

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: 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Sunday, September 20, 2020

Parable of the laborers sent to the vineyard

The absolute gratuitousness of the love of God Matthew 20: 1-16

1. Opening prayer

Oh Father, Your Son Jesus, whom You have given to us, is our kingdom, our richness, our Heaven; He is the Master of the house and of the earth in which we live and He goes out continuously to search for us, because He desires to call us, to pronounce our name, to offer us His infinite love. We will never be able to pay Him back, never repay the superabundance of His compassion and mercy for us; we can only tell Him our Yes, ours: "Here I am, I come", or repeat with Isaiah: "Here I am Lord, send me!". Lord, allow this word to enter into my heart, in my eyes, into my ears and that it changes me, transforms me, according to this surprising incomprehensible love that Jesus is offering me today also, even at this moment. Lead me to the last place, to mine, that which He has prepared for me, there where I can truly and fully be myself. Amen.

2. Reading

a) To insert the passage in its context:

This passage places us within the section of the Gospel of Matthew, which directly precedes the account of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus. This section begins in 19:1, where it is said that Jesus definitively leaves the territory of Galilee to go to Judea, beginning in this way the path to get close to Jerusalem and this is concluded in 25:46, with the account on the coming and the judgment of the Son of God. In particular, chapter 20 places us also along the road of Jesus towards the holy city and its temple, in a context of teaching and of polemics with the wise and the powerful of the time, which He carries out through parables and encounters.

b) To help in the reading of the passage:

20, 1a: with the first words of the parable, which are a formula of introduction, Jesus wants to accompany us into the most profound theme about which He intends to speak. He wants to open before us the doors of the kingdom, which is He himself, and He presents Himself as the Master of the vineyard, which needs to be cultivated.

20: 1b-7: These verses constitute the first part of the parable; in it Jesus tells about the initiative of the Master of the vineyard to employ the laborers, describing the four times he went out to look for laborers, in which he establishes a contract and the last time he goes out is at the end of the day.

29, 8-15: This second part includes, instead, the description of the payment to the workers, with the protest of the first one and the Master's answer.

20, 16: At the end is given the conclusive sentence, which is included with 19: 30 and which reveals the key of the passage and the its application: those who in the community are considered the last ones, in the perspective of the Kingdom and of God's judgment, will be the first ones.

c) Text:

20, 1°: 1 'Now the kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner

20, 1b-7: going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. 2 He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day and sent them to his vineyard. 3 Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place 4 and said to them, "You go to my vineyard too and I will give

you a fair wage." 5 So they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the same. 6 Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing around, and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" 7 "Because no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them, "You go into my vineyard too."

20, 8-15: 8 In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first." 9 So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. 10 When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. 11 They took it, but grumbled at the landowner saying, 12 "The men who came last have done only one hour, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat." 13 He answered one of them and said, "My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? 14 Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the latecomer as much as I pay you. 15 Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why should you be envious because I am generous?"

20: 16: 16 Thus the last will be first, and the first, last.'



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) The passage opens with a connecting particle, "*in fact*", which is very important, because it sends us to the preceding verse (Mt 19:30), where Jesus affirms that "the first will be the last and the last the first", with the same words that He will repeat at the end of this parable. Therefore, these are words of utmost importance, fundamental, which indicate to me the direction which I should take. Jesus is the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven; He is the new world, into which I am invited to enter. But His is an overturned world, where our logic of power, gain, reward, ability, effort, is defeated and replaced by another logic, that of absolute gratuitousness, of merciful and superabundant love. If I think that I am first, that I am strong and capable; if I have already placed myself in the first place at the table of the Lord, it is better that now I rise and go and take the last place. There the Lord will come to look for me and, calling me, He will raise me and take me towards Him.

