

# 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, December 5, 2021

*Second Sunday of Advent*

## 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 silence within us 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 on the way to 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 the Father to us and sent us Your Spirit. Amen.

## Reading

### **A Key to the Reading:**

The Gospel text of the second Sunday of Advent speaks to us of John the Baptist, prophet, in the desert preparing the way for the Lord. For centuries, people were living in expectation of the coming of the Messiah, and the ever more burdensome Roman occupation increased the desire for the coming of the Liberator, the Savior. The presence of John in the desert was a sign that God was once more visiting His people. Redemption was close at hand!

Luke is careful to place the coming of John the Baptist within the socio-political and religious context of the time. On the socio-political level, Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod governor of Galilee, and Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. Then, using a biblical text, Luke places John within the religious context of God's plan and says that he came to prepare the realization of the secular hopes of the Messiah's coming.

### **A Division of the Text to Help with the Reading:**

- Luke 3: 1-2: Placing John's action in time and space
- Luke 3: 3: A summary of John's political activities
- Luke 3: 4-6: Biblical light shed on John's activities

### **Text:**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

## A Moment of Prayerful Silence

*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?
- *Where* and *when* does John come on the scene? What is the significance of this specifying of the *time* and *place*?
- What is the significance of the biblical references for an understanding of John's activities?
- Desert, way, paths, valley, mountain, hill, winding ways, rough roads: what is the significance of these images to understand better Jesus' activities?
- What is this text's message for us today?

## Deepening the Theme

### **Yesterday's and Today's Contexts:**

- Luke places John's activities in the 15th year of Tiberius, Emperor of Rome. Tiberius was emperor from 14 to 37 A.D. In 63 B.C., the Roman emperor had invaded Palestine and imposed a severe form of slavery on the people. Popular uprisings followed each other, especially in Galilee, but were harshly suppressed by the Roman legions. From 4 B.C. to 6 A.D., that is, while Archelaus was governor, violence broke out in Judea. This fact forced Joseph and Mary go back to Nazareth in Galilee and not to Bethlehem in Judea (Mt 2:22). In 6 A.D., Archelaus was deposed, and Judea became a Roman province whose procurator was appointed directly by the Emperor of Rome. Pilate was one of these procurators. He ruled from 25 to 36. This change in the political regime brought a great calm, but occasional uprisings, such as the one of Barabbas (Mk 15: 7), and their immediate repression by the Romans (Lk 13: 1) were reminders of the extreme seriousness of the situation. Any little spark was enough to create the fire of revolt! Calm was just a truce, an occasion offered by history, by God, for people to look again at the journey they had undertaken (cf. Lk 13: 3, 5) and thus, avoid complete destruction. Rome was cruel. Any revolt would spell the end of the Temple and the Nation (Jn 11: 48; cf. Lk 13: 34-35; 19: 41-44).
- It is in this context, about the year 28 A.D., that John the Baptist comes on the scene as prophet in the desert. Luke speaks of the great expectation that arose among the people concerning the preaching of John the Baptist, who proclaimed a baptism of conversion for the forgiveness of sin. Today, too, there is a great desire for conversion and reconciliation with God, which manifests itself in various ways: the search for meaning in life, the search for spirituality, the international movement of the World Social Forum: "A different world is possible!" and many other religious movements. Social workers and politicians are searching for a more human world and thus confirm this desire for conversion or reconciliation with God. Advent is the proper time to renew in us this desire for change, for conversion and for coming closer to God.

### **A Commentary on the Text:**

- Luke 3: 1-2: Recalling the old prophets.  
The way Luke introduces the preaching of John is very similar to the introduction to the books of the old prophets. These mentioned the names of the kings of the time

of the prophets' activities. See, for instance, Isaiah (Isa 1: 1), Jeremiah (Jer 1: 1-3), Hosea (Hos 1: 1), Amos (Am 1: 1) and others. Luke does the same thing so as to say that if for nearly 500 years there was no prophet, now a new prophet has come by the name of John, son of Zachary and Elizabeth. Luke is concerned with placing these events in time and space. He introduces the names of the governors and describes the places where John worked. In fact, salvation history is not separate from human and personal history.

