

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, February 13, 2022

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 in 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.

Gospel Reading – Luke 6: 17, 20-26

A key to the reading:

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus declares blessed those who are poor, those who weep, those who are hungry and who are persecuted. And He declares bound to unhappiness the rich, those who laugh, who are satisfied, or who are praised by all. Of what does the happiness consist which Jesus attributes to the poor, to the hungry, to those who weep, to those who are persecuted? Is it happiness? The words of Jesus contrast with the daily experience of our life. The common ideal of happiness is quite different from the happiness that Jesus speaks about. And you, in your heart, do you think that a person who is poor and hungry is really happy?

Keeping in mind these questions, which result from our daily experience, read the text of this Sunday's Gospel. Read it attentively, perhaps without trying to understand it all. Allow the word of Jesus to enter into you. Keep silent. During the reading try to be attentive to two things: (i) to the social category of people who say they are happy, as well as those who are threatened by unhappiness; (ii) to people whom you know and who are part of the group of your friends and who could be part of one or another of these social categories.

The text of this Sunday's Gospel omits verses 18 and 19. We take the liberty to include them in the brief comment that follows, because they explain a bit better the public, those to whom the word of Jesus is addressed.

A division of the text to help in the reading:

- Luke 6: 17: Places the action of Jesus in time
- Luke 6: 18-19: The crowd seeking Jesus
- Luke 6: 20-23: The four beatitudes
- Luke 6: 24-26: The four threats

Text:

Jesus came down with the twelve and stood on a stretch of level ground with a great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon came to hear him and to be healed of their

diseases; and even those who were tormented by unclean spirits were cured. Everyone in the crowd sought to touch him because power came forth from him and healed them all.

And raising his eyes toward his disciples he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the

Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way."

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.

- Which is the point that you liked best or that struck you the most? Why?
- Who constituted the great crowd around Jesus? From where did they come and what were they seeking?
- What are the social categories of the people who are declared happy (Lk 6: 20-23)? What is the promise that each one of them receives from Jesus? How are these promises to be understood?
- When saying "Blessed are the poor," would Jesus be trying to say that the poor should continue to live in their poverty?
- What are the social categories of the people who are threatened by unhappiness? (Lk 6: 24-26)? What are the threats for each one of them? How is this threat to be understood?
- Do I look at life and at people as Jesus does?

To Deepen the Theme

Context of the time and that of today:

Luke presents the teaching of Jesus in a progressive revelation. First, up to verse 6: 16, Luke says many times that Jesus taught, but says nothing on the content of the teaching (Lk 4: 15, 31-32, 44; 5: 1, 3, 15, 17; 6: 6). Now, after informing us that Jesus saw a great multitude desirous of opening themselves to the Word of God, Luke presents the first sermon. The sermon is not long, but it is significant. The one who reads it unprepared will almost be afraid. It seems to be a sort of shock therapy!

The first part of the sermon (Lk 6: 20-38) begins with a provocative contrast: "Blessed you who are poor!" "Alas to you who are rich!" (Lk 6: 36-38). The second part (6: 39- 49) says

that nobody can consider himself superior to others (Lk 6: 39-42); the good tree bears good fruit, the bad tree bears bad fruit (Lk 6: 43-45). Certainly, a person is not helped by hiding behind beautiful words and prayers. What matters is to put the word into practice (Lk 6: 46-49).

Commentary on the Text:

- Luke 6: 17: Places the action of Jesus in time and space.

Jesus has spent the night in prayer (Lk 6: 12) and has chosen the twelve to whom He has given the name of apostles (Lk 6: 13-16). Now He goes down from the mountain together with the twelve. Having reached level ground, He finds two groups of people: a numerous group of disciples and an immense crowd of people who had come there from all of Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, and Sidon.

- Luke 6:18-19: The crowds who seek Jesus.

The crowds feel disoriented and abandoned and seek Jesus for two reasons: they want to listen to His word, and they want to be cured of their illnesses. Many people were cured, who had been possessed by the evil spirits. The people try to touch Jesus because they are aware that there is a force in Him which does good and cures people. Jesus accepts all those who seek Him. Among these crowds there are also some Jews and foreigners. This is one of the favorite themes of Luke!

