

# 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

# Sunday, August 8, 2021

*19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
The Bread of Life*

## Opening Prayer

Shaddai, God of the mountain, You who make of our fragile life the rock of your dwelling place, lead our mind

to strike the rock of the desert,

so that water may gush to quench our thirst.

May the poverty of our feelings

cover us as with a mantle in the darkness of the night and may it open our heart to hear the echo of silence until the dawn,

wrapping us with the light of the new morning, may bring us,

with the spent embers of the fire of the shepherds of the Absolute who have kept vigil for us close to the divine Master,

the flavor of the holy memory.

## Lectio

### **Gospel Text: John 6: 41-51**

<sup>41</sup> The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." <sup>42</sup> They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" <sup>43</sup> Jesus answered them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. <sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. <sup>45</sup> It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. <sup>46</sup> Not that anyone has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup> This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

### **A Key to the Reading:**

The sixth chapter of John's Gospel presents a complete picture around the Paschal theme and, analogously, with the telling of a miracle (5: 1-9a; 6: 1-15) followed by a discourse (5: 16-47; 6: 22-59). The chapter relates that part of Jesus' activity in Galilee, precisely at its most sublime moment, when Jesus reveals himself as bread of life to be believed in and eaten in order to be saved. In vv. 1-15 we find the great sign of the so-

called multiplication of the loaves whose significance is revealed in the discourse of the following day in vv. 26-59: the gift of bread to satisfy the hunger of the people prepares the way for the words concerning the bread of eternal life. Inserted, vv. 16-21, we find the story of Jesus walking on the water. In vv. 60-71 Jesus, knowing their lack of faith (vv. 60-66) and trying to encourage their faith (vv. 66-71), invites the twelve disciples to make up their minds. The whole discourse on the bread of life (6: 25-71) presents parallels with some Hebrew texts, especially with Philon.

### **A Moment of Silence:**

*Let the sound of the Word echo in us.*

## Meditatio

### **A Few Questions:**

- They murmured at him: how many are the voices that murmur against God?
- I am the bread which has come down from heaven: where do we acquire the bread that we eat every day?
- No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him: does the Father draw us or do we drag our feet behind him criticizing that which he says to us in our daily life?
- If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever: we nourish ourselves with the Word of God and the broken Bread once a week or even every day... why is it that eternal life is not evident in our words and our human experience?

### **A Key to the Reading:**

- To murmur. What better way is there for us not to live in depth that which the Lord asks of us? There are thousands of plausible reasons... thousands of valid justifications... thousands of licit motives... for us not to swallow a Word that defies every reason, every justification, every motivation to allow new echoes to resonate from a not-so-distant heaven that dwells in our hearts.
- v. 41. The Jews murmured at him because he had said: "I am the bread which came down from heaven." Jesus had just said: I am the bread of life (v. 35) and I have come down from heaven (v. 38) and this provokes dissent among the crowd. The term Jews is a theological one in John and may be thought of as synonymous with unbelievers. In truth these were Galileans who were called Jews because they murmured at Christ whose words disturbed their usual categories. The Jews were familiar with the term "bread come down from heaven." The children of Israel knew the bread of God, the manna, which had satisfied their hunger in the desert and had given security to a precarious journey whose horizons were uncertain. Christ, manna for humankind who in the desert of an unsatisfied hunger invokes heaven to sustain it on its journey. This is the only bread that satisfies hunger. The words of the Jews are an objection to the person of Jesus and an occasion to introduce the theme of

unbelief. In other passages the people "whisper" about Jesus (7: 12, 32), but in this chapter they "murmur" about what he says, about his words. This murmuring puts an emphasis on their unbelief and incomprehension.

- v. 42. "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know? How does he now say: I have come down from heaven?" This is subtle irony. The unbelievers know the earthly origins of the Christ. They know for certain the son of Joseph, but not the son of God. Only those who believe know his transcendental origin by the direct intervention of God in the Virgin. The passage goes from material language, bread made from water and flour to a spiritual language, bread for the human soul. As once the people in the desert did, the Jews murmur: they do not understand the origin of Jesus' gift: and as once their forbears refused the manna because it was too light, so now the descendants refuse the Word made flesh, bread come down from heaven, because of its earthly origin. The Jews, from all that Jesus said, only take note that he had said: I have come down from heaven (v. 38). Yet this is that which gives substance to all that was said before about being the bread of life (v. 35). The question: Is not this... is asked in a context of surprise in the Synoptic Gospels. In Matthew and Luke, through the story of Jesus' childhood, the reader has already been told of the virginal conception of Jesus. In John, the Galileans are confronted with someone who claims to have come down from heaven without any previous discussion as to his human condition. Son of Joseph means that Jesus is a man like all other men (cfr. 1: 45).
- v. 43-44. Jesus answered them: "Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." Jesus does not seem to dwell on his divine origin but stresses that only those drawn by the Father can come to him. Faith then is a gift of God and depends on a person's openness and ability to listen... but what does it mean to say the Father draws? Is not a person free on this journey? The attraction is simply the desire written in the tablets of flesh borne in the heart of every person. Thus, complete freedom exists in a spontaneous clinging to the source of one's being. Life can only attract life, only death cannot attract.
- v. 45. It is written in the prophets: "And they shall all be taught by God. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to me." The rest of the narrative follows a very precise order. These words are not an invitation, but a command. The creative Word of God, who called light and all other creatures into existence from nothing, now calls his own likeness to participate in the new creation. The consequence does not flow from an autonomous and personal decision, but from meeting with the person of Jesus and his call. It is a graced event, not a human choice. Jesus does not wait for a free decision but calls with divine authority as God called the prophets in the Old Testament. It is not the disciples who choose the Master as was the case with rabbis at the time, but the Master who chooses the disciples as beneficiaries of God's inheritance, which is much greater than any doctrine or teaching. The call implies the giving up of family, profession, a complete change of one's way of life in order to cling to a way of life that leaves no space for self-centeredness. The disciples are people of the kingdom. The call to become

disciples of Jesus is an "eschatological call." The words of the Babylonian prophet of the exile says: "and all her children (Jerusalem's) shall be" - referring to the Jews. The use of: "all shall be" is an expression of the universality of salvation whose fulfilment is Jesus.

- v. 46. *Not that anyone has seen the Father, except him who comes from God, he has seen the Father.* Only Jesus, who is from God, has seen the Father and can reveal him definitively. People are called to come from God. Knowledge of the Father is not a conquest, it is an origin. The movement is not external. If I look for an external origin, I can say that I have a father and mother, a creature of the created world. If I look for a deeper origin of my essential being I can say that I come from the Father, Creator of all life.
- v. 47. *Truly, truly, I say to you: He who believes has eternal life.* To believe in the words of Jesus, in his revelation, is a condition for obtaining eternal life and to be able to be "taught by the Father." I believe, I lean on a rock. The strength is not within my creature limitations, nor in the realization of my creature efforts to attain perfection. All is firm in Him who has no temporal attachments. How can a creature lean on itself when it is not master of one single instant of its life?
- v. 48. *I am the bread of life.* Again, the theme of the bread of life is presented together with that of faith and of eternal life. Jesus is the true bread of life. This verse relates to verse 51 "*I am the living bread*". Only he who eats this bread, he who assimilates Jesus' revelation as vital bread, will be able to live.
- vv. 49-50. Your Fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died: this is the bread which comes down from heaven that a man may eat of it and not die. The bread come down from heaven is contrasted with the manna that fed their fathers but not preserved them from death. This bread that gives life without end and comes from on high is the incarnate Word of God. The Eucharistic theme, already implied in some expressions, now becomes central. Earthly death does not contradict this experience of life if one walks along transcendental ways. The limitation is no limitation for those who eat of Him.
- vv. 51. *I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.* The "flesh" of Jesus is the vital food for the believer. The word flesh (*sàrx*), which in the Bible indicates the fragile reality of the human person before the mystery of God, now refers to the body of Christ immolated on the cross and to the human reality of the Word of God. It is no longer a metaphorical bread of life, it is the revelation of Jesus because the bread is the very flesh of the Son. For the life of the world means in favor of and emphasizes the sacrificial dimension of Christ because for the world expresses the salvation which flows from that dimension.