b). Here, Jesus compares Himself to a *landowner, the Master of the house*, using a particular figure, which He repeats several times in the Gospel. I try to follow it, being attentive to the characteristics which it presents and trying to verify which is my relationship with Him. The Master of the house is the owner of the vineyard, who takes care of it, surrounding it by a wall, digging a press there, cultivating it with love and labor (Mt 21: 33 ff.), so that it can bear a better fruit. It is the Master of the house who offers a great supper, and invites many, calling to his table the most forlorn or forsaken, the cripple and the lame, the blind (Lk 14: 21ff). And the one who returns from the wedding and for whom we have to wait keeping watch, because we do not know the hour (Lk 12:36); is the Master of the house who left on a trip, who has ordered us to keep watch, so as to be ready to open the door for him, as soon as he returns and knocks, in the evening, or at midnight, or at the rooster's crow, or in the morning (Mk 13:35). I understand then, that the Lord expects the good fruit from me; that He has chosen me as a guest to His table; that He will return and look for me and will knock at my door... Am I ready to respond to Him, to open the door for Him? To

offer to Him the fruit of the love which He expects from me? Or rather, am I sleeping, weighed down by a thousand other interests, enslaved by other masters of the house, diverse and far away from Him?

c) The Lord Jesus, the Master of the house and of the vineyard, repeatedly goes out to call and to send; at dawn, at nine o'clock, at noon, at three o'clock in the afternoon, at five, when the day is almost ended. He does not get tired. He comes to look for me, to offer me His love, His presence, to seal a pact with me. He desires to offer me His vineyard, its beauty. When we do meet, when He, looking at me fixedly, will love me (Mk 10:21), What will I answer? Will I be sad because I have many other goods belonging to me (Lk 18:23)? Will I ask Him to consider me justified, because I have already taken on other commitments? (Lk 14:18?). Will I flee, naked, losing also that small cloth of happiness that has remained in order to cover myself (Mk 14:52)? Or, rather, will I say, "Yes, yes", and then I will not go (Mt 21: 29)? I feel that this word causes me to be in crisis, it peers into the depth of myself, it reveals to me who I am ... I remain dismayed, fearful for my freedom, but I decide, before the Lord who is speaking to me, to do as Mary did and also say, "Lord, may it be done to me according to Your word", with humble availability and abandonment.

d) Now the Gospel places me before my relationship with others, the brothers and sisters who share with me the journey of following Jesus. We are all convoked to Him, in the evening, after the work of the day: He opens His treasure of love and begins to distribute it, to give grace, mercy, compassion, friendship, himself totally. He does not stop. The Lord continues only to overflow, to pour out, to give Himself to us, to each one. Matthew points out, at this point, that someone murmurs against the Master of the vineyard, against the Lord. Indignation springs up because He treats everyone equally, with the same intensity of love, with the same superabundance. Perhaps what is written in these lines also applies to me: the Gospel knows how to bring out and make evident my heart as it is, the most hidden part of myself. Perhaps the Lord is, precisely, addressing these words filled with sadness: "*Perhaps you are jealous?*" I should allow myself to be questioned. I have to allow Him to enter within me and to look at me with His penetrating eyes, because only if He looks at me, I will be able to be healed. Now I pray as follows: "Lord, I ask You, come to me, put Your word in my heart and let new life germinate, let love germinate".

5. A key for the reading

The Vineyard

In the image of the vineyard, apparently very simple and ordinary, Scripture condenses a very rich and profound reality, always more dense in significance, gradually as the texts get closer to the full revelation of Jesus. In the first book of Kings, chapter 21, we read of the violent attack against Naboth, a simple subject of the corrupt King Ahab, who possessed a vineyard, planted, unfortunately, precisely next to the palace of the King. This account makes us understand how important the vineyard was, an inviolable property: Naboth would not have given it up for anything in the world, as he says, "Yahweh forbid that I should give you my ancestral heritage!" (I Kings 21:3). Out of love for it, he lost his life. Therefore, the vineyard represents the most precious good, the family heritage, in a certain part, the identity itself of the person; he cannot sell it, cede it to others, barter or trade it for other goods, which would never equal it. It hides a vital, spiritual force.

