

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 26, 2021

Twenty-six 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.

Reading

A Key to the Reading:

The Gospel text of the 26th Sunday of ordinary time recounts part of a long instruction that Jesus addressed to his disciples (Mc 8: 22 a 10: 52). (See the commentary on the Gospel of 24th Sunday). This Gospel especially sets down three conditions necessary for the conversion of someone who wishes to follow him:

- it corrects the wrong idea of those who think they own Jesus (Mk 9: 38-40);
- (ii) it insists on welcoming little ones (Mk 9: 41-42) and
- (iii) it demands a radical commitment to the Gospel (Mk 9: 43-48).

A Division of the Text as a Help to the Reading:

- Mark 9: 38-40: Jesus corrects the closed mentality of John the Apostle.
- Mark 9: 41: Anyone who offers a cup of water to one of Jesus' disciples will be rewarded.
- Mark 9: 42: Avoid scandalizing little ones.
- Mark 9: 43-48: A radical commitment to the Gospel.

Gospel Text: Mark 9: 38-43, 45, 47-48

³⁸ John said to him, 'Master, we saw someone who is not one of us driving out devils in your name, and because he was not one of us we tried to stop him.' ³⁹ But Jesus said, 'You must not stop him; no one who works a miracle in my name could soon afterwards speak evil of me. ⁴⁰ Anyone who is not against us is for us.

'If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not lose his reward.

'But anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones who have faith, would be better thrown into the sea with a great millstone hung round his neck.

And if your hand should be your downfall, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life crippled, than to have two hands and go to hell, into the fire that never be put out. ⁴⁴ ⁴⁵ And if your foot should be your downfall, cut it off; it is better for you enter into life lame, than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁶ ⁴⁷ And if your eye should be your downfall, tear it out; it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell ⁴⁸ where their worm will never die nor their fire be put out. ⁴⁹ For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ Salt is a good thing, but if salt has become insipid, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.'

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' statement mean for us today when he says: –Anyone who is not against us is for us!?
- What does the “cup of water” mentioned by Jesus mean for us today?
- Who were the “little ones”? What does “anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones” mean (v. 42)?
- “Millstone around his neck,” “Cut the hand or foot,” “Tear out the eye”: Can these statements be taken literally? What is Jesus saying through these statements?
- In our society and community, who are the little ones and the marginalized? How do we welcome them and what is the quality of our welcome?

To Go Deeper Into the Theme

Yesterdays' and Today's Context:

- As we said above, this Sunday's Gospel presents three important requirements for the conversion of anyone who wishes to be Jesus' disciple:
 - (i) Not to have a closed mentality like that of John the disciple who thought he owned Jesus, but to be open and ecumenical, able to recognize good in others, even though they may belong to another religion.
 - (ii) To overcome the mentality of those who considered themselves superior to others and who, thus, despised the little ones and the poor and drew apart from the community. According to Jesus, such a person deserves to have a millstone tied round his neck and to be thrown into the depths of the sea.
 - (iii) Jesus asks us not to let routine enter our living out of the Gospel, but that we may be able to break the ties that prevent us from living it fully.
- These three pointers are very real for us today. Many members of the Catholic Church tend to be anti-ecumenical and have a closed mentality as if we Christians are better than others. In today's world, dominated by a neo-liberal system, many despise the little ones and everywhere poverty, hunger, refugees and those abandoned are on the increase. We Christians are often not committed to live the Gospel. If we, millions of Christians, were to really live the Gospel, the world would be a different place.

A Commentary on the Text:

- Mark 9: 38-40: A closed mentality.

One who did not belong to the community, used Jesus' name to drive out devils. John, the disciple, sees this and forbids it: Because he was not one of us, we tried to stop him. In the name of the community, John tries to stop someone else from doing good! He thought that to be a good disciple he had to monopolize Jesus and, thus, wanted to stop others from using the name of Jesus in doing good. This was the closed and old mind of the "Chosen people, a people set apart!" Jesus replies: You must not stop him! Anyone who is not against us is for us! (Mk 9:40). For Jesus, what is important is not whether the person is or is not a member of the community, but whether this person does or does not do the good that the community should be doing. Jesus had an ecumenical mind.

