

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

Luke Dysinger, OSB, is a Benedictine monk of Saint Andrew's Abbey, Valyermo, California

Sunday, November 7, 2021

32nd Sunday of 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.

Gospel Reading – Mark 12: 38-44

A Key to the Reading:

The Gospel text of this Sunday presents us with two opposing but connected facts: on the one hand we have Jesus criticizing the Scribes who used religion to exploit poor widows, and, on the other hand, we have the example of the poor widow who gave to the Temple even what she had to live on. These facts are relevant even today!

A Division of the Text to Help With the Reading:

- Mark 12: 38-40: Jesus criticizes the exploitation of the Scribes
- Mark 12: 41-42: Jesus watches people who place their alms in the treasury of the Temple
- Mark 12: 43-44: Jesus reveals the value of the poor widow's action

Text:

³⁸ In his teaching he said, 'Beware of the scribes who like to walk about in long robes, to be greeted respectfully in the market squares, ³⁹ to take the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets; ⁴⁰ these are the men who devour the property of widows and for show offer long prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive.'

⁴¹ He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the treasury, and many of the rich put in a great deal. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small coins, the equivalent of a penny. ⁴³ Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'In truth I tell you, this poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they have all put in money they could spare, but she in her poverty has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on.'

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 pleased or struck you most in this text? Why?
- What does Jesus criticize and what does he praise in the doctors of the Law?
- What social and religious imbalances of that period do we find in the text?
- How is it that the two coins of the widow are of more value than the great amount put in by the rich? Look carefully at the text and see what follows: "Why does Jesus praise the poor widow?"
- What message does this text convey to us today?

For Those Who Wish to Go Deeper Into the Theme

- **Yesterday's and today's context:**

The context in Jesus' time. Mark's text 12: 38-44 recounts the last part of Jesus' activities in Jerusalem (Mk 11: 1 to 12: 44). Those were very intense days, full of conflicts: the driving out of the sellers in the Temple (Mk 11: 12-26), and many discussions with the authorities: (Mk 11: 27 to 12: 12), with the Pharisees, with the Herodians and the Sadducees (Mk 12: 13-27) and with the doctors of the Law (Mk 12: 28-37). This Sunday's text (Mk 12: 38-44) reports a final word of criticism by Jesus concerning the bad behavior of the doctors of the Law (Mk 12: 38-40) and a word of praise for the good behavior of the widow. Almost at the end of his activities in Jerusalem, Jesus sits in front of the treasury where people were putting their alms for the Temple. Jesus draws the disciples' attention to the action of a poor widow and teaches them the value of sharing (Mk 12: 41-44).

- **The context in Mark's time.**

During the first forty years of the Church's history, from the 30's to the 70's, the Christian communities, for the most part, were made up of poor people (1 Cor 1: 26). Later some rich people or those who had various problems joined them. The social tensions that existed in the Roman Empire, began to be felt also in the life of the communities. For instance, divisions came to the fore when the communities came together to celebrate the supper (1 Cor 11: 20- 22), or when they met together (James 2: 1-4). Thus, the teaching concerning the action of the widow was very real for them. It was like looking into a mirror, because Jesus compares the behaviour of the rich with that of the poor.

- **Today's context.**

Jesus praises the poor widow because she could share more than the rich people did. Many poor today do the same. People say: The poor never allow another poor person to die of hunger. But sometimes even this is not true. Donna Cícera, a poor lady who went from the country to the periphery of a great city used to say: "In the country, I was very poor, but I always had something to share with another poor person who knocked on my door. Now that I am in the city, when I see a poor person who knocks on my door, I hide for shame because I have nothing to share!" Thus we see on the one hand rich people who have everything, and on the other poor people who have almost nothing to share, and yet share the little they have.

A commentary on the text:

- Mark 12: 38-40: *Jesus criticizes the doctors of the Law.*

Jesus draws his disciples' attention to the hypocritical and exploiting behaviour of some doctors of the Law. "Doctors" or Scribes were those who taught people the Law of God. But they taught it only by word because their lives witnessed to the opposite. They liked going about the squares wearing long tunics, accepting the greetings of people, taking first places in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets. In other words, they were people who wished to appear important. They used their knowledge and their profession as a means for climbing the social ladder and of enriching themselves, and not for serving. They liked to visit widows and recite long prayers in exchange for money! Jesus ends by saying: "The more severe will be the sentence they receive!"

- Mark 12: 41-42: *The almsgiving of the widow.*

Jesus and the disciples were seated in front of the treasury of the Temple and watched people placing their alms in the treasury. The poor gave a few cents, the rich put in bills of great value. The treasury became full. All gave something for the upkeep of the cult, to support the priests and for the maintenance of the Temple. Some of the money was used to help the poor, since in those days there was no social security. The poor depended on public charity. The most needy among the poor were the orphans and widows. They had nothing. They completely depended on the charity of others. But even though they had nothing, they made an effort to share with others the little they had. Thus, a very poor widow places her alms in the treasury, just a few cents!

