

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: 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Sunday, September 13, 2020

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 division of the text to help with the reading:

Matthew 18:21: Peter's question

Matthew 18:22: Jesus' reply

Matthew 18:23-26: 1st part of the parable

Matthew 18:27-30: 2nd part of the parable

Matthew 18:31-35: 3rd part of the parable

b) A key to the reading:

In the Gospel of the 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Jesus tells us of the need to forgive our brothers and sisters. It is not easy to forgive. There are some offences and insults that go on hurting us. Some say, "I forgive, but I do not forget." I cannot forget! Resentment, tensions, different opinions, provocations make it difficult to forgive and be reconciled. Why is forgiving so difficult? Do I create a space in my family, my community, my work and my relationships for reconciliation and forgiveness? How? Let us meditate on the third part of the "Sermon on the Community" (Mt 18:21-35), where Matthew puts together the sayings and parables of Jesus on limitless forgiveness. As you read, think of yourself and try to look back on your life.

c) The text:

21 Then Peter went up to Him and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?' 22 Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times. 23 'And so the kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. 24 When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; 25 he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. 26 At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet, with the words, "Be patient with me and I will pay the whole sum."

27 And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. 28 Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow-servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by



the throat and began to throttle him, saying, "Pay what you owe me." 29 His fellow-servant fell at his feet and appealed to him, saying, "Be patient with me and I will pay you." 30 But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 His fellow-servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him. 32 Then the master sent for the man and said to him, "You wicked servant, I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. 33 Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow-servant just as I had pity on you?" 34 And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. 35 And that is how My heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.'

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 part of the parable struck you most? Why?
- b) What counsels does Jesus give us to help us reconcile and forgive?
- c) Looking in the mirror of the parable, with which character do I identify myself most: the king who wants to audit his servants or with the forgiven servant who does not want to forgive his companion?
- d) Looking at the present situation of our family, our community, our church, our society and our world, is there among us a space for forgiveness and reconciliation so that reconciliation spreads among us? Where do we need to begin so that reconciliation may spread among us?

5. For those who wish to go deeper into the text

a) The context within which our text is placed in Matthew's Gospel:

- The comparison that Jesus uses to show the obligation to forgive and be reconciled brings together parable and allegory. When Jesus speaks of the King who wants to settle his accounts with his servants, He is thinking of God who forgives all. When He speaks of the debt of the servant forgiven by the King, He is thinking of our huge debt with God who always forgives us. When He speaks of the attitude of the forgiven servant who will not forgive, he is thinking of us, forgiven by God, but who will not forgive our brothers and sisters.

- At the end of the first century, the Judeo-Christians of the communities of Syria and Palestine had serious and grave problems of reconciliation with the brothers and sisters of the same race. At the time of the great disaster of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the 70's, both the *Synagogue* and the *Ecclesia* were trying to reorganize themselves in the regions of Syria and Palestine. That is why there was a great and growing tension between them that was the source of much suffering within families. This tension is the background to Matthew's Gospel.

b) A commentary on the text:

Matthew 18:21: Peter's question: how many times forgive?

On hearing Jesus' words on reconciliation, Peter asks: "How often must I forgive? Seven times?" Seven is a number indicating perfection and, in the case of Peter's proposal, seven is synonymous with *always*.

Matthew 18:22: Jesus' reply: seventy times seven!

Jesus sees further. He eliminates any possible limitation to forgiveness: "Not seven, but seventy times seven!" There is no proportion between the forgiveness we receive from God and our forgiving our brother and sister. So as to make His reply to Peter clear, Jesus tells a parable. It is the parable of limitless forgiveness!

Matthew 18:23-26: The first part of the parable: the situation of the debtor

When He speaks of the King, Jesus is thinking of God. A servant owes the king ten thousand talents, that is, 164 tons of gold. The servant says he will pay. But even if he worked the whole of his life, he, his wife, his children and all his family, he would not be able to acquire 164 tons of gold to pay back the king. In other words, we shall never be in a position to pay back our debt with God. Impossible! (cf. Psalm 49:8-9).

Matthew 18:27-30: The second part of the parable: The great contrast

At the servant's insistence, the king forgives him his debt of 164 tons of gold. A fellow servant owes him a hundred denarii, that is, 30 grams of gold. There is no comparison between the two debts! A grain of sand and a mountain! Before God's love that freely forgives our debt of 164 tons of gold, it is only just that we should forgive a debt of 30 grams of gold. But the forgiven servant would not forgive, not even at the insistence of the debtor. He behaves towards his fellow servant the way the king should have behaved towards him but did not: he ordered that he be thrown in jail until the debt of 30 grams of gold was paid! The contrast speaks for itself and needs no commentary!

