

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, March 6, 2022

First Sunday of Lent

Lectio

Initial Prayer

Oh Lord, at the beginning of this Lenten time You invite me to meditate, once more, on the account of the temptations, so that I may discover the heart of the spiritual struggle and, above all, so that I may experience victory over evil.

Holy Spirit, "visit our minds" because frequently, many thoughts proliferate in our mind which make us feel that we are in the power of the uproar of many voices. The fire of love also purifies our senses and our heart so that they may be docile and available to the voice of Your Word. Enlighten us (*accende lumen sensibus, infunde amorem cordibus*) so that our senses may be ready to dialogue with You. If the fire of Your love blazes up in our heart, over and above our aridity, it can flood the true life, which is fullness of joy.

Reading of the Gospel: Luke 4: 1-13

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, One does not live on bread alone." Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me." Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written: You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve." Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you, and: With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone." Jesus said to him in reply, "It also says, You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test." When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

Moment of Prayerful Silence:

To listen, silence is necessary: of the soul, of the spirit, of the senses, and also exterior silence, with the purpose of listening to what the Word of God intends to communicate.

Meditatio

Key for the reading:

Luke, with the refinement of a narrator, mentions in 4: 1-44 some aspects of the ministry of Jesus after His baptism, among them the temptations of the devil. In fact, he says that Jesus, "Filled with the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert, for forty days" (Lk 4: 1-2). Such an episode in the life of Jesus is something preliminary to His ministry, but it can also be understood as the moment of transition from the ministry of John the Baptist to that of Jesus. In Mark such an account of the temptations is more generic. In Matthew, it is said that Jesus "was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil" (Mt 4: 1), these last words attribute the experience of the temptations to an influence which is at the same time heavenly and diabolical. The Lukan account modifies Matthew's text in such a way as to show that Jesus, "filled with the Holy Spirit", leaves the Jordan on His own initiative and is led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, where "He is tempted by the devil" (4: 2). The meaning which Luke wants to give to the temptations of Jesus is that those were an initiative of the devil and not a programmed experience of the Holy Spirit (S. Brown). It is as if Luke wanted to keep clearly distinct the person of the devil from the person of the Holy Spirit.

Another element to be kept in mind is the order in which Luke places the temptations: *desert – sight of the kingdoms of the world – pinnacle of Jerusalem*. In Matthew, instead, the order varies: *desert – pinnacle – high mountain*. Exegetes discuss which is the original disposition, but they have not arrived at a unanimous opinion. The difference could be explained beginning with the third temptation (the culminating one): for Matthew the "mountain" is the summit of the temptation because in his Gospel he places all his interest on the theme of the mountain (we just have to remember the Sermon on the Mount, the presentation of Jesus as "the new Moses"); for Luke, instead, the last temptation takes place on the pinnacle of the temple of Jerusalem because one of the great interests of his Gospel is the city of Jerusalem (Jesus in Luke's account is on the way toward Jerusalem where salvation is definitively fulfilled) (Fitzmyer).

The reader can legitimately ask himself, "In Luke, just as in Matthew, were there possible witnesses to the temptations of Jesus?" The answer is certainly negative. From the account of Luke it appears clearly that Jesus and the devil are completely alone. Jesus' answers to the devil are taken from Sacred Scripture; they are quotations from the Old Testament. Jesus faces the temptations, and particularly that of the worship which the devil intends from Jesus Himself, having recourse to the Word of God as bread of life, as protection from God. The recourse to the Word of God contained in the book of Deuteronomy, considered by exegetes as a long meditation on the law, shows Luke's intention to recall this episode in the life of Jesus with God's plan, who wishes to save the human race.

