

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 15, 2021

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

LECTIO

Opening Prayer:

Holy Spirit, Spirit of Wisdom, of Science, of Intelligence, of Counsel, fill us, we pray, with the knowledge of the Word of God, fill us with every kind of spiritual wisdom and intelligence, so as to be able to understand it at depth. May we, under your guidance be able to understand the Gospel of this Marian solemnity. Holy Spirit, we need you, you, the only one who continually molds in us the figure and the form of Jesus. And we turn to you, Mary, Mother of Jesus and of the Church, you who have lived the inebriating and totalizing Presence of the Holy Spirit, you who have experienced the power of his force in you, who has seen it operating in your Son Jesus from the time when he was in the maternal womb, open our heart and our mind, so that they may be docile to listen to the Word of God.

Reading of the Gospel – Luke 1: 39-56

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now it happened that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord? Look, the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

And Mary said: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; because he has looked upon the humiliation of his servant. Yes, from now onwards all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his faithful love extends age after age to those who fear him.

He has used the power of his arm, he has routed the arrogant of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly. He has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his faithful love-according to

the promise he made to our ancestors -- of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Mary stayed with her some three months and then went home.

Moments of Prayerful Silence:

Silence is a quality of the one who knows how to listen to God. Try to create in yourself an atmosphere of peace and of silent adoration. If you are capable to be in silence before God, you will be able to listen to his breath which is Life.

MEDITATIO

Key to the Reading:

Blessed are you among women

In the first part of today's Gospel, the words of Elizabeth resound: "Blessed are you among women," preceded by a geographical movement. Mary leaves Nazareth, situated in the north of Palestine, to go to the South, approximately fifty kilometers, to a place which tradition has identified as the present-day Ain Karem, not too far from Jerusalem. The physical movement shows the interior sensibility of Mary, who is not closed on herself, to contemplate, in a private and intimate way, the mystery of the Divine Maternity which is being accomplished in her, but she is projected to the path of charity. She changes locations to go and help her elderly cousin. Mary's going to Elizabeth has the added connotation 'in haste' which Saint Ambrose interprets as follows: "Mary set out in haste to the hill country, not because she did not believe the prophecy or because she was uncertain of the announcement or doubted of the proof, but because she was pleased with the promise and desirous to devotedly fulfill a service, with the impulse that she received from her intimate joy... The grace of the Holy Spirit does not entail slowness." The reader, though, knows that the true reason of the trip is not indicated, but can get it through information deduced from the context. The angel had communicated to Mary the pregnancy of Elizabeth, already in the sixth month (cfr. v. 37). Besides the fact that she remained there three months (cfr. v. 56), just the time so that the child could be born, allows us to understand that Mary intended to help her cousin. Mary runs, and goes where there is an urgent need, the need for help, showing, in this way, a clear sensibility and concrete availability.

Together with Mary, Jesus, in his mother's womb, moves with her. From here it is easy to deduce the Christological value of the episode of the visit of Mary to her cousin: above all, the attention is for Jesus. At first sight, it could seem to be a scene concentrated on the two women. But in reality, what is important for the Evangelist is the fact present in their conceiving. Mary moving tends, in last instance, to have the encounter between the two women.

As soon as Mary enters the house and greets Elizabeth, the unborn John leaped in her womb. According to some this leaping is not comparable to the changing place of the fetus, which is experienced by every pregnant woman. Luke uses a particular Greek verb which precisely means "jumping". Wishing to interpret the verb a bit literally, it could be indicated with "dancing," thus excluding a physical phenomenon only. Some

have proposed that this 'dance' could be considered as a form of 'homage' which John renders to Jesus, inaugurating, though not yet born, that attitude of respect and of subjection which will characterize his life: "After me is coming someone who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals" (Mk 1, 7). One day, John himself will give witness: "it is the bridegroom who has the bride; and yet the bridegroom's friend, who stands there and listens to him, is filled with joy at the bridegroom's voice. This is the joy that I feel, and it is complete. He must grow greater, I must grow less" (Jn 3, 29-30). Thus, Saint Ambrose comments: "Elizabeth was the first one to hear the voice, but John is first to perceive the grace." We find a confirmation of this interpretation in the words themselves of Elizabeth which, repeating the same Greek verb in v. 44. which was already employed in v. 41, says: "The child in my womb leapt for joy." Luke, with these details, has wished to evoke the prodigies which took place in the intimacy of Nazareth. It is only now, thanks to the dialogue with an interlocutor, the mystery of the divine maternity leaves aside its secrecy and its individual dimension, to become a notable fact, and object of appreciation and of praise.

