

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: 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Sunday, November 1, 2020

The Beatitudes Matthew 5:1-12

1. Listening to the Text

a) Opening Prayer:

Lord, the meaning of our life is to seek your Word, which came to us in the person of Christ. Make me capable of welcoming what is new in the Gospel of the Beatitudes, so that I may change my life. I would know nothing about you were it not for the light of the words spoken by your Son Jesus, who came to tell us of your marvels. When I am weak, if I go to Him, the Word of God, then I become strong. When I act foolishly, the wisdom of his Gospel restores me to relish God and the kindness of his love. He guides me to the paths of life. When some deformity appears in me, I reflect on his Word and the image of my personality becomes beautiful. When solitude tries to make me dry, my spiritual marriage to him makes my life fruitful. When I discover some sadness or unhappiness in myself, the thought of Him, my only good, opens the way to joy. Therese of the Child Jesus has a saying that sums up the desire for holiness as an intense search for God and a listening to others: «If you are nothing, remember that Jesus is all. You must therefore lose your little nothing into his infinite all and think of nothing else but this uniquely lovable all... (*Letters, 87, to Marie Guérin*).

b) Reading the Gospel:

1 Seeing the crowds, he went onto the mountain.
And when he was seated his disciples came to him.

2 Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them:

3 How blessed are the poor in spirit:
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

4 Blessed are the gentle:
they shall have the earth as inheritance.

5 Blessed are those who mourn:
they shall be comforted.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness:
they shall have their fill.

7 Blessed are the merciful:
they shall have mercy shown them.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart:
they shall see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers:
they shall be recognized as children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness:
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

11 Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account.

12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.

c) A Moment of Prayerful Silence:

It is important to be able to listen in deep silence so that the word of Christ may speak to us and so that the Word made flesh may dwell in us and us in him. It is only in silent hearts that the Word of God can take root and, on this Solemnity of All Saints, become flesh in us.

2. Light Shed on the Word (Lectio)

a) The Context:

Jesus' words on the Beatitudes that Matthew drew from his sources, were condensed in short and isolated phrases, and the Evangelist has placed them in a broader context, which Biblical scholars call the "*sermon on the mount*" (Chapters 5-7). This sermon is considered like the statutes or *Magna Carta* that Jesus gave to the community as a normative and binding word that defines a Christian.

The many themes contained in this long sermon are not to be seen as collection of exhortations, but rather as a clear and radical indication of the new attitude of the disciples towards God, oneself and the brothers and sisters. Some expressions used by Jesus may seem exaggerated, but they are used to stress reality and thus are realistic in the context although not so in a literary sense: for instance in vv. 29-30: "*If your right eye should be your downfall, tear it out and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of yourself than to have your whole body thrown into hell. And if your right hand should be your downfall, cut it off and throw it away, for it will do you less harm to lose one part of yourself than to have your whole body go to hell.*" This manner of speaking indicates the effect desired to be created in the reader, who must understand correctly Jesus' words so as not to distort their meaning.

Our focus, for liturgical reasons, will be on the first part of the "*sermon on the mount*," that is the part dealing with the proclamation of the beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12).

b) Some Details:

Matthew invites the reader to listen to the beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus with a rich concentration of details. First, he indicates the place where Jesus proclaims his sermon: "*Jesus went onto the mountain*" (5:1). That is why exegetes call this the "*sermon on the mount*" even though Luke places this sermon on level ground (Lk 6:20-26). The geographic location of the "*mountain*" could be a veiled reference to an episode in the OT quite like ours: that is, when Moses proclaims the Decalogue on mount Sinai. It is possible that Matthew wishes to present Jesus as the new Moses who proclaims the new law.

Another detail that strikes us is the physical posture of Jesus as he proclaims his words: "*when he was seated.*" This posture confers upon him a note of authority in the legislative sense. The disciples and the "crowd" gather around him: this detail shows what Jesus had to say was for all to hear. We note that Jesus' words do not present impossible matters, nor are they addressed to a special group of people, nor do they mean to establish a code of ethics exclusively for his inner circle. Jesus' demands are concrete, binding and decisively radical.