- **Luke 6: 20-23 The four Beatitudes**

- Luke 6: 20: Blessed are you who are poor!

Fixing His eyes on His disciples, Jesus declared, "Blessed are you who are poor, because the Kingdom of God is yours!" This first Beatitude identifies the social category of the disciples of Jesus. They are poor! Jesus guarantees for them: "Yours is the Kingdom of Heaven!" It is not a promise concerning the future. The verb is in the present. The Kingdom is already theirs. Even being poor, they are already happy. The Kingdom is not a good future. It already exists in the midst of the poor.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus makes the meaning clear and says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit!" (Mt 5: 3). The poor are those who have the Spirit of Jesus, because there are also the poor who have the spirit and the mentality of the rich. The disciples of Jesus are poor and have the mentality of the poor. They also, like Jesus, do not want to accumulate, but accept their poverty and like Jesus, struggle for a more just living together where there will be a fraternal spirit and the sharing of goods, without discrimination.

- Luke 6: 21: Blessed are you, who are now hungry, blessed are you who now weep!

In the second and third Beatitude Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are now hungry, because you shall have your fill! Blessed are you who now weep, because you shall laugh!" The first part of these declarations is in the present, the second part in the future. What we now live and suffer is not definitive. What is definitive will be the Kingdom which we are constructing today with the force of the Spirit of Jesus. To construct the Kingdom presupposes suffering and persecution, but one thing is certain: the Kingdom will arrive and "you shall have your fill and shall laugh!" The Kingdom is at the same time a present and a future reality. The second Beatitude evokes the Canticle of Mary: "He has filled the starving with good things" (Lk 1: 53). The third one evokes the prophet Ezekiel who speaks of those who "grieve and lament over all the loathsome practices" carried out in the city of Jerusalem (Ezek 9: 4; cf. Ps 119: 136).

- Luke 6: 23: Blessed are you, when people hate you....!

The fourth Beatitude refers to the future: "Blessed are you when people will hate you and will denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, for your reward will be great in Heaven. This was the way the prophets were treated!" With these words of Jesus, Luke points out that the future announced by Jesus is about to arrive, and these people are on the right path.

- **Luke 6:24-26: The four threats.**

After the four Beatitudes on behalf of the poor and the excluded, follow the four threats against the rich, those who are filled, those who laugh or who are praised by everyone. The four threats have the same literary form as the four Beatitudes. The first one is in the present. The second and third one have a part in the present and a part in the future. The fourth one refers completely to the future. These four threats are found in the Gospel of Luke and not in Matthew. Luke is more radical in denouncing injustice.

- Luke 6: 24: Alas for you who are rich!

Before Jesus, on that level ground, there are only poor and sick people who have come from all parts (Lk 6: 17, 19). But before them, Jesus says, "Alas for you who are rich!" In transmitting these words of Jesus, Luke is thinking of the communities of his time, toward the end of the first century. There were rich and poor, there was discrimination against the poor on the part of the rich, discrimination which also affected the structure of the Roman Empire (cf. Jas 2: 1-9; 5: 1-6; Rev 3: 15-17). Jesus harshly and directly criticizes the rich: "You rich, you have already had your consolation!" It is good to remember what Jesus says at another moment concerning the rich! He does not believe very much in their conversion (Lk 18: 24-25). But when the disciples are frightened, He says that nothing is impossible for God (Lk 18: 26-27).

- Luke 6: 25: Alas for you who now laugh because you will be afflicted and will weep! "Alas for you who have now been filled because you will be hungry! Alas for you who now laugh because you will be afflicted and will weep!" These two threats indicate that for Jesus poverty is nothing fatal, and much less the fruit of prejudices, but rather the fruit of an unjust enrichment on the part of others. Here also, it is good to recall the words of the Canticle of Mary: "You sent the rich away empty handed!" (Lk 1: 53)

Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you!

"Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you; in fact, their fathers did the same with the false prophets!" This fourth threat refers to the Jews, that is, the sons of those who in the past praised the false prophets. In quoting these words of Jesus, Luke thinks about some converted Jews of his time who used their prestige and their authority to criticize the openness toward the gentiles (cf. Acts 15: 1, 5).