- Mark 9: 41: Anyone who offers a cup of water will be rewarded.

One of Jesus' sayings was inserted here: If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not lose his reward. Two thoughts to comment on this saying: i) "If anyone gives you a cup of water": Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to give his life. The sign of a great offering! But he does not forget little offerings in daily life: a cup of water, a sign of welcome, an act of charity, and so many other signs to show our love. Anyone who despises the brick will never build a house! ii) –Because you belong to Christ! Jesus identifies himself with us who wish to belong to him. This means that, for him, we are of great worth. Thus, we must always ask ourselves: "Who is Jesus for me?" and also ask ourselves: "Who am I for Jesus?" This verse gives us an answer that is encouraging and full of hope.

- Mark 9: 42: A scandal to little ones.

A scandal is something that makes a person deviate from the straight path. To scandalize little ones is to cause little ones to deviate from the path and lose faith in God. Anyone who does so, is condemned to be: "thrown into the sea with a great millstone hung round his neck!" Why such harshness? Because Jesus identifies himself with the little ones (Mt 25:40.45). Anyone who hurts them, hurts Jesus! Today, in many places, the little ones, the poor, leave the Catholic Church and go to other churches. They can no longer believe in the Church! Why? Before we point the finger at the other churches, it is good to ask ourselves: why do they leave our house? If they leave it is because they do not feel at home with us. There must be something missing in us. How far are we to blame? Do we deserve the millstone around our necks?

- Mark 9: 43-48: Cutting off the hand and foot.

Jesus tells us to cut the hand or foot, to pluck out the eye, if these are the cause of scandal. He says: 'It is better for you to enter into life crippled (maimed, with one eye), than to have two hands (feet, eyes) and go to hell.' These sayings cannot be taken literally. They are saying that we must be radical in our choice for God and for

the Gospel. The expression, "*Gehenna* (hell), where their worm will never die nor their fire be put out," is an image that depicts the situation of one without God. *Gehenna* was the name of a valley near Jerusalem, where the rubbish of the city was thrown and where there was a constant fire to burn the rubbish. This malodorous place was used by the people to symbolize the situation of one who had no part in the Kingdom of God.

Further Information:

Jesus welcomes and defends the little ones

Many times, Jesus insists on welcoming little ones. "Anyone who welcomes a little child such as this in my name, welcomes me" (Mk 9: 37). "If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without his reward" (Mt 10: 42). He asks that we do not despise the little ones (Mt 18: 10). At the final judgment, the just will be welcomed because they gave food to "one of the least of these brothers of mine" (Mt 25: 40).

If Jesus insists so much on welcoming little ones, it is because many little ones were not made welcome! In fact, women and children did not count (Mt 14: 21; 15: 38), they were despised (Mt 18: 10) and bound to silence (Mt 21: 15-16). Even the apostles forbade them to go near Jesus (Mt 19: 13; Mk 10: 13-14). In the name of God's law, badly interpreted by the religious authorities, many good people were excluded. Rather than welcoming the excluded, the law was used to legitimize exclusion.

In the Gospels, the expression "little ones" (in Greek *elachistoi*, *mikroi* or *nepioi*), sometimes means "children," at other times it means those excluded from society. It is not easy to distinguish. Sometimes what is "little" in the Gospel, means "children" because *children* belonged to the category of "little ones," of the excluded. Also, it is not easy to distinguish between what comes from the time of Jesus and what from the time of the communities for whom the Gospels were written. In any case, what is clear is the context of exclusion in practice at the time, and the image that the first communities had of Jesus: Jesus places himself on the side of the little ones and defends them. What Jesus does in defense of the life of children, of little ones, is striking:

- *Welcomes and forbids scandalizing them.* One of Jesus' hardest sayings is against those who give *scandal* to little ones, that is, who by their attitude deprive children of their faith in God. For such as these, it would be better to have a millstone tied round their necks and be thrown into the sea (Mk 9: 42; Lk 17: 2; Mt 18: 6).
- *Welcomes and touches.* When children come to Jesus to get his blessing, the apostles are upset and want to send them away. According to the customs of those days, mothers and little children lived practically in a permanent state of legal impurity. To touch them meant incurring impurity! But Jesus corrects the disciples

and welcomes the mothers and children. He embraces the children. "Let the little children come to me, do not stop them!" (Mk 10: 13-16; Mt 19: 13-15).