Someone branded Jesus' sermon as follows: *«For me, this is the most important text in the history of humankind. It is addressed to all, believers and non, and after twenty centuries it is still the only light still shining in the darkness of violence, fear and solitude in which the West finds itself because of its pride and selfishness»* (Gilbert Cesbron).

The word "blessed" (in Greek *makarioi*) in our context does not say "softly" but cries out happiness found throughout the Bible. For instance, in the OT, those called "blessed" are those who live out the precepts of Wisdom (Sir 25:7-10). The prayerful person of the Psalms defines "blessed" as those who "fear", or more precisely those who love the Lord, expressing this love in the observance of the precepts contained in the word of God (Ps 1:1; 128:1).

Matthew's originality lies in adding a secondary phrase that specifies each beatitude: for instance, the main assertion "blessed are the poor in spirit" is clarified by an added phrase "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Another difference with the OT is that Jesus' words proclaim a saving blessedness here and now and without any limitations. For Jesus, all can attain happiness on condition that they remain united to Him.

c) The First Three Beatitudes:

i) The first cry concerns the poor: *"How blessed are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is theirs."* The reader may be shocked: how can the poor be happy? In the Bible, the poor are those who empty themselves of themselves and above all renounce the presumption of building their own present and future alone, and thus leave room for and focus on God's project and his Word. The poor, always in the biblical sense, is not someone closed in on himself, miserable, negative, but someone who nurtures being open to God and to others. God is all his/her treasure. We could say with St. Teresa of Avila: happy are those who experience that "God alone suffices," meaning that they are rich in God.

A great modern spiritual author described poverty as follows: *"As long as one does not empty one's heart, God cannot fill it with himself. As you empty your heart, so does the Lord fill it."*

Poverty is emptiness, not only in what concerns the future but also the past. Not a regret or memory, not a worry or wish! God is not in the past. God is not in the future: He is in the present! Leave your past to God, leave your future to God. Your poverty is to live the present, the Presence of God who is Eternity" (Divo Barsotti).

This is the first beatitude, not just because it is the first of many, but because it seems to encapsulate all the others in their diversity.

ii) *"Blessed are those who mourn; they shall be comforted."* One can mourn because of a great pain or suffering. This underlines the fact that we are dealing with a serious situation even though the motives or the cause are not mentioned. If we wish to identify today "those who mourn" we could think of all the Christians who hold dear the demands of the kingdom and suffer because of many negative aspects in the Church; rather than focus on holiness, the Church presents divisions and lacerations. They may also be those who suffer because of their sins and inconsistencies and who, in some way, slow down their conversion. To these, only God can bring the news of "consolation."

iii) *"Blessed are the gentle, they shall have the earth as inheritance."* The third beatitude is about gentleness. This is a quality that is not so popular today. Rather, for many it has a negative connotation and is taken for weakness or the kind of imperturbability that knows how to control calculatingly one's own emotions. What does the word "gentle" mean in the Bible? The gentle are remembered as those who enjoy great peace (Ps 37:10), are happy, blessed and loved by God. They

are also contrasted with evildoers, the ungodly and sinners. Thus, the OT gives us a wealth of meanings that do not allow for one single definition.

In the NT the first time we meet the word is in Matthew 11:29: *“Learn from me because I am gentle and humble of heart.”* A second time is in Mt 21:5, when Matthew describes Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and cites the prophet Zechariah 2:9: *“Behold your servant comes to you gentle.”* Truly, Matthew’s Gospel may be described as the Gospel of gentleness.

Paul too says that gentleness is an identifying quality of the Christian. In 2 Corinthians 10:1 he exhorts believers *“I urge you by the gentleness and forbearance of Christ”*. In Galatians 5:22 gentleness is considered one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in the heart of believers and consists in being meek, moderate, slow to punish, kind and patient towards others. Again, in Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:12 gentleness is an attitude that is part of the Christian and a sign of the new man in Christ.