Isaiah 5 tells us clearly that the vineyard signifies the people of Israel, as it is written: "Now, the vineyard of Yahweh Sabaoth is the House of Israel; and the people of Judah the plant He cherished" (Isa 5: 7). The Lord has loved these people with an infinite and eternal love, sealed by an inviolable covenant; He takes care of it, just as a vine-dresser would do with his vineyard, doing everything possible so that it can bear more beautiful fruit. Each one of us is Israel, the whole Church: the Father has found us as dry, arid land, devastated, filled with rocks, and He has cultivated it, He has dug around it, fertilized it, watered it always; He has planted us as a chosen vineyard, all with genuine vines (Jer 2:21). What more could He have done for us, which He has not done? (Isa 5:4). In His infinite lowering, the Lord has become

vineyard Himself; He has become the true Vine (Jn 15:1ff), of which we are the branches; He united Himself to us, just as the vine is united to its branches. The Father, who is the vine-dresser, continues His work of love in us, so that we may bear fruit and He waits patiently. He prunes, He cultivates, but then He sends us to work, to collect the fruits to offer to Him. We are sent to His people, to His sons, as sons that we are ourselves, as His disciples; we cannot draw back, refuse, because we have been created for this: that we may go and bear fruit and that our fruit may remain (Jn 15:16). Lord, turn to us; look down from Heaven and visit Your vineyard (Psalm 79:15).

The promise: one denarius

The Master of the vineyard establishes as the payment for the work of the day a denarius; a good sum, which allowed one to live with dignity. More or less it corresponds to the drachma agreed upon by the old Tobit with the one who accompanied his son Tobias towards the Media (Tob 5:15).

But in the evangelical account this denarius is immediately called by another name. The Master, in fact, says, “that which is just I will give you” (v4). Our inheritance, our salary is what is just, what is good: the Lord Jesus. He, in fact, does not give, does not promise other than Himself. Our reward is in Heaven (Mt 5:12), with our Father (Mt 6:1). It is not the money, the denarius which was used to pay the tax per-capita to the Romans, on which was the image and the inscription of King Tiberius Caesar (Mt 22: 20), but which is the face of Jesus, His name, His presence. He tells us, “I am with you not only today, but all days, until the end of the world. I myself will be your reward”.

The sending out

The text offers to our life a very strong energy, which springs from the verbs “*to send, to order*” *to go*”, repeated twice. Both concern us; they touch us deeply; they call us and put us in movement. It is the Lord Jesus who sends us, making of us His disciples: “Behold, I send you” (Mt 10:16). He calls us every day for his mission and repeats to us, “Go!” and our happiness is hidden precisely here, in the realization of this Word of His. Also where He sends us, in the way in which He indicates it, towards the reality and the persons whom He places before us.

The murmuring, the grumbling

These are words of utmost importance, true and very much present in our experience of daily life. We cannot deny this: they dwell in our heart, in our thoughts, sometimes they torment us, disfigure us, get us terribly tired, drive us away from ourselves, from others, from the Lord. Yes, we are also among those workers who complain and grumble, murmuring against the Master. The rumor of the murmuring comes from very far away, but it joins us and enters our heart. Israel in the desert murmured heavily against its Lord and we have received as inheritance those thoughts, those words: “The Lord hates us, that is why he brought us out of the land of Egypt to hand us over to the Amorites and to destroy us” (Deut 1:27) and we doubt His capacity to nourish us, to lead us ahead, to protect us: “Can God make a banquet in the desert?” (Ps 78:19). To murmur means not to listen to the voice of the Lord, not to believe anymore in His love for us: Therefore, we become scandalized, upset, strongly against the merciful Lord and we get angry against His way of acting and we wish to change it, to make it smaller according to our own schema: He went to the house of a sinner! He eats and drinks with tax collectors, with sinners!” (Lk 5:30; 15:2; 19:7). If we listen well this is the secret murmuring of our heart. How to heal it? Saint Peter suggests this way: “Practice hospitality with one another, without murmuring” (I Pet 4: 9); only hospitality, that is, acceptance can, little by little, change our heart and open it to be receptive, capable of bearing within it persons, situations, the reality which we find in life. “Accept one another” says Scripture. And it is precisely like that: we have to learn to accept, above all, the Lord Jesus, as He is, with His way of loving and of remaining, of speaking with us and of changing us, of waiting for us and of attracting us. To accept Him is to accept the one who is at our side, who comes to meet us; it is only this movement which can overcome the harshness of murmuring.