This concern of Luke's arouses our curiosity. Today, when a person is ordained to the priesthood or professes final vows, it is customary to print a holy card recalling the date and place of ordination or profession, and some meaningful phrase from the Bible or a saint is included to express the significance of the ordination or profession in the life of the person concerned. However, we never come across a holy card saying, for instance, "In the fifth year of Bush, president of the United States; Blair being president of the council of the United Kingdom; Prodi president of the council of Italy; Zapatero president of the council of Spain; and Joseph Ratzinger Pope, named Benedict XVI, I received my priestly ordination to proclaim the Good News to the poor, to give sight to the blind, to free the oppressed and to proclaim a year of grace of the Lord!" Why does Luke choose to give the dates of salvation history together with those of the history of humankind?

- Luke 3: 3: Repentance and forgiveness.

John goes through the region of the Jordan preaching a baptism of penance so as to obtain pardon for one's sins. Repentance (in Greek: *metanoia*) means change, not just in one's moral behavior, but also and above all in one's mentality. Change in one's way of thinking! People were to become aware that their way of thinking, influenced by the "yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod" (Mk 8: 15), that is, by the government's propaganda and by the official religion, was wrong and had to change. Pardon brings with it reconciliation with God and with the neighbor. In this way, John was proclaiming a new way for the people to relate to God. Reconciliation will also be the mark of Jesus' preaching: reconciliation even "seventy times seven" (Mt 18: 22).

- Luke 3: 4-6: A definition of John's mission.

Luke quotes the following text from Isaiah to assist readers to better understand the meaning of John's preaching: "A voice cries, 'Prepare in the desert a way for Yahweh. Make straight path for our God across the wastelands. Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be leveled, every cliff become a plateau, every escarpment a plain; then the glory of Yahweh will be revealed and all humanity will see it together for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken'" (cf. Isa 40: 3-5). In this text, Isaiah proclaimed the people's return from exile to Palestine and he described it as though it were another Exodus. It was as if the people, coming back from the servitude of Babylon, were leaving Egypt and entering once more into the desert. For Luke, Jesus begins a new exodus prepared by the preaching of John in the desert.

The Gospels of Matthew (Mt 3: 3) and Mark (Mk 1: 3) also quote the same section of Isaiah, but they only quote the first part (Isa 40: 3). Luke quotes the full text up to the point where Isaiah says, "and all humanity will see the glory of the Lord" (Isa 40:5). The expression "all humanity" means every human being. This little difference shows Luke's concern for the communities, that the prophets had already foreseen this openness to the pagans! Jesus came not only for the Jews but so that "every human being" might see the saving power of God. Luke wrote his Gospel for the community in Greece who, for the most part, were converted pagans.