Finally, an eloquent witness comes from 1 Peter 3:3-4: *“Your adornment should be not an exterior one, consisting of braided hair or gold jewelry or fine clothing, but the interior disposition of the heart, consisting in the imperishable quality of a gentle and peaceful spirit, so precious in the sight of God.”*

How does Jesus use the word “gentle”? A truly enlightening definition is the one given by the gentle person of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini *“The gentle person, according to the beatitudes, is one who, in spite of the fervor of his/her feelings, remains docile and calm, not possessive, interiorly free, always extremely respectful of the mystery of freedom, imitating God in this respect who does everything with respect for the person, and urges the person to obedience without ever using violence. Gentleness is opposed to all forms of material or moral arrogance, it gains the victory of peace over war, of dialogue over imposition.”*

To this wise interpretation we add that of another famous exegete: *“The gentleness spoken of in the beatitudes is none other than that aspect of humility that manifests itself in practical affability in one’s dealings with the other. Such gentleness finds its image and its perfect model in the person of Jesus, gentle and humble of heart. Truly, such gentleness seems to us like a form of charity, patient and delicately attentive towards others”* (Jacques Dupont).

3. The Word Enlightens Me (Meditatio)

- a) Am I able to accept those little signs of poverty in my regard? For instance, the poverty of poor health and little indispositions? Do I make exorbitant demands?
- b) Am I able to accept some aspect of my poverty and fragility?
- c) Do I pray like a poor person, as one who asks with humility the grace of God, his pardon and his mercy?
- d) Inspired by Jesus’ message concerning gentleness, do I renounce violence, vengeance and a vengeful spirit?
- e) Do I encourage, in families and in my place of work, a spirit of kindness, gentleness and peace?
- f) Do I pay back any small malice, insinuations or offensive allusions with evil?
- g) Do I look after the weakest who cannot defend themselves? Am I patient with old people? Do I welcome lonely strangers who are often exploited at work?

4. To Pray

a) Psalm 23:

The Psalm seems to rotate around the title "The Lord is my shepherd". The saints are the image of the flock on the way: they are accompanied by the goodness and loyalty of God, until they finally reach the house of the Father (L. Alonso Schökel, I salmi della fiducia, Dehoniana libri, Bologna 2006, 54)

Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

In grassy meadows he lets me lie. By tranquil streams he leads me to restore my spirit.

He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits his name. Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death I should fear no danger, for you are at my side.

Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me.

You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup brims over.

Kindness and faithful love pursue me every day of my life.

I make my home in the house of Yahweh for all time to come.

b) Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you show us the way of the beatitudes so that we may come to that happiness that is fullness of life and thus holiness. We are all called to holiness, but the only treasure of the saints is God. Your Word, Lord, calls saints all those who in baptism were chosen by your love of a Father, to be conformed to Christ. Grant, Lord, that by your grace we may achieve this conformity to Jesus Christ. We thank you, Lord, for the saints you have placed on our way and who manifest your love. We ask for your pardon if we have tarnished your face in us and denied our calling to be saints.



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

01NOV2020 - SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS

Get in the ring

Catholic activist Mary “Mother” Jones famously urged: “Pray for the dead—and fight like hell for the living.” She did both, especially fighting for miner’s rights and against child labor at the turn of the 20th century. Called the “most dangerous woman in America” for her clout with the laboring class, she spoke for those who weren’t heard. Mother Jones won’t ever be a saint on the books, but she did as saints do: listened carefully to the concerns of her times, then went in punching for the needs of the oppressed. Who needs your voice—and maybe your boxing skills?

Today's readings:

Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12a ([667](#)).