### **Reflection:**

Murmur. If our murmuring were like a soft breeze, it would act as a harmonious basis for the eternal words that become our flesh: I am the living Bread that has come down from heaven. What a surprise that would be, knowing that this eternal Bread is not a

stranger, but Jesus, the son of Joseph, a man whose father and mother we know. We eat and we are assumed because those who eat of this bread will live forever. This is a bread that is born of the love of the Father. We are invited to listen and learn from Him on the trajectory of attraction, on that peak of faith that allows us to see. Bread with bread, Flesh with flesh. Only He who comes from God has seen the Father. When we have made of our flesh the table of the living Bread, then we shall have seen the Father. Desert and death, heaven and life. A sweet marriage fulfilled in every Eucharist ... on every altar, on the altar of the heart where the life of the divine Breath consumes the disfigured lineaments of a lost person.

## Oratio

*Psalm 33 (32)*

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.

He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; he put the deeps in storehouses.

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to naught; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

The counsel of the Lord stands for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.

Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love,

that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine.

## Contemplatio

The experience of the food that satisfies the hunger of the heart reminds me, Lord, that I can pass from imperfection to the fulfilment of being a reflection of yourself. I do not do away with the hunger, but by finding in it no longer a *homo dormiens*, (someone who does not ask questions of himself, who lives without any interest, who does not wish to see or feel, who will not allow himself to be touched, who lives in fear, superficially rather than in depth, and who keeps a horizontal position when confronted by events, sleeping or ignoring whatever he meets). Rather I find a *homo vigilans*, he who is always present to himself and others, capable of satisfying himself by his work and service. I find one who responsibly does not stop at that which is immediate, but who knows how to pace himself for the long and patient waiting, who expresses the all that dwells in each fragment of his life. I find one who no longer fears feeling vulnerable, because he knows that the wounds of his humanity can be transformed into scars through which life joins in the passing of time. It is a life that is finally able to realize his end and that sings with love in his "scarred heart" wrapped in a "flame that consumes but does not hurt" and in order to meet him definitively is prepared to "tear the veil."

Hunger is no longer hunger, because it now becomes the sweet burden of limitation, protected by "the delicious wound" and always open to the "sweet encounter" that will

satisfy every desire: "The Beloved is the mountain, the solitary valleys full of shade... He is like the calm night, very close to dawn, a silent music, a resounding silence... Who will heal this my scarred heart? He is the consuming flame that does not hurt! O my Beloved, tear the veil at the moment of our sweet encounter."



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

**08 AUG**2021 - NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## Let living water flow

Jesus said, "Whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink" will be rewarded (Matt. 10:42). How much more so if we champion clean water rights for all. Have you ever tried to run a bath, only to have sludge emerge from the pipes? Have you visited a familiar lake and found its normally clear water unfit for swimming? Have you gotten sick from drinking from a contaminated spring, or developed a rash from washing in your own sink? Folks around the world and in parts of our own country have had this experience often. Take time to learn what you can do locally and globally to ensure access to what Pope Francis calls a "basic and universal human right"—safe drinking water.

### Today's readings:

1 Kings 19:4-8; Ephesians 4:30—5:2; John 6:41-51 ([116](#)).

*"Elijah looked and there at his head was a hearth cake and a jug of water."*

**09 AUG**2021 - MEMORIAL OF TERESA BENEDICTA OF THE CROSS, VIRGIN, MARTYR

## Pick up a page-turner of faith

Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross was born Edith Stein in 1891 and was killed at Auschwitz in 1942. She was a German Jewish philosopher who had been an atheist, although she had admired Christians she knew. She shocked everyone by becoming Catholic and, 11 years later, a Carmelite nun. Her conversion was prompted by an all-night reading of the autobiography of Saint Teresa of Ávila, a 16th-century Carmelite also of Jewish origins. Pick up a copy of the autobiographies of both these riveting saints—and see how they contribute to your own ongoing conversion.

### Today's readings:

Deuteronomy 10:12-22; Matthew 17:22-27 ([413](#)).