- Mark 12: 43-44: *Jesus shows us where to find God's will.*

What is of greater value: the few cents of the widow or the thousand coins of the rich? For the disciples, the thousand coins of the rich were far more useful to perform acts of charity than the widow's few cents. They thought that peoples' problems could be solved by means of a lot of money. On the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves, they said to Jesus: "Are we to go and spend two hundred denarii on bread for them to eat?" (Mk 6: 37) Indeed, for those who think this way, the two cents of the widow are of no use. But Jesus says: "This poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury". Jesus has different criteria. In calling the attention of the disciples to the action of the widow, he teaches them and us where we must look for the manifestation of God's will, that is, in sharing. If today we shared the goods that God has placed in the universe for the whole of humanity, there would be neither poverty nor hunger. There would be enough for all and there would be some left over for others.

Further information: Almsgiving, Sharing, Wealth

The practice of almsgiving was very important for the Jews. It was considered a "good work" (Mt 6: 1-4), because the law of the Old Testament said: "*There will never cease to be poor people in the country, and that is why I am giving you this command: Always be open handed with your brother, and with anyone in your country who is in need and poor*" (Dt 15: 11). Alms placed in the treasury, whether for the cult or for the maintenance of the Temple or for those in need, orphans and widows, were considered an act pleasing to God. Almsgiving was a way of sharing with others, a way of recognizing that all goods and gifts belong to God and that we are but administrators of these gifts, so that there may be an abundance in this life for all.

It was from the book of Exodus that the people of Israel learnt the importance of almsgiving, of sharing. The forty years' journey in the desert was necessary to overcome

the desire for accumulation that came from the Pharaoh of Egypt and that was well implanted in the minds of the people. It is easy to leave Pharaoh's country. It is difficult to free oneself of Pharaoh's mentality. The ideology of the great is false and deceiving. It was necessary to experience hunger in the desert to learn that what is necessary for life is for all. This is what the Manna teaches: "No one who had collected more had too much, no one who had collected less had too little" (Ex 16: 18).

But the tendency to accumulate was there all the time and was very strong. And it constantly reappears in the human heart. It is precisely because of this tendency to accumulate that the great empires in the history of humanity were formed. The desire to possess and to accumulate is at the very heart of the ideology of these human empires or kingdoms. Jesus points to the conversion required to enter the Kingdom of God. He says to the rich young man: "Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor" (Mk 10: 21). This same requirement is echoed in the other Gospels: "Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you, in heaven where no thief can reach it and no moth destroy it" (Lk 12: 33-34; Mt 6: 9-20). Then Jesus adds the reason for this demand: *"For wherever your treasure is, that is where your heart will be too"*.

The practice of sharing, of almsgiving and of solidarity is one of the marks of the Spirit of Jesus, given to us on Pentecost (Acts 2: 1-13), and that he wishes to make present in the communities. The result of the outpouring of the Spirit is precisely this: *"None of the members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from the sale of them, to present it to the apostles"* (Acts 4: 34-35^a; 2: 44-45). These alms received by the apostles were not accumulated but were rather *"then distributed to any who might be in need"* (Acts 4: 35b; 2: 45).

On the one hand, the coming of rich people into the communities made it possible to expand Christianity, because these offered better conditions to the missionary movement. However, on the other hand, the accumulation of goods blocked the movement of solidarity and of sharing inspired by the force of the Spirit of Pentecost. James wishes to help such people to understand that they had gone the wrong way: *"Well now you rich! Lament, weep for the miseries that are coming to you. Your wealth is rotting, your clothes are all moth-eaten."* (Jm 5: 1-3). We all need to become students of that poor widow who shared what she had to live on, so as to learn the way to the Kingdom (Mk 12: 41-44).

Praying a Psalm 62 (61)

God is strength and love

In God alone there is rest for my soul, from him comes my safety; he alone is my rock, my safety, my stronghold so that I stand unshaken. How much longer will you set on a victim, all together, intent on murder, like a rampart already leaning over, a wall already damaged?

Trickery is their only plan, deception their only pleasure, with lies on their lips they pronounce a blessing, with a curse in their hearts. Rest in God alone, my soul! He is the source of my hope. He alone is my rock, my safety, my stronghold, so that I stand unwavering.

In God is my safety and my glory, the rock of my strength.

In God is my refuge; trust in him, you people, at all times. Pour out your hearts to him, God is a refuge for us.

Ordinary people are a mere puff of wind, important people a delusion; set both on the

scales together, and they are lighter than a puff of wind. Put no trust in extortion, no empty hopes in robbery; however, much wealth may multiply, do not set your heart on it.

Once God has spoken, twice have I heard this: Strength belongs to God, to you, Lord, faithful love; and you repay everyone as their deeds deserve.

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.