- *Identifies with the little ones.* Jesus embraces the children and identifies with them. Anyone who welcomes them "welcomes me" (Mk 9: 37). "In so far as you did this to one of the least of my brothers, you did it to me" (Mt 25: 40).
- *Asks the disciples to become like children.* Jesus wants the disciples to become like children who receive the Kingdom like children. Otherwise, it is not possible to enter the Kingdom (Mk 10: 15; Mt 18: 3; Lk 9: 46-48). He says that children are the teachers of adults! This was not normal. We want to do the opposite.
- *Defends their right to shout.* When Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem, it is the children who shout the loudest: "Hosanna to the son of David!" (Mt 21: 15). Children were criticized by the chief priests and Scribes, but Jesus defends them and even quotes Scripture in their defense (Mt 21: 16).
- *Is grateful for the Kingdom present in little ones.* Jesus greatly rejoices when he realizes that the little ones understand the matters concerning the Kingdom that he proclaimed to the people. "Father, I thank you!" (Mt 11: 25-26) Jesus sees that the little ones understand the things concerning the Kingdom better than the doctors!
- *Welcomes and heals.* Jesus welcomes, heals or raises from the dead many children and young people: Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter (Mk 5: 41-42), the Canaanites' daughter (Mk 7: 29-30), the widow from Naim's son (Lk 7: 14-15), the epileptic child (Mk 9: 25-26), the Centurion's son (Lk 7: 9-10), the public servant's son (Jn 4: 50), the child with five loaves and two fishes (Jn 6: 9).

Praying Psalm 34 (33)

A Poor Man Shares His Faith With Us

I will bless Yahweh at all times, his praise continually on my lips.

I will praise Yahweh from my heart; let the humble hear and rejoice.

Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh, let us acclaim his name together.

I seek Yahweh and he answers me, frees me from all my fears.

Fix your gaze on Yahweh and your face will grow bright, you will never hang your head in shame.

A pauper calls out and Yahweh hears, saves him from all his troubles.

The angel of Yahweh encamps around those who fear him, and rescues them. Taste and see that Yahweh is good.

How blessed are those who take refuge in him. Fear Yahweh, you his holy ones; those who fear him lack for nothing. Young lions may go needy and hungry, but those who seek Yahweh lack nothing good.

Come, my children, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of Yahweh. Who among you

delights in life, longs for time to enjoy prosperity? Guard your tongue from evil, your lips from any breath of deceit. Turn away from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of Yahweh are on the upright, his ear turned to their cry.

But Yahweh's face is set against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

They cry in anguish and Yahweh hears and rescues them from all their troubles. Yahweh is near to the broken-hearted, he helps those whose spirit is crushed.

Though hardships without number beset the upright, Yahweh brings rescue from them all. Yahweh takes care of all their bones, not one of them will be broken.

But to the wicked evil brings death, those who hate the upright will pay the penalty. Yahweh ransoms the lives of those who serve him, and there will be no penalty for those who take refuge in him.

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.

26SEP2021 - TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Well done, good and faithful servants

Mother's and Father's Days aren't occasions for parents to toot their own horns about how fabulously they fulfilled the tasks of child-rearing. These dates are for their children to recall and celebrate the special people who made their lives possible. Similarly, today's Priesthood Sunday isn't meant for priests to beat the drum about their vocation. It's an opportunity for the rest of us, who benefit from their fidelity, to thank the men who were present to the first moments of our life in faith and will be there at the last—plus countless moments in between.

Today's readings:

Numbers 11:25-29; James 5:1-6; Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48 (137).

"Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets!"

