

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 Devina

Sunday, September 5, 2021

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

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 in us silence 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 from 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 to us the Father and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

Reading

A key to the reading:

This Sunday's liturgy shows us Jesus healing a deaf and dumb person in the land of Decapolis and praised by the people thus: "He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak!" This praise is inspired by some passages in Isaiah (Is 29: 8- 9; 35: 5-6; 42: 7) and shows that the people saw in Jesus the coming of the messianic times. Jesus himself had used this same expression in reply to the disciples of John: "Go back and tell John what you hear and see: the blind see again, and ... the deaf hear" (Mt 11: 4-5).

The early Christians used the Bible to clarify and interpret the actions and attitudes of Jesus. They did this so as to express their faith that Jesus was the Messiah, the One who was to fulfil the promise, and so as to be able to understand better that which Jesus did

and said during those few years that he spent in their midst in Palestine.

A division of the text as an aid to the reading:

- Mark 7: 31: a geographical description: Jesus is somewhere outside Judea.
- Mark 7: 32: the man's condition: deaf and dumb.
- Mark 7: 33-34: Jesus' movements in healing the man. Mark 7:35: the result of the healing action of Jesus.
- Mark 7:36: the recommendation of silence is not obeyed.
- Mark 7: 37: the praise of the people.

The Text:

³¹Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis. ³² And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought him to lay his hand upon him. ³³ And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue; ³⁴ and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ And he charged them to tell no one; but the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷ And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak."

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

so that the Word of God may penetrate and enlighten our life.

Some Questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- What is the attitude of Jesus towards the deaf and dumb person and towards the people? How do you understand the actions of Jesus: he places his finger in the man's ears and with his saliva touches the man's tongue, then, looking up to heaven, he sighs and says: "Ephphatha»?
- How can we understand Jesus' concern for taking the man away from the crowd?
- Why does Jesus forbid the spreading of the news? How do we understand the people's disobedience of Jesus' command?
- What other New Testament and Old Testament texts are connoted or form the basis of this text?

Further Information on Mark's Gospel

- Mark 7: 31: Jesus in the land of Decapolis

The episode of the healing of the deaf and dumb man is little known. Mark does not state clearly where Jesus is. It is understood that he is somewhere outside Palestine, in the land of the pagans, across a region called Decapolis. Decapolis literally means Ten Cities. This was, in fact, a region of ten cities, southeast of Galilee, where people were pagan and influenced by Greek culture.

- Mark 7: 32: They brought him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech.

Even though he is not in his native land, Jesus is known as someone who heals the sick. Thus, the people bring him a deaf man who has difficulty with his speech. This is someone who cannot communicate with others. He reflects many who today live as a mass in large cities in complete solitude, without the possibility of any communication.

- Mark 7: 33-34: A different kind of healing

The manner of healing is different. The people thought that Jesus would simply place his hands on the sick person. But Jesus goes beyond their request and takes the man away from the crowd, places his finger in the man's ears and with his spittle touches the man's tongue, then looking up to heaven sighs deeply and says: «Ephphatha» which means –Be opened!! The finger in the ear recalls the magicians' exclamation in Egypt: "This is the finger of God!" (Ex 8:15) and also the expression of the Psalmist: "You...opened my ear!" (Ps 40:7). The touching of the tongue with spittle gives back the faculty of speech. In those days, people thought that spittle had medicinal value. Looking up to heaven says that the healing is from God. The sigh is an attitude of supplication.

- Mark 7: 35: The result of the healing

All at once, the ears of the deaf man were opened, his tongue was loosed, and the man began to speak correctly. Jesus desires that people might open their ears and loosen their tongues! Today too! In many places, because of an authoritarian attitude on the part of religious powers, people have been silenced and do not speak. It is very important that people regain the power of speech within the Church in order to express their experience of God and thus enrich all, including the clergy.

- Mark 7: 36: Jesus does not want any publicity

Jesus commands that no one tell of that which took place. However, there is an exaggerated importance attached to Mark's Gospel's prohibition to spread the news of the healing, as if Jesus had a secret that had to be kept. In fact, sometimes Jesus tells people not to spread news of a healing (Mk 1: 44; 5: 43; 7: 36; 8: 26). He asks for silence, but gets the opposite effect. The more he forbids, the more the Good News is spread (Mk 1: 28, 45; 3: 7-8; 7: 36-37). On the other hand, many times, in most cases, Jesus did not ask for silence concerning a miracle. Once he even asked for publicity (Mk 5: 19).

