

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: 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Sunday, September 27, 2020

The parable of the two sons

Disobedient obedience and obedient disobedience

Matthew 21: 28-32

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:

Jesus recounts a very common event in family life. One son says to the father, "I'm going!" but then does not go. Another son says, "I'm not going!" but then goes. Jesus asks his listeners to pay attention and express an opinion. In our reading let us be attentive so as to discover the precise point to which Jesus wishes to call our attention.

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

Mt. 21:28-31^a: The comparison

Mt 21:31b-32: The application of the comparison.

c) The text:

28-31a: 'What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He went and said to the first, "My boy, go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not go," but afterwards thought better of it and went. The man then went and said the same thing to the second who answered, "Certainly, sir," but did not go.

Which of the two did the father's will?' They said, 'The first.'

31b-32: Jesus said to them, 'In truth I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you, showing the way of uprightness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him.'



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) Which point in this story of the two sons most caught your attention? Why?
- b) To whom does Jesus address Himself? Why does He tell this parable?
- c) What is the main point underlined by Jesus in the attitude of the two sons?
- d) What kind of obedience does Jesus suggest through this parable?
- e) How exactly do the prostitutes and publicans get preference over the priests and elders?
- f) And I? Where am I? Am I among the prostitutes and sinners or among the priests and elders?

5. A key to the reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the text

a) The context within which Matthew places these words of Jesus (Matthew chapters 18-23):

* The context of Matthew's Gospel within which this parable is found is one of tension and danger. After the Discourse on the community (Mt 18:1-35), Jesus leaves Galilee, crosses the Jordan and begins His last journey towards Jerusalem (Mt 19:1). Long before, He had said that He was to go to Jerusalem to be apprehended and killed and that then He would rise again (Mt 16:21; 17:22-23). Now the time has come to go to the capital city and to face prison and death (Mt 20:17-19).

* When He arrives in Jerusalem, Jesus becomes the subject of conflict. On the one hand the people welcome Him joyfully (Mt 21:1-11). Even children acclaim Him when, with a prophetic gesture, He expels the sellers from the temple and He heals the blind and the lame (Mt 21:12-15). On the other hand the priests and doctors criticize Him. They ask Him to tell the children to keep quiet (Mt 21:15-16). The situation is so tense, that Jesus has to spend the night outside the city (Mt 21:17; cf. Jn 11:53-54). But the following day He goes back early in the morning and, on the road to the temple, curses the fig tree, symbol of Jerusalem, a fruitless tree bearing only leaves (Mt 21:18-22). He then goes into the temple and begins to teach the people.

* While He is speaking to the people, the authorities come to discuss with him. Jesus answers them one by one (Mt 21:33-22:45), the high priests and the elders (Mt 21:23), the Pharisees (Mt 21:45; 22:41), the disciples of the Pharisees and of the Herodians (Mt 22:16), the Sadducees (Mt 22:23), and the doctors of the law (Mt 22:35). Finally, Jesus denounces at length, and in harsh terms, the scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 23:1-36), followed by a tragic accusation against Jerusalem, the city that will not be converted (Mt 23:37-39). It is within this context of tension and danger that Jesus tells the parable of the two sons, the subject of our meditation.

b) Commentary on the words of Jesus as found in Matthew:

Matthew 21:28-30: An example taken from family life

* What is your opinion? This is a provocative question. Jesus asks His listeners to be attentive and to reply. In the context of the parable, the listeners invited to give their opinion are the high priests and elders of the people (Mt 21:23). These are the ones who, from fear of the people, would not give an answer to the question as to the origin of John the Baptist, whether He was from heaven or from earth (Mt 21:24-27). These are the ones who will seek a way to arrest Him (Mt 21:45-46).

* A man had two sons. Jesus tells the story of a father who says to one of his sons "My boy, you go and work in the vineyard today". The young man replies, "Certainly, sir!" but then does not go. The father then says the same thing to his other son. This son replies, "I will not go!" but then goes. The listeners too are fathers of families and must have known these matters from personal experience.

* *Which of the two did the father's will?* Jesus ends the parable by making explicit His initial question. The priests and elders answer promptly, *the second!* The answer came quickly because the matter concerned a familiar situation, well known and evident, one that they experienced in their own families and, most probably, practiced by them (and by all of us) when they were young. Thus, in reality, the

answer was a judgment, not on the two sons in the parable, but also on themselves. By answering, *the first*, they were judging their own attitudes. For, in times past, they had so often told their father, "I will not go!" but then went under pressure of circumstances or because remorse led them to do what the father asked. In their reply they show themselves as if they were obedient children.

* This is precisely the function or the "trap" of the parable, namely, to bring the listeners to feel involved in the story, so that using their own experience as criterion, they would come to a value judgment of the story told in the parable. This judgment will soon be used as a key to apply the parable to life. The same didactic procedure may be found also in the parable of the vineyard (Mt 21:41-46) and that of the debtors (Lk 7:40-46).

