

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 22, 2021

21st Sunday of Ordinary Time

Opening Prayer

Lord, your Word is sweet, it is like a honeycomb, it is not hard nor is it bitter. It may burn like fire, it may be like the hammer that breaks rock, it may be the sharp sword that pierces and separates the soul... but, Lord, your Word is sweet! Grant that I may listen to it that it may be gentle music, a song and an echo to my ears, my memory and my intellect. I offer my whole being to you and ask you to grant that I may listen faithfully, sincerely, strongly. Lord, grant that I may keep my ears and heart fixed on your lips, your voice, so that not one word may be in vain. Pour forth your Holy Spirit to be like living water watering my field so that it may bear fruit, thirty, sixty and a hundredfold. Lord, draw me, grant that I may come to you, because, you know... where shall I go, to whom on this earth if not to you?

Gospel Reading - John 6: 60-69

Placing the Passage in its Proper Context:

These are the concluding verses of the great chapter six of John's Gospel, where the Evangelist presents his "Eucharistic theology." This conclusion is the climax of the chapter, because the Word leads us deeper into and towards the center of things; from the crowd at the start of the chapter, to the Jews who discuss with Jesus in the synagogue in Capernaum, to the disciples, to the twelve, even to Peter, the only one who stands for each one of us, alone, face to face with the Lord Jesus. Here we hear the reply to Jesus' teaching, to the Word sown abundantly in the heart of his listeners. Here we verify whether the soil of the heart produces thorns and weeds or green shoots that

produce ears and finally good corn in the ears.

An Aid to the Reading of the Passage:

- v. 60: Some disciples condemn the Word of the Lord and thus also Jesus himself who is the Word of God. God is not seen as a good Father who speaks to his children, but as a hard master (Mt 25: 24), with whom it is not possible to enter into dialogue.
- vv. 61-65: Jesus unveils the incredulity and hardness of heart of his disciples and reveals his mysteries of salvation: his ascension into heaven, the gift of the Holy Spirit and our participation in the divine life. But these mysteries can only be understood and accepted by the wisdom of a docile heart, capable of listening, and not by means of physical intelligence.
- v. 66: This verse reveals the first great betrayal by many disciples who have failed to understand the true teaching of Jesus. Instead of turning their gaze on the Master, they turn their backs on him and thus interrupt communion and no longer walk with him.
- vv. 67-69: Jesus now addresses himself to the twelve, his most intimate friends, and places before them a final and absolute choice, whether to stay with him or go away. Peter answers on behalf of all and proclaims the faith of the Church in Jesus as Son of God and in his Word, which is the true source of life.

The Text:

Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, "Do you take offence at this? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before? ⁶³ It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you that do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. ⁶⁵ And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him.

Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

A Moment of Silent Prayer

I have received the Gift, the grace, I have listened to the Word of the Lord, now I do not wish to murmur (v. 61), I do not wish to be scandalized (v. 61), nor do I wish to be confused by incredulity (v. 64). I do not wish to betray my Master (v. 64), I do not wish to withdraw and not walk with him any longer (v. 66)... I wish to remain with the Lord at all times! In the silence of my heart, I repeat endlessly to him: "Lord to whom shall I go if not to you??!". Behold, Lord, I come...

A Few Questions

to open my heart and plough my interior soil with a plough capable of pulling up the roots of hardness and incredulity.

- What kind of disciple am I? Am I really willing every day to learn at the school of Jesus, to receive his teaching, which is not the doctrine of human beings but the wisdom of the Holy Spirit?
- "This is a hard saying, who can listen to it?" Is it really the Word of the Lord that is hard or is it my heart that wants only to close itself and no longer listen?
- "Jesus knowing in himself..." He knows my heart and knows what is in each person (Jn 1:48; 2: 25; 4: 29; 10: 15). How do I react to his gaze, to his voice that calls my name, to his coming into my life, to his constant knocking (Ap 3: 20)? What choices do I make?
- "It is the Spirit that gives life." However, do I allow myself to be led like Mary (Lk 1: 38) and Simeon (Lk 2: 27), do I allow the Lord to take me where he wills, where he waits for me, or do I always want to decide for myself the direction of my life?
- Do I answer Jesus' personal invitation "Come to me! Come and follow me!" every day, every moment, in the most diverse situations of my life, in various circumstances, in the presence of others? To whom do I go? Where do I turn to? Whose footsteps am I following?