“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

02NOV2020 - COMMEMORATION OF ALL THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED (ALL SOULS’ DAY)

It is well with my soul

This year, as we mourn the scores of those in our country and around the world who are dead from the pandemic, All Souls’ Day has a uniquely terrible gravity. We are not only grieving the loss of so many human lives but also the loss of what our lives were like before, and we are doing it without the same emotional support we might have had in physically closer times. Today is an opportunity to pray and remember, and acknowledge the deep sadness that is so important to the healing process. Invite the God of hope to wipe away your tears.

Today's readings:

Wisdom 3:1-9; Romans 5:5-11 or Romans 6:3-9; John 6:37-40 ([668](#)).

“Everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life.”

03NOV2020 - MEMORIAL OF MARTIN DE PORRES, RELIGIOUS

Create healing and harmony

After the summer we’ve had, Martin de Porres is the perfect intercessor for the United States today, on Election Day. This famously humble Dominican friar, born of poverty and mixed racial background, is the patron saint of race relations and social justice. Plus, he trained as a doctor to hide an ability to perform miraculous cures. Ask for his help and healing to end our time of pandemic and social division. And ask to have a heart like his: “Everything, even sweeping, scraping vegetables, weeding a garden, and waiting on the sick could be a prayer, if it were offered to God.”

Today's readings:

Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 14:15-24 ([486](#)).

“Bring in here the poor and the crippled, the blind and the lame.”

04NOV2020 - MEMORIAL OF CHARLES BORROMEIO, BISHOP

Be bread for the world

During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, bishops dispensed Catholics from their Sunday obligation to attend Mass. While there were worries about the future of the Eucharist, some leaders found ways for parishioners to be the church in the world, helping the needy, feeding the hungry, and even doing such things as sending baked goods to local hospitals. During the plague of 1576, Cardinal Charles Borromeo took to the streets of Milan to feed the hungry, going into personal debt to do so. Patron saint of cardinals, seminarians, and catechists, Saint Charles pray for us until the day when it is safe for all to gather again to share in the Eucharist.

Today's readings:

Philippians 2:12-18; Luke 14:25-33 ([487](#)).

"Every one of you who does not renounce all . . . possessions cannot be my disciple."

05 NOV 2020 - Keep the conversation going

Have you ever had to rethink your life? Vocation is an ongoing conversation between you and God about how best to use your gifts, and sometimes a "reset" is necessary. Saint Paul refers to the years he spent persecuting the church as a loss in today's first reading. He thought he was doing the right thing when he pushed to have Christians flogged. But he listened to God through dramatic events in his life and discerned that his calling was to join the Christians, eventually becoming their lead evangelizer. Keep the conversation between you and God going!

Today's readings:

Philippians 3:3-8a; Luke 15:1-10 ([488](#)).

"There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people."

06 NOV 2020

No more scarring the Earth

Today marks the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War. Just as human life is impacted and threatened by war, so too is our Earth. In 2003, [the archbishop of Dublin spoke with the U.S. bishops](#) on today's challenge of peace, saying: "The pursuit of peace—lasting peace based on justice—ought to be an environmental priority because the Earth itself bears the wounds and scars of war." The bishops call the church to "help build bridges among the peace, justice, and environmental agendas and constituencies." How can we do this in our own neighborhoods? How can we avoid war and bring justice and peace to the local environment in which we live?

Today's readings:

Philippians 3:17—4:1; Luke 16:1-8 ([489](#)).

"Prepare a full account of your stewardship."

07 NOV 2020 - OPTIONAL MEMORIAL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Dare to love

In his papal letter "[The Joy of Love](#)," Pope Francis speaks of the "tender gaze" with which Jesus looks on all. He might have learned this from Mary. In marriage, spouses learn to look at each other this tenderly, marveling at goodness even when youth and attractiveness fade, as Francis notes. Negotiating conflicts, seeing challenges as resolvable, and appreciating the "large nest" of extended family must have been skills Jesus gained by spending most of his life in such a setting. The pope suggests turning off mobile devices, creating conversation around the dining table. Can you and your loved ones take the challenge?

Today's readings:

Philippians 4:10-19; Luke 16:9-15 ([490](#)).

"The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones."