

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: 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Sunday, August 23, 2020

Peter, you are the rock!

Rock of support, Rock of obstacle

Matthew 16:13-20

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 to help in the reading:

Matthew 16:13-14: Jesus wants to know the opinion of the people

Matthew 16:15-16: Jesus challenges the disciples, and Peter responds in the name of all

Matthew 16:17-20: Solemn response of Jesus to Peter

b) Key for the reading:

In the Gospel of this Sunday, Jesus questions concerning who people think He is: "Who do people say that I am?" After learning the opinion of the people, He wants to know the opinion of His disciples. Peter, in the name of all, makes his profession of faith. Jesus confirms Peter's faith. In the course of the reading, let us pay attention to what follows: "Which type of confirmation does Jesus confer on Peter?"

c) The Text:

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi He put this question to His disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of man is?' 14 And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 15 'But you,' He said, 'who do you say I am?' 16 Then Simon Peter spoke up and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' 17 Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a blessed man! It was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. 18 So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my community. And the gates of the underworld can never overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' 20 Then He gave the disciples strict orders not to tell anyone that He was the Christ.



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) Which is the point which struck you the most? Why?
- b) What are the opinions of people concerning Jesus? What is the opinion of the disciples and of Peter concerning Jesus?
- c) What is my opinion concerning Jesus? Who am I for Jesus?
- d) Peter is **rock** in two ways. Which? (Mt 16:21-23)
- e) What type of **rock** am I for others? What type of rock is our community?
- f) In the text there are many opinions concerning Jesus and several ways of expressing faith. Today, also there are many diverse opinions concerning Jesus. Which are the opinions of our community concerning Jesus? What mission results for us from this?

5. For those who wish to deepen more into the theme

a) Context in which our text appears in the Gospel of Matthew:

* The conversation between Jesus and Peter receives diverse interpretations and even opposite ones in the several Christian Churches. In the Catholic Church, this is the foundation for the primacy of Peter. This is why, without, in fact, diminishing the significance of the text, it is convenient to place it in the context of the Gospel of Matthew, in which, in other texts, the same qualities conferred on Peter are almost all, attributed to other persons. They do not belong exclusively to Peter.

* It is always well to keep in mind that the Gospel of Matthew was written at the end of the first century for the community of the converted Jews who lived in the region of Galilee and Syria. They were communities which suffered and were victims of many doubts concerning their faith in Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew tries to help them to overcome the crisis and to confirm them in faith in Jesus, the Messiah, who came to fulfill the promises of the Old Testament.

b) Commentary on the text:

Matthew 15:13-16: *The opinions of the people and of the disciples concerning Jesus.*

Jesus asks the opinion of the people and of His disciples concerning Himself. The answers are quite varied: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the Prophets. When Jesus questions about the opinion of His own disciples, Peter becomes the spokesman and says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" Peter's answer signifies that he recognizes in Jesus the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Old Testament and that in Jesus we have the definitive revelation of the Father for us. This confession of Peter is not new. First, after having walked on the water, the other disciples had already made the same profession of faith: "Truly You are the Son of God!" (Mt 14:33). In the Gospel of John, Martha makes this same profession of Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of God who has come into the world" (Jn 11:27).

Matthew 16: 17: *Jesus' reply to Peter: "Blessed are you, Peter!"*

Jesus proclaims Peter as "Blessed!" because he has received a revelation from the Father. In this case also, Jesus' response is not new. First Jesus had made an identical proclamation of joy to the disciples for having seen and heard things which before nobody knew (Mt 13:16), and had praised the Father for having revealed the Son to little ones and not to the wise (Mt 11:25). Peter is one of these little ones to whom the Father reveals Himself. The perception of the presence of God in Jesus does not come "from

the flesh nor from the blood”, that is, it is not the fruit of the merit of a human effort, but rather it is a gift which God grants to whom He wants.