Extending the information:

The Beatitudes in Luke

The two affirmations "Blessed are you who are poor!" and "Alas for you who are rich!" urge those who listen to make a choice, an option on behalf of the poor. In the Old Testament, several times God places the people before the choice of the blessing or the curse. The people are free to choose: "I place you before life and death, blessing and curse; choose, therefore, life so that you and your descendants may live" (Deut 30: 19). It is not God who condemns. It is the people who choose life or death, it depends on their position before

God and of others. These moments of choice are moments of the visit of God to His people (Gen 21: 1; 50: 24-25; Ex 3: 16; 32: 34; Jer 29: 10; Ps 59: 6; Ps 65: 10; Ps 80: 15; Ps 106: 4). Luke is the only evangelist who uses this image of God's visit (Lk 1: 68, 78; 7: 16; 19: 44). For Luke, Jesus is the visit of God who places the crowds before the choice of blessing or the curse: "Blessed are you who are poor!" and "Alas for you who are rich!" But the people do not recognize God's visit (Lk 19: 44).

The Message of Luke for the Converted Pagans

The Beatitudes and the threats form part of a sermon. The first part of the sermon is addressed to the disciples (Lk 6: 20). The second part is addressed to "You who listen to Me" (Lk 1: 27), that is to those immense crowds of the poor and the sick, who had come from all parts (Lk 6: 17-19). The words which Jesus addressed to this crowd are demanding and difficult: "love your enemies" (Lk 6: 27), "blessed are those who curse you" (Lk 6: 28), "to those who slap you on one cheek, present the other cheek" (Lk 6: 29), to anyone who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic" (Lk 6: 29). Taken literally, these words may benefit the rich, because the harder choice is always for the poor. And these words seem to say the opposite of the message of the Beatitudes and of the threats which Jesus had communicated before to His disciples.

But they cannot be taken literally. Not even Jesus took them like that. When the soldier slaps Him in the face, He does not offer the other cheek; rather, He reacts firmly: "If there is some offense in what I said, point it out; but if not, why do you strike Me?" (Jn 18: 22-23). Then how can we understand these words? Two sentences help to understand what these words want to teach. The first sentence: "Treat others as you would like people to treat you!" (Lk 6: 31). The second sentence: "Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate!" (Lk 6: 36). Jesus does not simply want to change something, because that would change nothing. He wants to change the system. The new way which Jesus wants to construct comes from the new experience that Jesus has: the Father full of tenderness who accepts everyone! The words of threat against the rich cannot be an occasion of revenge on the part of the poor. Jesus commands them to have the contrary attitude: "Love your enemies!" True love cannot depend on what I receive from the other. Love should want the good of the other independently from what the other does for me. God's love for us is like this.

The Sermon on the Mountain, the Sermon on the Level Ground

In the Gospel of Luke Jesus comes down from the mountain and stops on level ground to give a sermon (Lk 6: 17). This is why some call it the "sermon on the plain". In the Gospel of Matthew, this same sermon is given on the mountain (Mt 5: 1) and is called the "sermon on the mount." Because Matthew seeks to present Jesus as the new legislator, the new Moses. It was on the mountain where Moses received the Law (Ex 19: 3-6; 31: 18; 34:1-2). And it is on the mountain that we receive the new law of Jesus.

Prayer of Psalm 34 (33)

"Gratitude which comes from a diverse way of looking at things"

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 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 what 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.

13 FEB 2022 - SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Courage under fire

They called him the “Scourge of Apartheid” and “Guardian of the Light.” Was he a Marvel superhero? Would you believe an archbishop? An Oblate of Mary Immaculate, Denis Hurley of Durban (1915-2004) opposed the racist regime of South Africa for 50 years, calling it “blasphemy” and “intrinsically evil” as first the world’s youngest bishop and later as the youngest archbishop. Hurley joined Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu and three others on the South African government’s “most wanted” list. Standing up for the truth may put us on a hit list. It also makes us blessed in God’s eyes.

Today’s readings:

Jeremiah 17:5-8; 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20; Luke 6:17, 20-26 (78).

“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, . . . on account of the Son of Man.”