Matthew 21:31-32: *Application of the parable* * *I tell you solemnly, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you!* Using the reply given by the priests and elders as a key, Jesus applies the parable to the sinful silence of His listeners before the message of John the Baptist. The reply they gave becomes their own condemnation. According to this sentence, it is the publicans and prostitutes, who, at first, had said *no* to the father but then did the will of the Father, because they had received and accepted the message of John the Baptist as coming from God. Whereas they, the priests and elders, were the ones who, at first, had said *yes* to the father, but had not carried out what the father had asked, because they would not accept the message of John the Baptist, not even in the face of so many who did accept it as from God.

* Thus, by means of the parable, Jesus turns everything upside down: those who were considered transgressors of the Law and therefore condemned, were in truth those who had obeyed God and tried to walk *the way of justice*, while those who considered themselves obedient to the Law of God, were in fact those who disobeyed God.

* The reason for this harsh judgment from Jesus lies in the fact that the religious authorities, priests and elders, would not believe that John the Baptist came from God. The publicans and the prostitutes, however, believed. This means that for Jesus, the contemplative outlook, the ability to recognize the active presence of God in persons and things of life, was not in the priests, not even among their leaders. Yet it was in those who were despised as sinners and unclean. It is easy to understand why these authorities decided to apprehend and kill Jesus: "when they heard these parables, the chief priests and the scribes realized He was speaking about them" (Mt 21:45-46).

* Anyone who wishes to apply this parable today would probably provoke the same anger that Jesus did through his conclusion. The same thing happens today. Prostitutes, sinners, the ignorant, some women, children, lay people, workers, people of color, prisoners, homosexuals, persons with AIDS, drunkards, drug addicts, divorced persons, married clergy, heretics, atheists, unmarried mothers, the unemployed, the illiterate, the sick, that is, all those marginalized as not part of the religious circle, frequently have a sharper outlook in perceiving *the way of justice* than those of us who live all day in church and are part of the religious hierarchy. It is not just because a person belongs to the religious hierarchy, therefore, that he or she has an outlook that allows him or her to perceive the things of God in life.

To throw light on the words of Jesus

* A new way of teaching people and to speak of God

Jesus was not a scholar (Jn 7:15). Unlike the apostle Paul (Acts 23:3), He did not go to the high school in Jerusalem.

He came from the country, from Nazareth, a small town in Galilee. Now, this carpenter from Galilee goes to Jerusalem and, without getting permission from the authorities, starts teaching the people in the square in front of the temple! He said new things. He spoke differently, divinely! The people were impressed by his way of teaching, "A new doctrine! Taught with authority! Different from that of the Scribes! (Mk 1:22, 27). What Jesus did most was teach, it was a habit with Him. Many times the Evangelists say that

Jesus taught. If they do not always say what Jesus taught, it is not because they are not interested in the content, but because the content comes through not only in the teaching but also in the gestures and in His attitude toward the people. The content is never separate from the person who communicates it. The goodness and love that come through in His way of acting and of being with others are part of the content. They are like the “tempera”; good content without goodness is like spilt milk.

* Teaching through parables.

Jesus taught above all through parables. He had an extraordinary capacity to find comparisons in order to explain the things of God: things that are not so evident by means of simple and clear examples, which the people knew and experienced in their lives in their daily struggle to survive. This presupposes two things: keeping to the experiences of life and keeping to the things of God, of the Realm of God.

Usually, Jesus does not explain the parables, but says, "Those who have ears to hear, listen!" Or "You have heard. Now try to understand!" For instance, the farmer who hears the parable of the seed says, "I know what the seed that falls on the ground is all about! But Jesus said that this is connected with the Realm of God. What does He mean?" We can then imagine the long conversations and discussions among the people. Once a bishop asked the community, "Jesus said that we must be like salt. What is salt used for?" The community discussed this and came up with more than ten purposes for salt! They then applied all this to the life of the community and discovered that to be salt is difficult and demanding. The parable had worked!

In some parables there are things that do not usually happen in life. For instance, when have we ever seen a shepherd leave ninety-nine sheep to go looking for the one that is lost? (Lk 15:4). When have we ever seen a father who welcomes his dissolute son with a feast and not a word to scold him? (Lk 15:20-24). Where have we ever seen a Samaritan who is better than a Levite or a priest? (Lk 10:29-37). In this way, the parable provokes thought. It invites us to be involved in the story and to reflect on ourselves, starting from the experience of life and then confronting this with God. It makes us discover from experience that God is present in our everyday life. The parable is a participative form of teaching, of educating. It does not present every little detail. It does not give all the facts, but entices us to discover. A parable changes our view; it makes us contemplatives, persons who delve into reality. Herein lies the novelty of Jesus' teaching in parables. It is different from the teaching of the doctors who taught that God manifests Himself only in the observance of the law. For Jesus, "The Realm of God is not the fruit of observance. The Realm of God is among you!" (Lk 17:21).

6. Psalm 121

The contemplative eye discovers the presence of God in life

I lift up my eyes to the hills.
Whence does my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved,
He who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.
The sun shall not smite you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil;
He will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and for evermore.

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.