Matthew 16:18-20: *the attributions of Peter*

Peter receives three attributions from Jesus: (i) *To be a rock of support*, (ii) *to receive the keys of the Kingdom*, and (iii) *to be foundation of the Church*.

i) To be Rock: Simon, the son of Jonah, receives from Jesus a new name which is Cephas, and that means Rock. This is why he is called Peter. Peter has to be **Rock**, that is, he has to be a sure foundation for the Church so that the gates of the underworld can never overpower it. With these words from Jesus to Peter, Matthew encourages the communities of Syria and Palestine, which are suffering and are the victims of persecutions, to see in Peter a leader on whom to find support, to base themselves concerning their origin. In spite of being weak and persecuted communities, they had a secure basis, guaranteed by the word of Jesus. At that time, the communities had very strong affective bonds with the persons who had begun, who were at the origin of the community. Thus, the community of Syria and Palestine fostered their bond of union with the person of Peter, the community of Greece with the person of Paul, some communities of Asia with the person of the Beloved disciple and others with the person of John of the Apocalypse. Identifying themselves with these leaders of their origin helped the communities to foster their identity and spirituality better. But this could also be a cause of dispute, as in the case of the community of Corinth (1 Cor 1:11-12).

To be *rock* as the basis of faith evokes the Word of God to the people who are in exile in Babylonia: “Listen to Me you who pursue saying injustice, you who seek Yahweh. Consider the rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug. Consider Abraham your father, and Sarah who gave you birth; when I called him, he was the only one, but I blessed him and made him numerous” (Isa 51:1-2). Applied to Peter, this quality of *peter-foundation* indicates a new beginning of the people of God.

ii) The keys of the Kingdom: Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom to bind and to loosen, that is, to reconcile the persons among themselves and with God. Behold, that here again the same power to bind and to loosen, is given not only to Peter, but also to the other disciples (Jn 20:23) and to their own communities (Mt 18:18). One of the points on which the Gospel of Matthew insists more is reconciliation and forgiveness (Mt 5:7, 23-24, 38, 42-48; 6:14-15:35). In the years 80’s and 90’s, in Syria, because of faith in Jesus, there were many tensions in the communities and there were divisions in the families. Some accepted Him as Messiah and others did not, and this was the cause for many tensions and conflicts. Matthew insists on reconciliation. Reconciliation was and continues to be one of the most important tasks of the coordinators of the communities at present. Imitating Peter, they have to bind and loosen, that is, do everything possible so that there be reconciliation, mutual acceptance, building up of the true fraternity “Seventy times seven!” (Mt 18:22).

iii) The Church: The word **Church**, in Greek **eclésia**, appears 105 times in the New Testament, almost exclusively in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Letters, only three times in the Gospels, and once only in the Gospel of Matthew. The word literally means “convoked” or “chosen”. It indicates the people who get together convoked by the Word of God, and who seek to live the message of the Kingdom which Jesus came to bring to us. The Church or the community is not the Kingdom, but an instrument or an indication of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is much greater. In the Church, in the community, what happens when a human group allows God *to reign* and allows God to be ‘Lord’ in one’s life, should be rendered present to the eyes of all.

c) Deepening:

i) A picture of Saint Peter:

Peter, who was a fisherman of fish, became fisherman of men (Mk 1:17). He was married (Mk 1:30). He was a good man, very human. He was a natural leader among the twelve first disciples of Jesus. Jesus

respects this leadership and makes Peter the animator of His first community (Jn 21:17). Before entering into the community of Jesus, Peter was called *Simão Bar Jona* (Mt 16:17), that is, Simon, son of Jonah. Jesus calls him *Cefas or Rock* (Jn 1:42), who later becomes *Peter* (Lk 6:14).

By his nature and character, Peter could be everything, except *pietra – rock*. He was courageous in speaking, but in the moment of danger he allows himself to be dominated by fear and flees. For example, the time in which Jesus walked on the sea, Peter asks, “Jesus, allow me also to walk on the sea”. Jesus says: “You may come, Peter!” Peter got off from the boat and walked on the sea. But as soon as he saw a high wave, he was taken with panic, lost trust, and began to sink and cry out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus assured him and saved him (Mt 14: 28-31).

In the Last Supper, Peter tells Jesus, “I will never deny You, Lord!” (Mk 14:31), but a few hours later, in the Palace of the High Priest, in front of a servant, when Jesus had already been arrested, Peter denied, swearing that he had nothing to do with Jesus (Mk 14:66-72).