Matthew 18:23-35: The third part of the parable: the moral of the story

The shameful attitude of the forgiven servant who will not forgive strikes even his mates. They report him to the king and the king acts accordingly: he puts into motion the procedure of justice and the forgiven servant who in turn would not forgive, is thrown into jail, where he will stay until his debt is paid! He should still be there today! He will never be able to pay 164 tons of gold! The moral of the parable: "This is how My Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart!" The only limit to the free mercy of God who always forgives us is our refusal to forgive the brother and sister! (Mt 18:34; 6:12:15; Lk 23:34).

c) A deepening: Forgiving after 11 September 2001!

On 11 September 2001, a group of terrorists flew two planes into the two towers of New York and killed more than three thousand persons while shouting "Holy War!" The immediate cry in reply was: "Crusade". Both sides used the name of God to legitimize violence. No one recalled the saying: "Seventy times seven!" And one of the sides calls itself Christian!

On the occasion of the war in Iraq, Pope John Paul II shouted at a public audience, "War is Satanic!", and invited all to fight for peace. At an ecumenical meeting of representatives of Jews and Muslims in Jerusalem in 2000, the Pope said, "We cannot call on the name of God to legitimize violence!"

The last sentence of the Old Testament through which the people of God entered the New Testament and that expresses the nucleus of its messianic hope for reconciliation, is the oracle of the prophet Malachi: "Lo, I will send Elijah, the prophet, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with doom" (Mal 3:23). To turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers, means to rebuild relationships between persons. There will be no future of peace unless we make a great effort at rebuilding human relationships in the small nucleus, that is, in the family and in the community. The community is where families meet to preserve and pass on the values that they hold.

Indifference came into the world with the first-born of the first union: Cain who kills Abel (Gen 4:8). This indifference has grown with double vengeance. Cain will be avenged sevenfold, but Lamech seventy times sevenfold (Gen 4:24). Peter wants to undo the error and proposes a reconciliation of seven times (Mt 18:21). But his proposal is weak. It does not go to the root of violence. Jesus goes much further and demands seventy times seven (Mt 18:22). To this day, and especially today, reconciliation is the most urgent task for us, followers of Jesus. It is worthwhile remembering Jesus' warning: "*That is how My Father will deal with you unless you each forgive the brother from your heart!*" **Seventy times seven!**

6. Prayer: Psalm 62

God our only hope

In God alone there is rest for my soul,
from Him comes my safety;
He alone is my rock, my safety,
my stronghold so that I stand unshaken.
How much longer will you set on a victim,
all together, intent on murder,
like a rampart already leaning over,
a wall already damaged?
Trickery is their only plan,
deception their only pleasure,
with lies on their lips they pronounce a blessing,
with a curse in their hearts.

Rest in God alone, my soul!
He is the source of my hope.
He alone is my rock, my safety, my stronghold,
so that I stand unwavering.
In God is my safety and my glory,
the rock of my strength.
In God is my refuge;
trust in Him, you people, at all times.
Pour out your hearts to Him,
God is a refuge for us.

Ordinary people are a mere puff of wind,
important people a delusion;
set both on the scales together,
and they are lighter than a puff of wind.
Put no trust in extortion,
no empty hopes in robbery;
however much wealth may multiply,
do not set your heart on it.
Once God has spoken,
twice have I heard this:
Strength belongs to God,
to You, Lord, faithful love;
and You repay everyone as their deeds deserve.

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 that which 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.

13SEP₂₀₂₀ - TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Share the wealth

Jesus tells the parable of the servant forgiven his large debt who then refuses to forgive a small debt owed him. How could we not forgive others, when God has forgiven us so much? Someone always raises the objection that you can't let someone who kicked you once have another go at it. But that is not what Jesus is asking us to do. He's not asking us to be fools. He's reminding us we're all deep in the red with a debt we can't possibly repay. Be grateful we don't have to.

Today's readings:

Sirach 27:30—28:7; Romans 14:7-9; Matthew 18:21-35 ([130](#)).

“Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?”