A Key to the Reading

I ask the Scriptures to be my guide, to enlighten each step, each movement, because I wish to go to Jesus. I ask the verbs he uses, the expressions he repeats, the silence of the unsaid words, to reveal to me the way ... to find him and not someone else.

- The Word of the Lord and the love relationship with it

In this passage, John presents to me the Word of the Lord as meeting point, the holy place for an appointment with Him. I realize that this is the place of my decision, of ever deeper separations in my heart and in my conscience. I realize also that the Word is a Person, it is the Lord himself, present before me, given to me, open to me. The whole of the Bible, page after page, is an invitation, sweet yet at the same time strong, to meet the Word, to get to know the Promised one, the Bride who is really the Word that comes from the kiss of love, from the mouth of the Lord. The meeting accorded is not superficial, empty, nor is it fleeting or sporadic, but intense, full, constant, uninterrupted, because it is like the meeting between the bride and groom. Thus does the Lord love me and give himself to me. It is, therefore, important to listen carefully and lovingly so that not one word may be in vain (1 Sam 3: 19); it is important to listen with the heart, with the soul (Ps 94: 8; Bar 2: 31); it is important to obey in practice for a lifetime (Mt 7: 24-27; Ja 1: 22-25); it is important to make a true

and final decision that will choose the Word of the Lord even to making it my sister (Pr 7: 1-4) or my bride to be taken into my home (Wis 8: 2).

- Murmuring is closing one's heart

The theme of murmuring, of rebelling, shakes me up and creates a crisis in me. When I read the Bible, even when I just think about it, I realize that murmuring against the Lord and his actions in our lives is the most terrible and destructive thing that could possibly live in my heart. It takes me away from Him. It separates me strongly and makes me blind, deaf, and insensitive. It makes me say that He does not exist while all the time He is very near; that He hates me when He loves me with an eternal and faithful love (Dt 1: 27)! It is the greatest and most profound foolishness! In Exodus, Numbers, and the Psalms, I come across a people of God that weeps, complains, gets angry, murmurs, closes itself, rebels, and turns away (Es 16: 7ff; Num 14: 2; 17, 20ff; Ps 105: 25); a hopeless, lifeless people. I understand that this kind of situation comes about when there is no longer dialogue with the Lord, when the contract with Him is broken, when, instead of listening to Him and asking questions of Him, there is only murmuring, a kind of continuous droning in the soul, in the mind, that makes me say: "Can God supply food in the dessert?" (Ps 77: 19). If I murmur against my Father, if I stop believing in his Love for me, in his tenderness, that He showers me with every good thing, I am lifeless, I am without nourishment for the every-day journey. Or if I get angry, if I become jealous because He is good and gives His love to all, without reserve, and I act like the Pharisees (Lk 15: 2; 19: 7), then I am entirely alone and besides no longer being His child I am no longer even brother or sister of anyone. In fact, there is a close relationship between murmuring against God and murmuring against brothers and sisters. (Phil 2: 14; 1 Pt 4: 9) I learn all this when I follow the trail of this word...

- The Gift of the Son of man: the Holy Spirit

It seems that I see a road full of light, traced by the Lord Jesus and almost hidden in these verses that are so compact and overflowing in spiritual richness. The starting point lies in a true and deep listening to his Words and in welcoming them. From here we pass on to the purification of the heart, which from a heart of stone, hard and closed, becomes, through the tenderness of the Father, a heart of flesh, soft, a heart that He can hurt, mould, take into His hands and hold tight, as a gift. Yes, all this is accomplished by the Words of Jesus when they come to me and enter into me. It is only thus that I can continue on my journey, overcoming murmurings and scandal, until I am able to see Jesus with new eyes, eyes renewed by the Word, eyes that do not rest on superficial things, on the hardness of the rind, but eyes that learn, every day a little more, to go beyond and to look on high. "Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?" (v. 62). This is the welcoming of the Spirit, gift of the Risen One, gift of the One who ascended at the right hand of the Father, gift from on high, perfect gift (Ja 1: 17). He had said: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me" (Jn 12: 32) and He draws me with the Spirit, He makes me His own with the Spirit, He sends me in the Spirit (Jn 20: 21s), He strengthens me thanks to the Spirit (Acts 1: 8). If I take a long look at the pages of the