Murmuring is born from jealousy, from envy, from our evil eye, as the Master of the vineyard says, Jesus Himself. He knows how to keep us inside. He knows how to penetrate our look and reach our heart, in the spirit. He knows how we are, He knows us, loves us; And it is out of love that He brings out of us the evil within, takes off the veil from our evil eye. He helps us to become aware or conscious of how we are, of what is within us. At the moment when He says, "Perhaps your eye is evil?" as He is doing today in this Gospel, He heals us, He takes the balm and spreads it, takes the clay made with his saliva and puts it on our eyes, to the very depth.

6. A moment of prayer: Psalm 135

Refrain: Your love for us is infinite!

Alleluia! Give thanks to Yahweh for He is good, for His faithful love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of gods, for His faithful love endures forever.

Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for His faithful love endures forever.

He alone works wonders, for His faithful love endures forever.

He struck down the first-born of Egypt, for His faithful love endures forever.

He brought Israel out from among them, for His faithful love endures forever.

With mighty hand and outstretched arm, for His faithful love endures forever.

He split the Sea of Reeds in two, for His faithful love endures forever.

Let Israel pass through the middle, for His faithful love endures forever.

And drowned Pharaoh and all his army, for His faithful love endures forever.

He led His people through the desert, for His faithful love endures forever.

He kept us in mind when we were humbled, for His faithful love endures forever.

And rescued us from our enemies, for His faithful love endures forever.

He provides food for all living creatures, for His faithful love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of heaven, for His faithful love endures forever.

7. Final Prayer

Thank you, O Father, for having revealed Your Son to me and for having made me enter into His inheritance, in His vineyard. You have rendered me a branch, have rendered me a grape: now I only need to remain in Him, in You and allow myself to be taken as good fruit, ripe, to be placed in the press. Yes, Lord, I know it: this is the way, I am not afraid, because You are with me. I know that the only way to happiness is the gift of self to You, the gift to the brothers. That I may be a branch, that I may be good grapes, to be squeezed, as You wish! Amen.



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

20SEP₂₀₂₀ - TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Grow your faith

Who gave you your first God lessons? On this Catechetical Sunday, we thank family members, preachers, teachers, RCIA teams, and others who brought the Good News to us. We're also grateful for holy ones, like Venerable Mother Theresa Dudzik, who taught by their example. A remarkable seamstress, Dudzik arrived in Chicago at age 21 after the Great Fire of 1871. She took the destitute into her apartment and sewed to earn money to feed them. In time she founded the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago to run homes, schools, day-care centers, and an orphanage. What will your own example teach others?

Today's readings:

Isaiah 55:6-9; Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a; Matthew 20:1-16a ([133](#)).

"Seek the LORD while he may be found, call him while he is near."

21SEP₂₀₂₀ - FEAST OF MATTHEW, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

Rise up

Nobody likes paying taxes or has warm, fuzzy feelings about the IRS, but it seems tax collectors in Jesus' time had it especially rough—being lumped in with all manner of sinners. That is because tax collectors were Jews who worked for the Romans, the enemy occupiers of Jewish lands, so they were viewed as traitors by their people. Jesus sought them out for salvation anyway and led Matthew to a new position: apostle and evangelist. What does it take to get a promotion like that? Merely "get up and follow Jesus," as Matthew did.