*"And they were overwhelmed with grief."*

**10 AUG**2021 - FEAST OF LAWRENCE, DEACON, MARTYR

## Find your way to serve

Lawrence was one of seven deacons martyred in Rome under Emperor Valerian in 258. The word *deacon*—from the Greek word for *service*—describes the work of these early ministers: beginning with the first seven deacons mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, appointed to serve the everyday needs of the flock while the apostles busied themselves with evangelization. Today's Catholic deacons are ordained; permanent deacons can preach at Mass and preside over weddings, Baptisms, and funerals—while transitional deacons later become priests. Learn more at [nadd.org](http://nadd.org).

### Today's readings:

2 Corinthians 9:6-10; John 12:24-26 ([618](#)).

*"Where I am, there also will my servant be."*

**11 AUG**2021 - MEMORIAL OF CLARE, VIRGIN

## Hope lights the way

Saint Clare, founder of the Poor Clare order of nuns, is part of a long line of women and men who gave up everything for the sake of following Christ, and, in turn, inspired others to join them on their holy journey. Often meeting significant resistance, these brave souls persevered, driven by a passion to bring God's Good News to the world. "Like a shooting star against the dark sky of injustice and ignorance, founders of religious communities lit up the landscape with a burst of hope," says Precious Blood Father Joe Nassal. Saint Gaspar, the founder of the



Missionaries of the Precious Blood, like Saint Clare hoped to free people from the chains of societal conformity. Clare chose to do it within the confines of a cloister; Gaspar, as an itinerant preacher. Both were being true to themselves and the gospel. Follow your own path toward hope.

**Today's readings:**

Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Matthew 18:15-20 (415).

*"His eyes were undimmed and his vigor unabated."*

**12 AUG**2021 - MEMORIAL OF JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL, RELIGIOUS

## Love lifted her higher

Jane Frances de Chantal, a French widow who founded the Visitation Nuns in 1610, was a well-off, educated woman with administrative talent and deep faith who was widowed at age 28. Obligated to live with a cruel father-in-law, she coped by pouring herself into charity work and spiritual development, eventually teaming up with Saint Francis de Sales to found a religious community. Have you ever coped with difficulties by trying to become a better person? What trial in your life could nudge you toward greater goodness?

**Today's readings:**

Joshua 3:7-10a, 11, 13-17; Matthew 18:21—19:1 (416).

*"Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan."*

**13 AUG**2021 - MEMORIAL OF PONTIAN, POPE, AND HIPPOLYTUS, PRIEST, MARTYRS

## What unites is greater than what divides

Pope Pontian and Hippolytus were both imprisoned in Sardinia during Roman persecutions. Before their deaths in 235, Pontian and Hippolytus reconciled, because for a time the two were archenemies. Indeed, Hippolytus had been elected antipope by his followers who were in stark opposition to Pontian's tolerant stance on reconciling returning Christians to the church. In the end, Pontian and Hippolytus realized that their shared love of Christ far surpassed any differences. Finding one common element with an enemy is the first step toward reconciliation. Perhaps we can start with our shared humanity and work our way from there.

**Today's readings:**

Joshua 24:1-13; Matthew 19:3-12 (417).

*"I gave you a land that you had not tilled and cities that you had not built, to dwell in."*

**14 AUG**2021 - MEMORIAL OF MAXIMILIAN KOLBE, PRIEST, MARTYR

## Give a piece of your heart

Maximilian Kolbe shook up the rules for saint-making. At Kolbe's 1982 canonization, Pope John Paul II named him a "martyr of charity." No longer could one become a martyr only by being killed because of "hatred for the faith." Now one killed because of charitable work, as Maximilian was, could also be a martyr. This opened the door to sainthood for others who were murdered for their good work, like Notre Dame Sister Dorothy Stang of Brazil, the Adorers of the Blood of Christ sisters of Liberia, or the Maryknoll sisters of El Salvador. We are all called in some way to be martyrs, even if we give away only a part of our lives. Give away a piece of your life today.

**Today's readings:**

Joshua 24:14-29; Matthew 19:13-15 (418).

*"Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."*