27SEP2020 - TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Still time to change your mind

One of the lovely things about having a mind is that you can change it. A working brain takes in new information, reflects on it, and makes connections. Sometimes the result is a revised perspective on ideas you thought were chiseled in stone. People of faith also pray for wisdom and inspiration, which can be troubling prayers to have answered if you're banking on the status quo. Jesus told his followers that folks they had counted out of the circle of grace were being counted in by God. A thoughtful faith will be able to absorb the divine curveballs.

Today's readings:

Ezekiel 18:25-28; Philippians 2:1-11; Matthew 21:28-32 ([136](#)).

“‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’ He said in reply, ‘I will not.’”

28SEP2020 - MEMORIAL OF LAWRENCE RUIZ AND COMPANIONS, MARTYRS

Make an offering of your life

Saint Lorenzo Ruiz, patron saint of the Philippines and the first canonized Filipino martyr, died in 1637 and was elevated to sainthood in 1987. A Dominican-educated altar boy who grew up to become a clerk, marry, and have children, he was falsely accused of murder and fled on a ship to Japan in the company of missionaries. Once there, he was arrested and tortured for being a Christian, but he refused to recant his faith and was executed, saying, “Had I a thousand lives, all these to Him shall I offer.” What sacrifices are you willing to make for your faith?

Today's readings:

Job 1:6-22; Luke 9:46-50 ([455](#)).

“Whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”

29SEP2020 - FEAST OF MICHAEL, GABRIEL, AND RAPHAEL, ARCHANGELS

Pray for heavenly healing

Some Christians call today “Michaelmass,” for Michael the archangel. And indeed, among the three archangels the Catholic Church honors today, the mighty Michael—depicted in art battling Satan—is probably best known. Almost as well known is Gabriel, who announces to Mary that she will conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit and bear the Messiah. Raphael is least familiar. But, as the angel most known for healing—his name meaning “God’s medicine”—Raphael is arguably the heavenly help we need right now. Ask for Saint Raphael’s intercession today, to heal a world reeling from a pandemic.

Today's readings:

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 or Revelation 12:7-12a; John 1:47-51 ([647](#)).

“You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending.”

30SEP2020 - MEMORIAL OF JEROME, PRIEST, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Being a saint doesn't make you perfect

Saint Jerome (345-420) is a highly regarded scholar of the church who translated the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek into Latin. He was also a complex human being whose crabby nature sometimes complicated his life. In other words, he was fully human. In addition to his enduring Latin translation, called the Vulgate, there are many homilies, quotes, letters, and commentaries attributed to Jerome. This quote is one to contemplate on his feast day: *"It is our part to seek, His to grant what we ask; ours to make a beginning, His to bring it to completion; ours to offer what we can, His to finish what we cannot."*

Today's readings:

Job 9:1-12, 14-16; Luke 9:57-62 ([457](#)).

"Let my prayer come before you, Lord. Daily I call upon you."

01OCT2020 - MEMORIAL OF THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS, VIRGIN, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Love greatly in small ways

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux is one of the most accessible role models ever canonized. Her spirituality, affectionately known as the "Little Way," is a path anyone in any walk of life can follow because its central tenet is simple (though not easy to follow!): "What matters in life is not great deeds, but great love." She lived a short, quiet life as a French Carmelite nun, modeling the conviction that people can live in profound union with God simply by carrying out our daily tasks with a loving spirit. Choose one task today that you can carry out with loving kindness.

Today's readings:

Job 19:21-27; Luke 10:1-12 ([458](#)).

"Yet know this: the kingdom of God is at hand."

02OCT2020 - MEMORIAL OF THE HOLY GUARDIAN ANGELS

Watching over you

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is clear about the existence of angels. "The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls 'angels' is a truth of faith. The witness of Scripture is as clear as the unanimity of Tradition." In Genesis 16, Hagar's angel rescues her. In Exodus 23, when God told Moses to lead the people, he said, "My angel will go before you." In Numbers 22, an angel kept the oracle Balaam from the mistake of cursing Israel. Psalm 91 says that God "commands his angels . . . to guard you wherever you go." In the Book of Tobit, young Tobias is accompanied by the Archangel Raphael. Angels are the loving care of God personified in celestial beings, God faithfully standing at our side. You can call on angelic support in your time of need.

Today's readings:

Job 38:1, 12-21; 40:3-5 ([459](#)); Matthew 18:1-5, 10 ([650](#)).

"Their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father."

03OCT2020

Divinely inspired

Job is a famous biblical character many of us can admire from a distance but few would take the opportunity to imitate up close. During a pandemic, however, all of us get to taste some of what Job experienced. Job's story invites us to examine a central question: In whom or what do I place my trust? In a time of crisis, we're invited to dig down to a deeper truth underneath the shifting conditions—the unconditional love of God for all of us, regardless of the circumstances. Try offering your own love to others unconditionally and learn something about how God operates.

Today's readings:

Job 42:1-3, 5-6, 12-17; Luke 10:17-24 ([460](#)).

"I had heard of you by word of mouth, but now my eye has seen you."