The words of Elizabeth, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord?" (vv. 42-43). With a Semitic expression which is equivalent to a superlative ("among women"), the Evangelist wishes to attract the attention of the reader on the function of Mary: to be the "Mother of the Lord." And then, a blessing is reserved for her ("Blessed are you") and a blessed Beatitude. In what does this consist of? It expresses Mary's adherence to the Divine Will. Mary is not only the receiver of a mysterious design which makes her blessed, but also a person who knows how to accept and adhere to God's will. Mary is a creature who believes, because she trusts in a plain, simple word and which she has vested with her "yes" of love. And Elizabeth acknowledges this service of love, identifying her as "blessed as mother and blessed as believer."

In the meantime, John perceives the presence of his Lord and exults, expressing with that interior movement the joy which springs from that contact of salvation. Mary will be the interpreter of that event in the hymn of the Magnificat.

A Song of Love:

In this song Mary considers herself part of the *anawim*, of the "poor of God," of those who "fear God" placing in Him all their trust and hope and who, on the human level, do not enjoy any right or prestige. The spirituality of the *anawim* can be synthesized with the words of Psalm 37: 79: "In silence he is before God and hopes in him," because "those who hope in the Lord will possess the earth."

In Psalm 86: 6 the one who prays, turning to God, says: Give your servant your force": Here the term 'servant' expresses his being subjected, as well as the sentiment of belonging to God, of feeling secure with him.

The poor, in the strictly Biblical sense, are those who place their trust unconditionally in God; therefore they are to be considered, qualitatively, the best part, of the People of Israel.

The proud, instead, are those who place all their trust in themselves.

Now, according to the Magnificat, the poor have a thousand reasons to rejoice, because God glorifies the *anawim* (Psalm 149: 4) and humbles the proud. An image taken from the New Testament, which expresses very well the attitude of the poor of the Old Testament, is that of the publican who with humility beats his breast, while the pharisee being complacent of his merits is being consumed by his pride (Lk 19: 9-14). Definitely, Mary celebrates all that God has done in her and all that he works in every creature. Joy and gratitude characterize this hymn to salvation which recognizes the greatness of God, but which also makes great the one who sings it.

Some Question for Meditation:

- Is my prayer, above all, the expression of a sentiment or celebration and acknowledgement of God's action?
- Mary is presented as the believer in the Word of the Lord. How much time do I dedicate to listening to the Word of God?
- Is your prayer nourished from the Bible, as was that of Mary? Or rather am I dedicated to devotions which produce a continuous tasteless and dull prayer? Are you convinced that to return to Biblical prayer is the assurance to find a solid nourishment, chosen by Mary herself?
- Are you in the logics of the Magnificat which exalts the joy of giving, of losing to find, of accepting, the happiness of gratuity, of donation?

ORATIO

Psalm 44 (45)

The psalm, in this second part, glorifies the Queen. In today's liturgy these verses are applied to Mary and celebrate her greatness and beauty.

In your retinue are daughters of kings, the consort at your right hand in gold of Ophir. Listen, my daughter, attend to my words and hear; forget your own nation and your ancestral home, then the king will fall in love with your beauty; he is your lord, bow down before him.

Her companions are brought to her, they enter the king's palace with joy and rejoicing.

Final Prayer:

The prayer which follows is a brief meditation on the maternal role of Mary in the life of the believer: "Mary, woman who knows how to rejoice, who knows how to exult, who allows herself to be invaded by the full consolation of the Holy Spirit, teach us to pray so that we may also discover the source of joy. In Elizabeth's house, your cousin, feeling accepted and understood in your most intimate secret, you burst out in a hymn of exultation of the heart, speaking of God, of you about your relationship with him, and of the unprecedented adventure already begun of being the Mother of Christ and of all of us, holy people of God. Teach

us to give our prayer a rhythm of hope and tremors of joy, sometimes worn out by bitter whining and soaked with melancholy almost as obliged. The Gospel speaks to us about you, Mary, and of Elizabeth: both of you kept in your heart something, which you did not dare or you did not wish to manifest to anyone. But each one of you felt understood by the other on that prophetic day of the Visitation and you pronounced words of prayer and of feast. Your encounter becomes liturgy of thanksgiving and of praise to your ineffable God. You, woman of a profound joy, you sang the Magnificat, in rapture and amazed at all that the Lord was operating in his humble servant. Magnificat is the cry, the explosion of joy, which explodes within each one of us, when one feels accepted and understood”.

CONTEMPLATIO

The Virgin Mary, the temple of the Holy Spirit, accepted with faith the Word and surrendered herself completely to the power of Love. Because of this she became the Icon of interiority, that is all recollected under the look of God and abandoned to the power of the Most High. Mary keeps silence about herself, because everything in her can speak about the wonders of the Lord in her life.