### Further Information:

- John, the prophet – Since the sixth century before Christ, prophecy had ceased. "No prophet anymore," it was said (Ps 74: 9). People lived in expectation of the prophet promised by Moses (Dt 18: 15; 1 Mac 4: 46; 14: 41). This long waiting period ended with the coming of John (Lk 16: 16). The people did not consider John as a rebel like Barabbas, or like a scribe or Pharisee, but as a prophet longed for by all (Lk 1: 76). Many thought he was the Messiah. Even in Luke's time, in the 80's, there were still those who thought John was the Messiah (Acts 19: 1-6).
- John appears and proclaims, "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand!" (Mt 3: 2). He was jailed because of his courage in denouncing the errors of the people and of those in authority (Lk 3: 19-20). When Jesus heard that John was in prison, He went back to Galilee and proclaimed the same message as John: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the gospel" (Mk 1: 15). Jesus carries on from where John left off and goes further. The Old Testament ends with John and in Jesus the New Testament begins. Jesus even says, "I tell you, of all the children born to women, there is no one greater than John, yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Lk 7: 28).
- The content of John's preaching (Luke 3: 7-18) – John draws the crowds by preaching a baptism of change and forgiveness of sins. This shows that people were ready to change and wanted to relate to God in a new way. John denounced errors and attacked privileges. He said that being children of Abraham was no guarantee nor did it give any advantage before God. For God, he said, the stone and the child of Abraham were the same, because "God can raise children of Abraham from these stones!" (Lk 3: 8) What advances a person in God's sight is not the privilege of being a child of Abraham but actions that produce good fruit.
- Luke talks of three categories of people who ask of John, "What must we do?": the people (Lk 3: 10), the publicans (Lk 3: 12) and the soldiers (Lk 3: 14). The answer for the people is simple: "Anyone who has two tunics must share with the one who has none, and anyone with something to eat must do the same!" (Lk 3: 11) This is a clear answer: *sharing* of goods is the condition for receiving God's presence and to pass from the Old to the New Testament. In his answer to the publicans (Lk 3: 13) and to the soldiers (Lk 3: 14), John asks for the same thing, but applies it to their situation. The publicans must not receive more than is permitted. The exploitation of the people by the publicans was a plague in the society of those days. Soldiers must not resort to extortion or false accusations and must be satisfied with their wages.
- In the 80's, when Luke is writing, many people still thought that John was the Messiah (cf. Acts 19: 3). Luke quotes John's own words to help readers to place the figure of John within the framework of salvation history. John acknowledges that Jesus is stronger. The difference between him and Jesus is in the gift of the Spirit who will be transmitted through Jesus. Luke shows that John's concept of the Messiah was incomplete. For John, the Messiah would be a severe judge, ready to pass judgment and to punish (Lk 3: 17). Perhaps that is why John, later, had difficulty recognizing Jesus as the Messiah (Lk 7: 18-28), since Jesus did not behave like a severe judge who punished. Rather He said, "I judge no one!" (Jn 8: 15; 12: 47) Rather than judging and punishing, Jesus showed tenderness, welcomed sinners and ate with them.

## Praying Psalm 15 (14)

### **Lord, who can enter your sanctuary?**

Yahweh, who can find a home in Your tent, who can dwell on Your holy mountain?

Whoever lives blamelessly, who acts uprightly, who speaks the truth from the heart, who keeps the tongue under control, who does not wrong a comrade, who casts no discredit on a neighbor, who looks with scorn on the vile, but honors those who fear Yahweh, who stands by an oath at any cost, who asks no interest on loans, who takes no bribe to harm the innocent. No one who so acts can ever be shaken.

### **Final Prayer**

Lord Jesus, we thank You 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.*

**05DEC**2021 - SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## In praise of community service

Consider him an early volunteer. John the Baptist preached and baptized through the countryside, preparing the community for the way, truth, and life about to open to them. He wasn't paid for these services, which is probably why his diet was locusts and honey, and his clothing coarse. Today on International Volunteer Day, we give thanks for all who helped their neighbors with grocery runs and check-ins during the long season of sickness. We can continue this spirit of social engagement: giving blood, organizing group clean-ups, shoveling a neighbor's sidewalk. Volunteering builds empathy!

### Today's readings:

Baruch 5:1-9; Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6 (6).

*"A voice of one crying out in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.' "*

**06DEC**2021 - MEMORIAL OF NICHOLAS, BISHOP

## The wonder of it all

Very little is known about the historical Saint Nicholas, but he evolved into a legendary figure so intertwined with Christmas, it's almost as if he were part of the Nativity story. The actual Nicholas lived 300 years after the birth of Jesus. Whether he secretly gave gifts to children or not, the spirit of his story is real. Centuries later as presents are wrapped in mystery and kept under the tree in anticipation, emotions of waiting for the Christ Child heighten as we ponder a miracle we can't fathom. Thank you, Saint Nicholas, for a tradition that helps incarnate our joy and wonder!

### Today's readings:

Isaiah 35:1-10; Luke 5:17-26 (181).