When Jesus is in the Garden of Olives, Peter takes out the sword (Jn 18:10), but ends fleeing, leaving Jesus alone. (Mk 14:50). By nature, Peter was not rock!

But this Peter, so weak and human, so similar to us, becomes rock, because Jesus prays for him and says, “Peter, I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail, and once you have recovered, you in your turn must strengthen your brothers!” (Lk 22: 31-32). This is why Jesus could say, “You are Peter and on this rock I will build My Church” (Mt 16:18). Jesus helps him to be *rock*. After the Resurrection, in Galilee, Jesus appears to Peter and asks him two times, “Peter, do you love Me?” And Peter responds twice, “Lord, you know that I love you!” (Jn 21:15, 16). When Jesus repeats the same question a third time, Peter becomes sad. Perhaps he remembered that he had denied Jesus three times. To this third question he answers: “Lord, you know all things! You know that I love You very much!” And it is then that Jesus entrusted to him the care of His sheep, saying, “Peter, feed My lambs!” (Jn 21:17). With the help of Jesus, the firmness of the rock grows in Peter and is revealed on the day of Pentecost.

On the day of Pentecost, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, Peter opens the door of the room where all were meeting together, locked with a key because of fear of the Jews (Jn 20:19), he takes courage and begins to announce to the people the Good News of Jesus (Acts 2:14-40). And he did not stop doing it! Thanks to this courageous announcement of the Resurrection, he was imprisoned (Acts 4:3). During the trial, he was forbidden to announce the Good News (Acts 4:18), but Peter does not obey this prohibition. He says, “We know that we have to obey God more than men!” (Acts 4: 19; 5:29). He was arrested again (Acts 5:18-26). He was tortured (Acts 5:40). But he says, “Thank you. But we shall continue!” (cf. Acts 5:42).

Tradition says that, towards the end of his life, in Rome, Peter was arrested and condemned to death, and death on the cross. He asked to be crucified with his head down. He believed he was not worthy to die like Jesus. Peter was faithful to himself up to the end!

ii) Completing the context: Matthew 16:21-23

Peter had confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” He had imagined a glorious Messiah, and Jesus corrects him: “It is necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to die in Jerusalem”. By saying that “it is necessary”, He indicates that suffering has already been foreseen in the prophecies (Isa 53:2-8). If Peter accepts Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, he has to accept Him also as the servant Messiah who will be put to death: not only the triumph of the glory, but **also** the journey to the cross! But Peter does not accept the correction and seeks to dissuade Him.

Jesus’ response is surprising: “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do”. Satan is the one who separates us from the path which God has traced for us. Literally, Jesus says, “Get behind Me” (Get away!). Peter wanted to place

himself in front and indicate the direction. Jesus says, “Get behind Me!” He who indicates the course and direction is not Peter, but Jesus. *The disciple* has **to follow** the Master. He has to live in continuous conversion.

The Word of Jesus is also a reminder for all those who guide or direct a community. They have “to follow” Jesus and not place themselves in front of Him as Peter wanted to do. No, only they can indicate the direction or the route. Otherwise, like Peter, they are not **rock of support**, but they become a **rock of obstacle**. Thus were some of the leaders of the communities at the time of Matthew, full of ambiguity. Thus, it also happens among us even today!

6. Psalm 121

The Lord is my support

I lift up my eyes to the mountains;
where is my help to come from?
My help comes from Yahweh
who made heaven and earth.

May He save your foot from stumbling;
may He, your guardian, not fall asleep!
You see -- He neither sleeps nor slumbers,
the guardian of Israel.

Yahweh is your guardian, your shade,
Yahweh, at your right hand.
By day the sun will not strike you,
nor the moon by night.
Yahweh guards you from all harm.
Yahweh guards your life.
Yahweh guards your comings and goings,
henceforth and for ever.

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.

23 AUG 2020-TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

What is to be healed must first be acknowledged

Today, on the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and Its Abolition, we seek forgiveness for what's been called the “original sin” of our nation: seeing people of color as exploitable resources. Generations of slaveholders were unrepentant about horrific acts they deemed to be entirely moral. The sin of racism that made such attitudes possible has been condemned heartily by the church in more recent generations—though some church leaders in generations past were late coming to that perspective as slaveholders themselves. If racism is to be overcome, we each have confessions to make, repentance to do, and voices to raise.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 22:19-23; Romans 11:33-36; Matthew 16:13-20 ([121](#)).