Gospels, I can see how the Spirit of the Lord is the strength that dwells in each person, each reality, because He is the eternal love of the Father, the very life of God in us. I pay attention and dwell on the verbs and the expressions used, on the words that follow and enlighten each other, enriching each other. I feel that I am really immersed in living Waters that gush and gurgle, I feel that I receive a new baptism and I thank the Lord with my whole heart. "He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire" (Mt 3: 11), so cries John and, as I read, this Word comes true in me, inside me, in my whole being. I feel the Spirit speaking in me (Mt 10: 20); who, with His power, drives away from me the spirit of evil (Mt 12: 28); who fills me, as He did Jesus (Lk 4:1), John the Baptist (Lk 1: 15), the Virgin Mary (Lk 1: 28. 35), Elisabeth (Lk 1: 41), Zachary (Lk 1: 67), Simeon (Lk 2: 26), the disciples (Acts 2: 4), Peter (Acts 4: 8) and so many others. I feel and meet the Spirit who teaches me what to say (Lk 12: 10); who really gives new birth to me so that I may never die (Jn 3: 5); who teaches me all things and reminds me of all that Jesus said (Jn 14: 26); who guides me towards truth (Jn 16: 13); who gives me strength to witness to the Lord Jesus (Acts 1: 8), to His love for me and for everyone.

- The struggle of faith: in the Father or in the evil one?

This passage of John's Gospel challenges us to a great struggle, a hand-to-hand fight between the spirit and the flesh, between the wisdom of God and human reason, between Jesus and the world. I can see that Job was right when he said that human life on earth is a time of temptation and a struggle (Job 7: 1), because I too experience the evil one who tries to discourage me by creating doubts concerning the divine promises and urging me to turn away from Jesus. He would like to send me away, tries by every means to harden my heart, to close me, to break my faith, my love. I hear him roaming around like a roaring lion seeking whom to devour (1 Pt 5: 8), like a tempter, a creator of divisions, an accuser, like a scoffer mocking and repeating all the time: "Where is the promise of his coming?" (2 Pt 3: 3f). I know that it is only with the arms of faith that I can win (Eph 6: 10-20; 2 Cor 10: 3-5), only in the strength that comes to me from the Words of my Father; hence I choose them, love them, study them, scrutinize them, learn them by heart, repeat them and say: "Even if a whole army surrounds me, I will not be afraid; even if enemies attack me, I will still trust in God!" (Ps 26: 3).

- Profession of faith in Jesus, Son of God

The appearance of Simon Peter at the end of this passage is like a pearl set on a precious jewel, because it is he who proclaims truth, light, and salvation through his profession of faith. I gather other passages from the Gospels, other professions of faith that help my incredulity, because I too wish to believe and then know, I too wish to believe and be firm (Is 7: 9): Mt 16: 16; Mk 8: 29; Lk 9: 20; Jn 11: 27).

A Moment of Silent Prayer:

Psalm 18: A Hymn of Praise to the Word of the Lord, Who Gives Wisdom and Joy to the Heart

The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

Ref. Lord, you have the words of eternal life!

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Ref. Lord, you have the words of eternal life!

But who can discern his errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me!

Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight,
O Lord,

my rock and my redeemer.

Ref. Lord, you have the words of eternal life!

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank you for your words that have re-awakened in me spirit and life; thank you because you speak and creation goes on, you overwhelm me, you still print your image in me, your unique likeness. Thank you because, lovingly and patiently, you wait for me even when I murmur, when I allow myself to be scandalized, when I fall into incredulity or when I turn my back to you. Forgive me, Lord, for all these faults and continue to heal me, to make me strong and happy in following you, you alone! Lord, you ascended to where you were before, but you are still with us and do not cease to draw each one of us to you. Draw me, Lord, and I shall run, because I have truly believed and known that you are the Holy One of God! But, please Lord, when I run to you, let me not run alone, let me be always open to the companionship of my brothers and sisters; and together with them, I shall find you and shall be your disciple all the days of my life. Amen.



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

22 AUG 2021

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Who do you serve?