Monday, August 16, 2021

Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

God our Father,

may we love you in all things and above all things and reach the joy you have prepared for us beyond all our imagining.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 19: 16-22

A man came to Jesus and asked, 'Master, what good deed must I do to possess eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is one alone who is good. But if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He said, 'Which ones?' Jesus replied, 'These: You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false witness. Honor your father and your mother. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these. What more do I need to do?' Jesus said, 'If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'



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

15 AUG 2021

SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Some assumptions prove true

Catholicism acknowledges twin sources in scripture and tradition. While our faith is biblically rooted, we embrace an expanding truth discerned by saints and mystics, church doctors, and popes. Mary's Assumption isn't narrated in the gospels and wasn't taught dogmatically until 1950. It evolved from the second-century appreciation of Mary as the New Eve: preserved from sin at conception and therefore not subject to sin's effects in death. Liturgists, saints, and theologians promoted the Assumption for centuries, and devout Catholics championed this understanding. Finally, Pope Pius XII bowed to the "sense of the faithful" and made it official in 1950.

Today's readings:

Vigil: 1 Chronicles 15:3-4, 15-16; 16:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:54b-57; Luke 11:27-28 (621); *Day:* Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab; 1 Corinthians 15:20-27; Luke 1:39-56 (622).

"A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet."

16 AUG 2021

MEMORIAL OF STEPHEN OF HUNGARY

Concern yourself with the greatest Kingdom

Royal families are typically concerned about succession and making sure they have an heir. They want their lineage to survive them. Many monarchs eventually failed at that, including King Saint Stephen I of Hungary, who founded the country in the year 1000 and made it Christian. Only one of his sons lived to adulthood but died before Stephen did. What Stephen did leave behind is a country that is still majority Catholic. We might not be remembered for sowing faith long into the future here on Earth—but if we remain faithful, we could end up with royal treasure in heaven.

Today's readings:

Judges 2:11-19; Matthew 19:16-22 (419).

"Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?"

17 AUG 2021

Pray for the persecuted

On this day in 1798, Our Lady of La Vang first appeared to Vietnamese victims of persecution. When Vietnam's emperor outlawed Catholicism, inciting brutality and martyrdom, believers fled to the rain forest of La Vang. They sought Mary's consolation, gathering beneath a large tree to pray the Rosary. They began seeing an apparition of Mother and Child, flanked by angels. She comforted them and is said to have pointed out nearby healing plants. Our Lady of La Vang is honored in the United States with a chapel at the [National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception](#). Ask her to intercede for victims of racist hate.

Today's readings:

Judges 6:11-24a; Matthew 19:23-30 (420).

"We have given up everything and followed you."

18 AUG 2021

Let's work on making work better

The U.S. Catholic Bishops have spoken on *The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers*, saying in part: “The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages” Food for thought at a time when workers’ reluctance to return to low-paid, unfulfilling jobs is much in the news. Is the problem with the worker—or the workplace?

Today's readings:

Judges 9:6-15; Matthew 20:1-16 (421).

“Are you envious because I am generous?” Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

19 AUG 2021

MEMORIAL OF JOHN EUDES, PRIEST

Take this devotion to heart

The Sacred Heart of Jesus image is ubiquitous in the Catholic world, and today we celebrate one of the people who helped create a devotion to it, John Eudes, a French priest (1601-80), who also founded the Eudists, the Congregation of Jesus and Mary. The Sacred Heart image is a heart encircled by a crown of thorns often depicted with radiating rays of light and placed on the chest of Jesus. The image is physical and mystical, a reminder of Christ’s bodily sacrifice and mysterious in its supernatural appearance. Seek out this image and allow it to shape your prayer today.

Today's readings:

Judges 11:29-39a; Matthew 22:1-14 (422).

“Everything is ready; come to the feast.”

20 AUG 2021

MEMORIAL OF BERNARD, ABBOT, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

All hail Doctor Mellifluous

No, Mellifluous is not the newest superhero villain; it’s a title for one of the greatest heroes of the Roman Catholic faith. Bernard of Clairvaux earned the nickname because his writings were eloquent, as suggested by the Latin root of his nickname: “flowing honey.” This gift was founded on his deep love of God, scripture, and the church’s tradition. His description of the Holy Spirit as the “kiss” between God the Father and Jesus the Son gives us a beautiful example of how to image the relationship of love among the three persons of the Trinity. Following in the good doctor’s footsteps, how have you experienced the kiss of the Holy Spirit in your own relationships?

Today's readings:

Ruth 1:1, 3-6, 14b-16, 22; Matthew 22:34-40 (423).

“For wherever you go, I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge, your people shall be my people, and your God my God.”

21 AUG 2021

MEMORIAL OF PIUS X, POPE

The year of living humbly

Prior to COVID-19, plagues mentioned in history books seemed like remote disasters that only happened in times and places where rats roamed streets filled with sewage. Now that we’ve been humbled by our continued vulnerability to unseen agents of disease and death, perhaps we can bring a renewed appreciation to Pius X, who endeared himself to the people of northern Italy because of his efforts tending the sick during the cholera plague of the early 1870s. Take a moment this week to thank someone who has tended the sick during our very modern plague.

Today's readings:

Ruth 2:1-3, 8-11; 4:13-17; Matthew 23:1-12 (424).

“The greatest among you must be your servant.”