“The LORD is exalted, yet the lowly he sees, and the proud he knows from afar.”

24 AUG 2020-FEAST OF BARTHOLOMEW, APOSTLE

Take your place

Bartholomew gets only a mere mention as one of the 12 apostles in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and is believed to have been the one called Nathanael in the Gospel of John. But what does a name matter, when Jesus knows you, and knows your character, before you even meet? The “greater things” to come that Jesus promised Bartholomew didn't include the glory of a leading role in salvation history, since little else is known about him, but did include being a firsthand witness to God's glory. There's a front-row seat waiting for you, too.

Today's readings:

Revelation 21:9b-14; John 45-51 ([629](#)).

“Here is a true child of Israel. There is no duplicity in him.”

25 AUG 2020-MEMORIAL OF LOUIS

A royal example of God's kingdom

No wonder Saint Louis is the patron saint of the Franciscan Secular Order. He used his position in the world—as King Louis the IX of France—to help build the kingdom of God. Like Francis of Assisi, Louis fed lepers and beggars, usually waiting on them himself. He built hospitals and orphanages to take care of his people. He was committed to being a just ruler: “upholding the cause of the poor.” Pray such a priority might overshadow partisan politics among policy makers.

Today's readings:

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3a, 14-17; Matthew 23:23-26 ([426](#)).

“Cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean.”

26 AUG 2020

Keep it real

Hypocrisy is the “practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one's own behavior does not conform.” Jesus made it clear that he had no patience with such duplicity, as he called out those who spent more time criticizing the religious practices of others rather than living his law of love. Examine your attitudes and words today to see how often critical judgment of

others is your prevailing state of mind. The list of small critiques, like little pinpricks, can easily deflate a joyful spirit. Ask for the grace to be centered in Divine love.

Today's readings:

2 Thessalonians 3:6-10, 16-18; Matthew 23:27-32 ([427](#)).

“Even so, on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing. Woe to you, . . . you hypocrites.”

27 AUG 2020-MEMORIAL OF MONICA

Stick-to-itiveness pays off

Saint Monica, one of a relatively small number of African saints, is typically described as Saint Augustine's long-suffering mother, who prayed, cajoled, and urged him to abandon his wayward life and embrace Christianity, which he eventually did. Her own intellectual and leadership abilities are unrecorded except as they influenced her family members, but her story of persistence and strength continues to inspire. Many in the church uphold her as a model of enduring faith. If you feel like quitting when faced by a difficult problem or problematic family member, pray to Saint Monica for wisdom and perseverance.

Today's readings:

1 Corinthians 1:1-9; Matthew 24:42-51 ([428](#)).

“Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Stay awake!’”

28 AUG 2020-MEMORIAL OF AUGUSTINE, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

A sin for the ages

In his theological work *The City of God*, Saint Augustine (354-430) proposed that slavery, an accepted practice of his day, was sinful and did more harm to the slaveholder than the enslaved person. Although Augustine's sentiment may have seemed enlightened for its time, slavery, particularly among poor people and people of color, continues to this day in various forms around the world. We can see the evil that racism perpetuates. All of humanity is straining under the weight of this sin. It is time for each of us to “open wide our hearts,” as the U.S. bishops advised in their [2018 pastoral letter on racism](#). We do well to have a first (or fresh) look at it today.

Today's readings:

1 Corinthians 1:17-25; Matthew 25:1-13 ([429](#)).

“Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

29 AUG 2020-MEMORIAL OF THE PASSION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Bravely lead the way

Speaking up—when staying silent would have been easy—cost John the Baptist his earthly life, though it gained him a special place in the heavenly pantheon. He stands as a unique witness to the coming of the Lord, and along with Jesus and Mary, is the only individual honored with multiple feasts in the liturgical calendar. You may not always risk death to speak out against injustice, but it does take courage and a sense of duty to something greater than yourself. Let John the Baptist be the inspiration you need to be a prophetic voice.

Today's readings:

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 ([430](#)); Mark 6:17-29 ([634](#)).

“When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.”