14 FEB 2022 - MEMORIAL OF CYRIL, MONK, AND METHODIUS, BISHOP

Courting faith

Today may be the feast day of Saint Valentine, but Saints Cyril and Methodius get higher billing by the church with a memorial today. These brothers who were missionaries shared the love of Christ, not by penning endearing notes to loved ones, but by translating the Bible into a local language. In fact, they invented an alphabet so they could do it! The best way to reach people is to meet them where they are. If someone is in a different place on their spiritual journey, do you insist they “catch up” to you? Or do you run up to greet them and speak of God’s love in terms they understand? Maybe you’ll end up walking arm in arm in the same direction.

Today’s readings:

James 1:1-11; Mark 8:11-13 (335).

“The Pharisees came forward and began to argue with Jesus, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him.”

15 FEB 2022

Faith and facts fit together

Galileo, father of the scientific method, was born on this day in 1564. Famously, the Catholic Inquisition condemned him for insisting the Earth revolved around the sun—an unpopular position made twice as controversial for seeming to defy the pope. Ever since, Galileo remains the poster child for “faith versus reason,” which feeds the unjustified stereotype that Catholicism is “anti-science.” It’s not. In fact, practicing Catholics, including priests and nuns, are found among notable scientists, past and present. And when Pope John Paul II issued an official apology in 1992, it came through the Pontifical Academy of Science. Time to unite spirit and intellect to help us understand the glories and challenges God’s creation presents to us.

Today’s readings:

James 1:12-18; Mark 8:14-21 (336).

“All good giving and every perfect gift is from above.”

16 FEB 2022

“Holy Spirit, come”

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal has helped reinvigorate the faith and refreshed the experience of worship for diverse pockets of churchgoers. Beginning with the 1967 Duquesne Weekend—a meeting in Pittsburgh at an Episcopalian prayer service, where a group of Catholics encountered the “charismatic gifts” of speaking in tongues, miraculous healing, and other supernatural occurrences—Catholics across the country and eventually

around the world began to experience a similar sense of renewal and ecumenical connection. Though the gifts of the Spirit are available to all, not everyone will experience them in the same way. What is essential is to be open to the Holy Spirit at all times.

Today's readings:

James 1:19-27; Mark 8:22-26 (337).

"He laid hands on the man's eyes a second time and he saw clearly."

17 FEB 2022 - MEMORIAL OF THE SEVEN HOLY FOUNDERS OF THE SERVITE ORDER, RELIGIOUS

God calls us each by name

Today the church honors the seven men who founded the Servite religious order in Italy nearly 800 years ago. The Servites have branches for every type of Catholic vocation: laity, priests, brothers, contemplative nuns, and active (apostolic) sisters. This international religious institute is nearly 800 years old, with rich traditions of prayer and service. If you are single and seeking your path, have you considered life as a consecrated brother, sister, or priest? VocationMatch.com is a good place to begin your exploration.

Today's readings:

James 2:1-9; Mark 8:27-33 (338).

" 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter said to him in reply, 'You are the Christ.' "

18 FEB 2022

Cross-culture conflicts

The concept of "taking up one's cross" has never been an easy one to understand. It does not mean to suffer in silence and passively accept our fate. When we "take up our cross," we signal our willingness to suffer for the sake of good, to give witness to what is right, to announce charity where there is greed, love where there is hate, and peace where there is war. Blessed Titus Brandsma, a Carmelite priest who was martyred in Dachau after speaking out against Nazism, wrote, "They who want to win the world for Christ must have the courage to come into conflict with it."

Today's readings:

James 2:14-24, 26; Mark 8:34—9:1 (339).

"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

19 FEB 2022 - OPTIONAL MEMORIAL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Let your prayer shine

The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary traditionally contained three sets of mysteries—the Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious—each set reflecting on five events in the life of Jesus and Mary. In 2002 Pope Saint John Paul II introduced a fourth set, the Luminous Mysteries, which included the Baptism of the Lord, the Wedding at Cana, the Proclamation of the Kingdom, the Transfiguration, and the Institution of the Eucharist. Each of these additional mysteries reveals a facet of the identity of the Lord. Saint Irenaeus wrote of the Transfiguration: "The glory of God is a live human being and a truly human life is the vision of God." Take time to know Jesus better by praying the Luminous Mysteries.

Today's readings:

James 3:1-10; Mark 9:2-13 (340).

"And he was transfigured before them."