14SEP₂₀₂₀ - FEAST OF THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

Cross purposes

It might seem strange to non-believers that the instrument of our savior's torture and execution is the symbol of our faith. But believers know that the cross represents Christ's defeat of death; the symbol is one of triumph. The entrance antiphon for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross is: "We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is our salvation, our life and our resurrection: through him we are saved and made free." Reflect on how the crosses you've borne in your own life have also led to freedom.

Today's readings:

Numbers 21:4b-9; Philippians 2:6-11; John 3:13-17 ([638](#)).

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.”

15SEP₂₀₂₀ - MEMORIAL OF OUR LADY OF SORROWS

Pray for us, Mother of God

Yesterday was the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Today, in connection, we remember Mary as Our Lady of Sorrows. Many saints and poets have tried to convey the weight of Mary's pain. But it's Romanos the Melodist who, in the 500s, wrote the "Hymn of Mary at the Cross." In it, Jesus reveals to his mother the redemptive power of his suffering—plus, her role as our intercessor. He says: "Run, Mother, announce to all that 'By suffering he strikes the one who hates Adam, and as victor he is coming.'" How can Our Mother pray for you today?

Today's readings:

1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27-31a ([444](#)); John 19:25-27 or Luke 2:33-35 ([639](#)).

“Behold, your mother.”

16SEP₂₀₂₀ - MEMORIAL OF CORNELIUS, POPE, AND CYPRIAN, BISHOP, MARTYRS

Let compassion prevail

The third century was a terrible time of persecution for Christians, some of whom had either to deny their faith or face death. Some rather understandably denied the faith in order to survive, but when persecutions lifted, asked to return. Their desire for reconciliation caused an uproar. Pope Cornelius faced strong challenges because he believed they should be allowed to return after a period of penance. His friend and brother bishop, the learned Cyprian, sided with him in this decision. Their compassionate response prevailed. Both men ended up giving their lives for the faith as Cornelius died in exile in 253 and Cyprian was martyred under the Emperor Valerian in 258. Follow the lead of these two early Christians and let compassion have the last word.

Today's readings:

1 Corinthians 12:31—13:13; Luke 7:31-35 ([445](#)).

“Love does not brood over injury.”

17 SEP 2020

 - MEMORIAL OF ROBERT BELLARMINE, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Live in peace to rest in peace

Today is the Memorial of Saint Robert Bellarmine, a Jesuit theologian and doctor of the church. His scholarly work inserted him into a number of the controversies of his day (late 1500s to early 1600s). One of his many works still in publication is *The Art of Dying Well*, whose advice starts with the concept that dying well (in peace, connected to God) depends on living well. Take a cue from this brilliant saint and contemplate whether you need to make changes to be living well by Christian standards. It's never too late to get right with God.

Today's readings:

1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 7:36-50 ([446](#)).

“But he said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’”

18 SEP 2020

Holy honey!

We don't often think about snacks in the Bible, but surprisingly they're there! While there were likely no cake pops or ice cream in the kitchens of our matriarchs and patriarchs in faith, they still had a sweet tooth—especially for honey! Do an online search of the Bible and read through more than 60 references to honey. Honey has become a symbol of God who can satisfy us with a most pure, joyful sweetness. The Jewish celebration of Rosh Hashana recalls the significance of honey, especially remembering how God cared for the Israelites in the desert by feeding them manna, which tasted like “wafers made with honey.” On this first day of Rosh Hashana, let us, with our Jewish friends, wish one another a good, sweet year ahead, trusting in the providence of God.

Today's readings:

1 Corinthians 15:12-20; Luke 8:1-3 ([447](#)).

“Accompanying Jesus were the Twelve and some women . . . and many others who provided for them out of their resources.”

19 SEP 2020

 - MEMORIAL OF JANUARIUS, BISHOP, MARTYR

Relate to the world's suffering

Reading the gruesome details of tortures like that of fourth-century Januarius, martyred by Emperor Diocletian in 305, may make their suffering seem far removed from our daily experience. But it's not a huge leap to consider more ordinary sufferings today: of the unemployed, the victims of racial hatred, trafficking, disease, or addiction. In the doctrine of the Mystical Body, all suffering is given meaning by Christ's. His Passion means that no one agonizes in vain, that all is redeemed. Consider a gift of financial support to an organization like Catholic Charities, which helps alleviate the suffering of the refugee, the hungry, the trafficked person.

Today's readings:

1 Corinthians 15:35-37, 42-49; Luke 8:4-15 ([448](#)).

“Some fell into good soil and . . . produced a hundredfold.”