Songwriter Bob Dylan had a come-to-Jesus moment in 1978 in a hotel room in Tucson, Arizona. More accurately, it seemed like Jesus came to him, as he felt “a presence in the room that couldn’t have been anybody but Jesus.” For four years, Dylan wrote songs critics panned as “God-awful gospel,” and fans mourned the loss of what they’d come to expect from him. By 1981, Dylan had returned to his Jewish and folk-rock roots. Yet he never retracted his vision: “Well, it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody.” The choice remains ours.

Today's readings:

Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b; Ephesians 5:21-32; John 6:60-69 (122).

“If it does not please you to serve the LORD, decide today whom you will serve.”

23 AUG 2021

MEMORIAL OF ROSE OF LIMA, VIRGIN

Family finesse

Parents have expectations of their kids, and kids want to make their own choices—it’s part of the painful growing-up process. Rose of Lima was like a lot of teenagers who clashed with her parents about her future, and she was like a lot of saints who rankled family by refusing to marry. They never let her join a convent, but they didn’t force her to wed either, finally relenting to her choice of chastity. She lived out her brief life as she had wished, in prayer and penance. She is the patron saint of family problems. Everyone has them, so ask Rose for help.

Today's readings:

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5, 8b-10; Matthew 23:13-22 (425).

“One who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God.”

24 AUG 2021

FEAST OF BARTHOLOMEW, APOSTLE

Play a stirring role

Bartholomew, also called Nathanael, was one of the original 12 apostles and later, a traveling missionary. He embodied what it means to become a missionary disciple—one who, upon being led to Jesus, wishes to lead others to him, too. As the U.S. bishops say in *Go and Make Disciples*, Jesus “gave the Church the unending task of evangelizing as a restless power, to stir and to stimulate.” Where can you stir interest in Jesus today?

Today's readings:

Revelation 21:9b-14; John 1:45-51 (629).

“Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”

25 AUG 2021

The past is present

Today, we are becoming aware of the deep truth that wrongs committed in the past, even generations ago, can still perpetuate evil. Such is the sin of racism, which the U.S. Catholic Bishops have repeatedly called “an evil which endures in our society and in our Church” (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*). Each of us is called to help dismantle

racism, to reject profiting from the oppression of others, and to listen to the voices of those who have been silenced too long—for the sake of our past, present, and future.

Today's readings:

1 Thessalonians 2:9-13; Matthew 23:27-32 ([427](#)).

"You are like whitewashed tombs."

26 AUG 2021

Be alert!

Wakefulness is a term often used in spiritual writing. In today's gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, "Stay awake! You do not know on which day your Lord will come." The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) contains at least 20 references to being awake, usually in regard to "awakening faith." The church wants its members to be vigilant and tells us in the catechism that the "Holy Spirit constantly seeks to awaken us to keep watch!" Ask the Holy Spirit to help you awaken to God's presence today.

Today's readings:

1 Thessalonians 3:7-13; Matthew 24:42-51 ([428](#)).

"Jesus said to his disciples: 'Stay awake!'"

27 AUG 2021

MEMORIAL OF MONICA

Hang in there

Sometimes it feels like all of our small choices and actions will never amount to anything. Go big or go home, we're told. Yet the stuff of transformation, healing, and love is knitted together one small thing at a time. Our call is to have faith and persist. Take a look at Saint Monica, a laywoman from North Africa, who day in and day out offered "small" acts of kindness, love, and care for her beloved yet wayward son Augustine. She never tired of believing in him, even storming heaven on his behalf. Persisting in the small things that are good, beautiful, and true can make a big difference. What small things are you called to persist in?

Today's readings:

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; Matthew 25:1-13 ([429](#)).

"Stay awake."

28 AUG 2021

MEMORIAL OF AUGUSTINE, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Let happiness be your song

Like all larger-than-life historical figures, Saint Augustine and his legacy are subject to debate. Some find in his vast work reason to take a pessimistic view of humanity. But he was quite life-affirming in his conviction that the happiness found in following God is indeed the only worthy and lasting happiness. "Happy is [the one] who has God," he succinctly put it. To "have" God for Augustine meant to love God, citing Psalm 72: "For me it is good to cling to God." Or, as Pharrell Williams put it in his blockbuster song "Happy" a few years back, "Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth."

Today's readings:

1 Thessalonians 4:9-11; Matthew 25:14-30 ([430](#)).

"You yourselves have been taught by God to love one another."