27SEP2021 - MEMORIAL OF VINCENT DE PAUL, PRIEST

God works with us as we are

Saint Vincent de Paul is known for founding two religious orders, reforming the church, and serving the poor to such an extent that he is the patron of all works of charity. Many schools and parishes bear his name. But in his lifetime, he was also known for being irritable and quick-tempered—which his friends confirmed and he himself admitted. He said it was only God's grace that made him compassionate, humble, and generous. He's a perfect example that we don't have to be perfect to do saintly work—if we let God soften our hard-heartedness, what great things we might do.

Today's readings:

Zechariah 8:1-8; Luke 9:46-50 (455).

"For the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest."

28SEP2021 - MEMORIAL OF WENCESLAUS, MARTYR

A faith that runs in the family

Good King Wenceslaus is, of course, best known for his care of the poor and the concern he showed his servant, as immortalized in the famous Christmas carol. Indeed, it was young Wenceslaus' habit to sneak out in the middle of the night and—with his servant assisting—roam the countryside looking for poor or imprisoned people he could anonymously help with his almsgiving. But Wenceslaus and his grandmother, Saint Ludmila, could also be patron saints for grandchildren who are raised in the Catholic Christian faith primarily by their grandparents. Pray for all modern grandparents who assume this role.

Today's readings:

Zechariah 8:20-23; Luke 9:51-56 (456).

"Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord."

29SEP2021 - FEAST OF MICHAEL, GABRIEL, AND RAPHAEL, ARCHANGELS

God's special care for migrants

Every minute of the day 20 people in the world leave everything behind to escape war, persecution, or terror. The archangels of the Bible represent God's special care for these migrants. Michael was the guardian of Israel during their captivity in the foreign land of Babylon. Gabriel is the patron saint of diplomats and ambassadors living in foreign countries. Raphael is featured in the Book of Tobit accompanying the story's hero, Tobias, on his journey

to a foreign land to find a wife. The church recognized World Day of Migrants and Refugees last Sunday. Pray that the archangels guide and protect migrants and refugees making perilous journeys everywhere.

Today's readings:

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 or Revelation 12:7-12a; John 1:47-51 (647).

"You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

30SEP 2021 - MEMORIAL OF JEROME, PRIEST, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Translating the faith for the ages

Where would the church be without the word? If you have ever read a verse from the Bible, thank Saint Jerome (347-419). His translation of the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into Latin set the standard until the mid-20th century, paving the way for scholarship that affects our contemporary translations of scripture. His pivotal writing and translating earned him the rare title of "doctor of the church." Give a nod to Saint Jerome by reading a favorite scripture passage today.

Today's readings:

Nehemiah 8:1-4a, 5-6, 7b-12; Luke 10:1-12 (458).

"Say to them, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand for you.'"

01OCT 2021 - MEMORIAL OF THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS, VIRGIN, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Graceful glances

Glances are totally underrated. They seem trivial, hurried and fleeting, even stolen! They are the smallest of gestures, barely registering a flick of the eye. It is surprising then that a glance can also be a prayer. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux wrote, "For me, prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something." Our prayerful "glances" are significant. They register with God. A glance can communicate everything to God, especially when life leaves us wordless. Pause now for a moment and glance at God.

Today's readings:

Baruch 1:15-22; Luke 10:13-16 (459).

"Justice is with the Lord, our God."

02OCT 2021 - MEMORIAL OF THE HOLY GUARDIAN ANGELS

All night and all day

Years back, in perhaps what were more innocent times (or at least appear so to us now), Catholic schoolchildren were encouraged to leave a little space on their chairs for their guardian angels. This charming bit of nostalgia reveals a deeper article of faith. From biblical times to the present, the testimony on angels guiding us has been consistent. Saint Augustine said, "Go where we will, our angels are always with us," while Saint Bernard encouraged Christians to "Make the holy angels your friends . . . we have nothing to fear under the protection of these guardians." Perhaps the larger truth is that although suffering and even tragedy may come our way, if we leave our hearts open, we will not be left alone. God will be at our side. Scoot over a bit!

Today's readings:

Baruch 4:5-12, 27-29 (460); Matthew 18:1-5, 10 (650).

"Their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father."