope Francis said, “In the end, everything has been entrusted to our protection, and all of us are responsible for it. Be protectors of God’s gifts!” The key to stewardship is remembering that it’s not ownership—your talents, your treasure, all of creation were bestowed on you. Show your gratitude to God by using them responsibly and sharing them with others lovingly and generously.

### Today's readings:

Ezekiel 24:15-24; Matthew 19:16-22 ([419](#)).

*“Sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.”*

**18AUG**2020

## Build a human economy

People’s livelihoods have been hit by COVID-19’s closure of workplaces. Protests over racial inequality shine an unforgiving light on economic inequality. The Catholic Church has a lot to say about how the economy should work to promote the common good. The Catechism of the Catholic Church denounces two economic extremes—communism’s centralized control, but also capitalism’s tendency to make individualism and the market into modern-day idols. Above all, let us remember what the U.S. Catholic Bishops [have written](#): “The economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy. . . . A fundamental moral measure of any economy is how the poor and vulnerable are faring.” Keep that in mind as you make big and small economic decisions.

### Today's readings:

Ezekiel 28:1-10; Matthew 19:23-30 ([420](#)).

*“By your great wisdom applied to your trading you have heaped up your riches.”*

**19AUG**2020-MEMORIAL OF JOHN EUDES, PRIEST

## Beyond thank you

Today is World Humanitarian Day, a day established in 2018 by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the safety and security of humanitarian aid workers who step up in times of crises. If ever there is a year for us to honor and advocate for such workers, it is this year. As the world has faced a global pandemic, we have been challenged more than ever to recognize the essential workers in our midst who have risked their lives for our well-being. Today is a good day to think about ways to support

humanitarian workers beyond a simple thank you through a donation, a call of advocacy to an elected official, or joining alongside them in their work.

**Today's readings:**

Ezekiel 34:1-11; Matthew 20:1-16 ([421](#)).

*"The last shall be first and the first shall be last."*

## 20AUG 2020-MEMORIAL OF BERNARD, ABBOT, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

### Faithful through thick and thin

Today is the Memorial of Bernard of Clairvaux, whose impact on Europe in the 12th century was profound and whose influence lives on worldwide in Cistercian monasteries and Catholic theology. He was a scholar (whose books are still readily available), a skilled arbitrator, mystic, monk, reformer, and leader of Europe's second crusade (a violent venture that ended badly). Through his successes and mistakes, Bernard of Clairvaux aimed to follow Jesus. We are called to do the same. Do one thing today that puts your heart, mind, or skills to the service of God.

**Today's readings:**

Ezekiel 36:23-28; Matthew 22:1-14 ([422](#)).

*"Tell those invited: 'Behold, I have prepared my banquet, my calves and fattened cattle are killed, and everything is ready; come to the feast.'"*

## 21AUG 2020-MEMORIAL OF PIUS X, POPE

### The right of kings that was wrong

Shortly after the turn of the 20th century, Giuseppe Sarto was elected Pope Pius X, but not without controversy. The leading vote-getter of the papal conclave was Mariano Rampolla, but Polish Cardinal Jan Kosielsko exercised a veto in the name of Emperor Franz Joseph. That swung the vote to Sarto. It was the last time a reigning monarch exercised a longstanding right of veto in a papal conclave. Government interference in church leadership has always been an issue, though today less so in most (though not all) parts of the world. Pray for a worldwide church that answers to only one Lord, Jesus.

**Today's readings:**

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Matthew 22:34-40 ([423](#)).

*"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."*

## 22AUG 2020-MEMORIAL OF THE QUEENSHIP OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

### She wears her crown well

Though queenship is a concept quite foreign to a democratic society (especially one that threw off royal rulership at its founding!), when applied to Mary it can be understood as an expression of the Holy Mother's central role in the reign of God. Though today's feast, established in 1954, is quite recent in terms of the larger sweep of church history, associations of Mary with queenship go back to the angel Gabriel's announcement that Mary's son would inherit the throne of King David. Allow Mary to reign in your heart, especially at times when you are called on to take a leap of faith, as Mary certainly was when Gabriel revealed her mission to her.

**Today's readings:**

Ezekiel 43:1-7b; Matthew 23:1-12 ([424](#)).

*"Son of man, this is where my throne shall be."*