- Mark 7: 37: The praise of the people

All were in admiration and said: "He has done all things well!" (Mk 7: 37). This statement recalls the creation: –God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good." (Gen 1: 31). Despite the prohibition, those who had witnessed the healing began to proclaim that which they had seen, expressing the Good News in the brief form: "He has done all things well!" It is useless to prohibit them talking. The inner power of the Good News is such that it spreads itself! Whoever has experienced Jesus, has to tell others, whether s/he likes it or not!

Information on the Internal Divisions of Mark's Gospel

1st Key: Mark's Gospel *was written* to be read and listened to in *community*.

When one reads a book alone, one can always stop and go back so as to connect one thing with another. But when one is in community and someone else out in front is reading the Gospel, one cannot shout: "Stop! Read that again! I did not understand it well!" For a book to be listened to in community celebrations, it must be divided differently from other books meant for personal reading.

2nd Key: Mark's Gospel is a *narrative*.

A narrative is like a river. Going down a river in a boat, one is not aware of divisions in the water. The river has no divisions. It is a single flow, from beginning to end. The divisions are made on the banks not in the river. For instance, one may say: "The beautiful part of the river that goes from that house on the bend up to the palm tree three bends down river." But one does not see any division in the water itself. Mark's narration flows like a river. Listeners come across divisions along its banks, that is, in the places where Jesus goes, in the people he meets, in the streets he walks down. These marginal indications help listeners not to get lost in the midst of so many words and actions of Jesus and concerning Jesus. The geographical setting helps the reader to walk along with Jesus, step by step, from Galilee to Jerusalem, from the lake to Calvary.

3rd Key: Mark's Gospel was written *in order to be read all in one go*.

That is how the Jews read the small books of the Old Testament. For instance, on the eve of Easter, they read the complete Canticle of Canticles. Some scholars are of the opinion that Mark's Gospel was written to be read in its entirety on the eve of Easter. Now, so that the listeners might not get tired, the reading had to have divisions, pauses. For, when a narrative is long, such as is Mark's Gospel, the reading needs to be interrupted from time to time. There must be some pauses. Otherwise, the listeners get lost. The author of the narrative provided for these pauses. These were marked by summaries between one long reading and the next. These summaries were like hinges that gathered what was read before and opened the way to what was to come. They allow the narrator to stop and start again without interrupting the flow of the narrative. They help the listeners to take their bearing within the river of the flowing narrative. Mark's Gospel has several of these pauses that allow us to discover and follow the course of the Good News of God that Jesus revealed and that Mark narrates. In all there are six longer blocks of readings, interspersed with summaries or hinges, where it is possible to take a small pause.

Based on these three keys, we now present a division of Mark's Gospel. Others divide this Gospel in different ways. Each way has its distinctive character and its value. The value of any division is that it opens several ways of going into the text, of helping us to discover something about the Good News of God and to discern the how Jesus opens a way for us to God and the neighbor.

- Introduction: Mk 1:1-13:
 - Beginning of the Good News
 - Preparing the proclamation
- Summary: 1: 14-15
- 1st reading: Mk 1: 16-3: 16:
 - Growth of the Good News
 - Conflict appears
- Summary: 3: 7-12
- 2nd reading: Mk 3: 13-6: 6:
 - Growth of the conflict
 - The Mystery appears
- Summary: 6: 7-13
- 3rd reading: Mk 6: 14-8: 21:
 - Growth of the Mystery
 - Misunderstanding appears
- Summary: 8: 22-26
- 4th reading: Mk 8: 27-10: 45:
 - Growth of the misunderstanding
 - The dark light of the Cross appears
- Summary: 10: 46-52
- 5th reading: Mk 11: 1-13: 32:
 - Growth of the dark light of the Cross
 - Appearance of rupture and death
- Summary: 13: 33-37
- 6th reading: Mk 14: 1-15: 39:
 - Growth of the rupture and death
 - Victory over death appears
- Summary: 15: 40-41
- Conclusion: Mk 15: 42-16: 20:

Growth of the victory over death

Reappearance of the Good News.

In this division the headings are important. They point to where the Spirit is blowing, to the *inspiration* that runs through the whole Gospel. When an artist feels inspired, he tries to express this inspiration in a work of art. The poem or image that is the result carries within it this inspiration. Inspiration is like the electric power that runs invisibly through the wires and lights the lamps in our houses. So also, inspiration runs invisibly in the words of the poem or in the form of the image to reveal and light up within us a light equal or almost equal to that which shone in the artist. That is why works of art attract us so much. The same occurs when we read and meditate the Gospel of Mark. The same Spirit or *Inspiration* that moved Mark to write his text remains present in the thread of the words of his Gospel. By our attentive and prayerful reading of his Gospel, this Spirit begins to act and operate within us. Thus, gradually, we discover the face of God revealed in Jesus and that Mark communicates to us in his book.

Psalm 131

Filial Surrender

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high.

I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul.