Today's readings:

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13; Matthew 9:9-13 ([643](#)).

"I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

22SEP₂₀₂₀

Trade stressed for blessed

Back-to-school September is such a stressful time for families. Add the reality of COVID-19—with parents trying to work from home, kids' schedules often up in the air—and it gets all the messier. Even if you don't have children at home, you probably know people who do and are stressing. How can we all find balance? Honor the sabbath in whatever way you are able, by hitting the pause button—even for a few hours. "Human life has a rhythm of work and rest," says the Catechism of the Catholic Church. "The institution of the Lord's Day helps everyone enjoy adequate rest and leisure to cultivate their familial, cultural, social, and religious lives." Plan ahead for this coming Sunday.

Today's readings:

Proverbs 21:1-6, 10-13; Luke 8:19-21 ([450](#)).

"To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD."

23SEP₂₀₂₀ - MEMORIAL OF PIUS OF PIETRELCINA, PRIEST

Listen from the heart

Saint Pius of Pietrelcina (1887-1968) is better known by his nickname, Padre Pio. He is said to have borne the stigmata, the wounds of our Lord, for more than 50 years. To be sure, he was a man of prayer and suffering, a Capuchin Franciscan priest who lived in a small Italian friary nearly all of his life. However, the principal reason for his local fame was his ability to listen to those who came seeking his counsel, to "read their hearts" and to offer them the love of God in the sacraments. His frequent message to penitents, "Pray, hope, and don't worry," is a message for us to treasure and savor today.

Today's readings:

Proverbs 30:5-9; Luke 9:1-6 ([451](#)).

“He sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God.”

24SEP₂₀₂₀

Find the balance between law and freedom

Today’s gospel notes King Herod’s interest in Jesus, whom Herod likely saw as a threat. The tension between political power and the moral and religious power of Christianity has been part of the faith since its beginning. In *Dignitatis Humane*, the Vatican II document on religious liberty, the Council “urges everyone, especially those who are charged with the task of educating others, to do their utmost to form people who, on the one hand, will respect the moral order and be obedient to lawful authority, and on the other hand, will be lovers of true freedom.” Sounds like a recipe for peace and progress.

Today's readings:

Ecclesiastes 1:2-11; Luke 9:7-9 ([452](#)).

“But Herod said, ‘John I beheaded. Who then is this about whom I hear such things?’ ”

25SEP₂₀₂₀

Keep the faith!

The coronavirus has taken quite a toll on Catholic parish and sacramental life. Nearly every bishop responding to a recent survey said the pandemic has seriously affected the celebration of the sacraments and rites and sacramental preparation programs in their dioceses. In addition, they report that the morale of priests, lay ecclesial ministers, deacons, and chancery staff has been damaged by the long shutdown, according to a survey out of [Georgetown University](#). People are hurting at all levels of church life because the very thing we thrive on—gathering together—has become problematic and potentially life-threatening. Be patient and work with your local faith community to find safe and creative pastoral responses. And keep faith alive in your own home and heart!

Today's readings:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; Luke 9:18-22 ([453](#)).

“There is . . . a time for everything under the heavens . . . a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces.”

26SEP₂₀₂₀ - MEMORIAL OF COSMAS AND DAMIAN, MARTYRS

Saints for this season

Today’s brother physicians are patron saints to a long list of healthcare workers, and also against plagues. A brief year ago, biblical references to plagues and epidemics seemed quaint and far removed. Our eyes have been opened to the enduring force of such outbreaks, however, and Cosmas and Damian truly become saints for our time. Perhaps even more so when we learn they were Arab physicians from the area now called Syria. Healing role models come from all backgrounds. Thank the frontline healthcare workers in your own town. They are likely from diverse backgrounds as well.

Today's readings:

Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:8; Luke 9:43b-45 ([454](#)).

“Fill us at daybreak with your kindness.”