07 NOV 2021 - THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

A joyous calling

When we hear the word "vocation," the first thing that may come to mind is "sacrifice." Doesn't it imply God is asking us to give up something precious—like the rest of our lives and our freedom? No wonder we run from the idea whenever it surfaces! But if you ask a priest or religious sister or brother about what vocation means to them, words frequently uttered include *joy*, *meaning*, and *peace*. Listen to some who answered their inner longing speak of their joy [here](#), and pray for vocations this National Vocation Awareness Week.

Today's readings:

1 Kings 17:10-16; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44 ([155](#)).

"[This widow], from her poverty, has contributed all she had."

08 NOV 2021

Mary, all the way

Nuestra Señora de los Treinta y Tres, or Our Lady of the Thirty-Three, also known as the Liberator of Uruguay, is the patron of that country. The image of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary was venerated by a group of 33 revolutionaries whose actions led to the founding of modern Uruguay, and there are still pilgrimages every November to the cathedral where this image is enshrined. Mary helps all of us along the way, on the pilgrimage of life, to the liberation of her son. Honor her on her feast day today by offering prayers of praise to the one who set us free from sin.

Today's readings:

Wisdom 1:1-7; Luke 17:1-6 ([491](#)).

"If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him."

09 NOV 2021 - FEAST OF THE DEDICATION OF THE LATERAN BASILICA

We gather together

Saint Paul says we're each a temple of the Holy Spirit. Saint Peter calls us the "living stones" of the church. But having a physical place to gather and worship is of practical importance, too; it's where we forge the bonds of Christian community and celebrate Christ's Incarnation. And so, after Emperor Constantine's edict in 313—allowing persecuted Christians to come out of hiding and be public in their practice—it's significant that he gifted a young church with the Lateran properties. How can you help your own parish maintain Christian community, knowing COVID has kept many from physically gathering?

Today's readings:

Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12; 1 Corinthians 3:9c-11, 16-17; John 2:13-22 ([671](#)).

"No one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ."

10 NOV 2021 - MEMORIAL OF LEO THE GREAT, POPE, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Follow the good doctor's advice

The Latin word "doctor" means teacher, and so we have a number of them within the church to whom we look for inspiration and guidance on matters of significance of faith and belief. Leo the Great, whose feast we celebrate today, is one of those "doctors" whose teachings have helped form the foundation upon which we stand today as Catholic Christians. In Saint Leo's case, it was his defense of the doctrine of Christ's Incarnation—that Jesus is fully human and fully divine—that won him fame as a stalwart of the faith. Honor Leo by living fully the divine love showered upon you.

Today's readings:

Wisdom 6:1-11; Luke 17:11-19 (493).

"Authority was given you by the Lord and sovereignty by the Most High, who shall probe your works and scrutinize your counsels."

11NOV 2021 - MEMORIAL OF MARTIN OF TOURS, BISHOP

Give us wisdom to confront and ease poverty

Saint Martin of Tours, today's saint, is famous for tearing his cloak in two to give half to a beggar. With poverty entrenched in our world, knowing how to overcome it ourselves or how to help those who are afflicted is a constant. Perhaps the Wisdom of God, uplifted in the first reading for today, can give guidance. In the footsteps of Saint Martin, we Christians turn to "Wisdom a spirit intelligent, holy, unique" to respond to the many kinds of pain inflicted by poverty.

Today's readings:

Wisdom 7:22b—8:1; Luke 17:20-25 (494).

"For behold, the Kingdom of God is among you."

12NOV 2021 - MEMORIAL OF JOSAPHAT, BISHOP, MARTYR

Don't let passion trump compassion

Saint Josaphat, Basilian monk and church reformer, born around 1580, worked to consolidate the Eastern and Western Christian Churches and was part of the "uniat" camp in Lithuania that supported union with Rome. Try as he might, Josaphat couldn't persuade all of his compatriots of the value of a unified Catholic Church, and his detractors claimed he had "gone Latin." Those against the union eventually stormed the bishop's residence and murdered him. Passions run deep when it comes to religion and politics, but, like Josaphat, never lose sight of the ultimate commandment for Christians: to love neighbor, friend, and enemy alike.

Today's readings:

Wisdom 13:1-9; Luke 17:26-37 (495).

"If they so far succeeded in knowledge that they could speculate about the world, how did they not more quickly find its Lord?"

13NOV 2021 - MEMORIAL OF FRANCES XAVIER CABRINI, FOUNDER

Celebrate a saint for immigrants

As we wrap up National Vocation Awareness Week, we celebrate one of the truly great American vocations of the 20th century, Frances Xavier Cabrini. Mother Cabrini was the first U.S. citizen to be made a saint. She came to the United States from Italy in 1889 to help the flood of immigrants coming to America. Starting with nothing, she founded schools, orphanages, and hospitals to provide support for her fellow immigrants. In her spirit, reach out to immigrants in need—documented or otherwise—they are everywhere to be found these days.

Today's readings:

Wisdom 18:14-16; 19:6-9; Luke 18:1-8 (496).

"Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night?"