*"We have seen incredible things today."*

**07DEC**2021 - MEMORIAL OF AMBROSE, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

## Wage peace

Advent anticipates the Prince of Peace. But as we recall Pearl Harbor, Catholics also embrace a tradition that includes just war theory—sketched out by the likes of Saint Augustine, fleshed out by the likes of Saint Ambrose. King David “never waged war unless he was driven to it,” Ambrose observed, illustrating that wars should be fought only as a last resort. Further, war should be waged selflessly—to help and protect others. War that “preserves one’s country [or] defends the weak . . . is full of justice.” Pray for those in the armed services who sacrifice and protect, and also pray for peace.

### Today's readings:

Isaiah 40:1-11; Matthew 18:12-14 (182).

*"Comfort, give comfort to my people."*

**08DEC**2021 - SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY (PATRONAL FEAST DAY OF U.S.A.)

## A day of pure celebration

Today we celebrate the Immaculate Conception, the church's teaching that Mary was preserved from original sin from the moment of her conception. It is one of only two dogmas proclaimed infallibly by a pope. All of today's readings are related: They trace the tale back to the Fall, followed by a celebration of the “marvelous deeds” of God's salvation, culminating in the gospel reading of the Annunciation, where Mary learns she will bear a son who

will reverse the curse of sin. Today, honor our Blessed Mother and thank God for her preservation from sin so that she might bring Christ into the world.

**Today's readings:**

Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38 (689).

*"... he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him."*

**09DEC**2021 - MEMORIAL OF JUAN DIEGO CUAUHTLATZIN

## Be a witness to the miracle of God's love

We are told that Saint Juan Diego was undistinguished before he became the person to whom the Virgin Mary appeared at Tepeyac, Mexico in 1531. Juan Diego had an opportunity to open himself to God's grace—Mary's appearance and miracle. He responded in faith by listening to the Virgin and persistently communicating her message, even though as an indigenous person, his word was at first discounted. His part in the miracle at Tepeyac has had enduring impact by opening other indigenous and mestizo Mexicans to the gospel message, and by opening church leaders—albeit slowly, in fits and starts—to the message indigenous peoples have for the wider church. Are you ready to receive God's grace, as did Juan Diego?

**Today's readings:**

Isaiah 41:13-20; Matthew 11:11-15 (184).

*"Whoever has ears ought to hear."*

**10DEC**2021 - MEMORIAL OF OUR LADY OF LORETO

## Jesus makes his presence known

Emmanuel, "God is with us," is our guiding truth. Christians find many ways to remind ourselves of God's Real Presence. Of course, the primary way is through the Eucharist. But shrines and relics are also a very Catholic way of pointing to the reality of Christ in our lives. Take for example the shrine of Our Lady of Loreto, which resides in Loreto, Italy, a small town on the Adriatic coast. It is there that the original home of Mary is said to have been moved, either by angels or more probably by a wealthy Italian merchant, after the late 13th-century siege of Jerusalem. At this shrine we can presumably touch the same stones that Jesus touched as a boy. What a remarkable reminder that the Word was made flesh and lived among us. Pray to Our Lady of Loreto for continued reminders of God's abiding presence.

**Today's readings:**

Isaiah 48:17-19; Matthew 11:16-19 (185/689B).

*"The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us!'"*

**11DEC**2021 - MEMORIAL OF DAMASUS I, POPE

## By the book

By the fourth century of the Christian era there were 20 or so gospels floating around the early church communities along with the familiar four. Dozens of epistles existed in addition to the 21 we now recognize. It was today's saint, Pope Damasus I (c. 305–384), who presided over the Council of Rome in 382 that determined the canon, or official list, of the Bible. He also encouraged Saint Jerome to produce a translation of the existing Greek and Hebrew texts into Latin, the common language of the day. Inexpensive versions of the Catholic *New American Bible Revised Edition* make great Christmas gifts for friends and family looking to deepen their faith.

**Today's readings:**

Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11; Matthew 17:9a, 10-13 (186).

*"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."*