O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and for evermore.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank 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.

05SEP₂₀₂₁ - TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Shopping made simple

What do you give to the saint who has everything? Mother Teresa of Calcutta was among the spiritually richest people on the planet throughout her productive life caring for the poor. The date of her death, September 5, was quickly recognized in Hungary as an occasion to be perpetually honored. In 2012, the United Nations declared this date as an International Day of Charity in her memory. As Mother Teresa demonstrated, simple acts of charity reach across divisions and make communities more resilient. Contribute to the healing of society today by charitable giving, locally or globally.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 35:4-7a; James 2:1-5; Mark 7:31-37 (128).

“Did not God choose those who are poor in the world to be . . . heirs of the kingdom that he promised?”

06SEP₂₀₂₁

Labor of love

This Labor Day, as we enjoy food at picnics and barbecues, let's remember who harvested this food—many of them Spanish-speaking migrant workers, many of them fellow Catholics. Consider what your parish can do for migrant workers in your area. Perhaps a clothing drive or a fundraiser to buy rosaries and Bibles in Spanish or other languages of a migrant group. Or enlist school kids to write translated notes of welcome and thanks for the hard work migrants do. [Catholic Charities](#) helped nearly 400,000 migrants, immigrants, and refugees this past year with all kinds of assistance—learn more about their work and how you can pitch in.

Today's readings:

Colossians 1:24—2:3; Luke 6:6-11 (437).

“Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?”

07SEP₂₀₂₁

Creation needs your caring prayer

Jewish believers celebrate Rosh Hashanah today, marking the birthday of the universe—recalling how God placed Adam and Eve at the center of creation as faithful stewards. For many Christians, it's also Day 7 in the [Season of Creation](#). When the Catholic Church joined this observance in 2019, Pope Francis wrote: “In the silence of prayer, we can hear the symphony of creation calling us to abandon our self-centeredness in order to feel embraced by the tender love of the Father and to share with joy the gifts we have received.” Pray to become a more selfless steward of creation.

Today's readings:

Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 6:12-19 (438).

“Jesus departed to the mountain to pray.”

08SEP₂₀₂₁ - FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

The birth of our salvation

In 431, bishops at the Council of Ephesus decreed Mary as *Theotokos*, a Greek word that means “God-bearer”—or, more commonly, “Mother of God.” Her birthday was celebrated at the beginning of the year—in Constantinople, the calendar began on September 1—because Mary's birth is also the beginning of our salvation, through her son.

“Be of good cheer,” wrote Saint Andrew of Crete, “this is the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin and of the renewal of the human race!” Honor Mary today by praying the Magnificat, also known as the “Ode of the Theotokos.”

Today's readings:

Micah 5:1-4a or Romans 8:28-30; Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23 (636).

“From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old.”

09SEP₂₀₂₁ - MEMORIAL OF PETER CLAVER, PRIEST

Call it out

Saint Peter Claver (1580-1654) was a Jesuit priest dedicated to baptizing and serving enslaved Africans in Cartagena, Colombia, a major slave-trade port. While Claver was ahead of many of his peers in at least recognizing the humanity of Africans and poured out his life to alleviate the great suffering he encountered, we need to acknowledge that the colonial system that enslaved Africans was allowed to continue unabated for centuries without much church resistance. How can we and our communities of faith challenge the enduring legacy of racism today, inspired by Claver’s witness of service and the gospel mandate to love?

Today's readings:

Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 6:27-38 (440).

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

10SEP₂₀₂₁

Because of you . . .

A 2014 study found that “young people with mentors, especially at-risk youth, have more positive visions of themselves and their futures, and they also achieve more positive outcomes in school, the workplace, and their communities.” The value of mentoring is nothing new. Proverbs 22:6 says: “Train the young in the way they should go; even when old, they will not swerve from it.” Whether you are teaching a practical or spiritual skill or a new technique or way of thinking, your instruction will have an impact. Take time to be a good mentor for the sake of the next generation and the greater glory of God.

Today's readings:

1 Timothy 1:1-2, 12-14; Luke 6:39-42 (441).

“When fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher.”

11SEP₂₀₂₁

Heaven help us all

The attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon happened 20 years ago today. We still carry the memory of that awful day, and we continue to remember in our prayers the victims of the attack and their families and loved ones who continue to mourn their great loss. We remember the passengers and crew of the aircraft destroyed in the attack as well as the victims on the ground. We remember especially the brave first responders who ran toward danger rather than away, many of whom gave away their health and lives to save others. And we pray for the terrorists as well, because we believe in the redemptive power of prayer and because hatred and vengeance have no place in our hearts. May all of humanity be redeemed.

Today's readings:

1 Timothy 1:15-17; Luke 6:43-49 (442).

“A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good.”