Did these temptations take place historically? Why do some, among believers and non-believers, hold that such temptations are only some fantasy about Jesus, some invention of a story? Such questions are extremely important. Certainly, it is not possible to give a literal and unsophisticated explanation, or perhaps to think that these could have happened in an external way. Dupont's explanation seems to offer an alternative: "Jesus speaks about an experience which He has lived, but translated into a figurative language, adapted to strike the minds of His listeners" (*Les Tentations de Jesus au Desert*, 128). More than considering them as an external fact, the temptations are considered as a concrete experience in the life of Jesus. It seems to me that this is the principal reason which has guided Luke and the other evangelists in transmitting those scenes. The opinions of those who hold that the temptations of Jesus are fictitious or invented are deprived of foundation, neither is it possible to share the opinion of Dupont himself, when he says that these were "a purely spiritual dialogue that Jesus had with the devil" (Dupont, 125). Looking within the New Testament (Jn 6: 26-34; 7: 1-4; Heb 4: 15; 5: 2; 17a) it is clear that the temptations were an evident truth in the life of Jesus. The explanation of Raymond Brown is interesting and can be shared: "Matthew and Luke would have done no injustice to historical reality by dramatizing such temptations within a scene, and by masking the true tempter by placing this provocation on his lips" (the Gospel According to John, 308). In synthesis we could say that the historicity of the temptations of Jesus or the taking root of these in the experience of Jesus might be described with a "figurative language" (Dupont) or "dramatized" (Raymond Brown). One must distinguish the content (the temptations in the experience of Jesus) from its container (the figurative or dramatized language). It is possible that these two interpretations are much more correct than those which interpret them in a purely literal sense.

An additional key to the reading:

However, these intellectual interpretations, that this episode in Jesus' life as transmitted to us through the gospel, are "dramatizations" or speaking figuratively, also fall short and can be misleading. In the book "On Heaven and Earth," Pope Francis, the then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, said, "I believe that the devil exists" and "his greatest achievement in these times has been to make us believe he doesn't exist." As for the existence of the devil, theologian Monsignor Corrado Balducci points out that "Satan is mentioned about 300 times in the New Testament, much more than the Holy Spirit."

In a week we will celebrate Jesus' Transfiguration on the mountain. This is not an abstract dramatization, but rather that Moses and Elijah appeared and the three disciples actually heard the voice of God, yet to accept that the Son of God might actually and verbally turn away Satan, we find it incredulous. In Pope Francis' *Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete Et Exsultate*, we read: "Hence, we should not think of the devil as a myth, a representation, a symbol, a figure of speech or an idea" (161).

Without witnesses to the event, Dupont and Brown resort to examining the event in terms of modern empirical standards. Yet, turning to *Gaudete Et Exsultate* again, we read "We will not admit the existence of the devil if we insist on regarding life by empirical standards alone, without a supernatural understanding. It is precisely the conviction that this malign power is present in our midst that enables us to understand

how evil can at times have so much destructive force." (160) This represents the old Gnostic desire to shape events according to what the human intellect can easily and completely grasp, and to replace divine mystery with something more easily understood or identified with. While the three temptations do have symbolic meaning, it should not detract from its realism as well. "Evil is not only an abstract idea or the absence of good. Evil is a person, Satan: the Evil One. Satan is the angel who opposes God and who desires to disrupt the power of God in our lives." - *Bishop James Conley, Southern Nebraska Register*.

Jesus himself identifies Satan as someone He has seen: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Lk 10: 18). "The prince of this world is coming," he says, "against me he can do nothing" (Jn 14: 30), as well as in Jn 16: 11 and Jn 12: 31. By claiming that the evangelist must be "dramatizing" these events, or merely using figurative descriptions, Dupont and Brown enter into a form of rationalism that denies how Jesus spoke at other times. From a literary style point of view, we would not expect every event to be transmitted as a quotation, nor would we expect Him to return to the disciples saying "guess what happened to me in the desert..." In that age, with its cultural and religious obsession with sin and Satan, this direct exchange would have been treated respectfully as it was passed down. We cannot directly infer it to be figurative merely because it isn't a direct quotation or is without human witnesses.

The temptations do share a common theme though, one of division. To separate Jesus from the Father, from His disciples, and from His mission should He accept his (Satan's) proposals. In his address to new bishops in missionary territories in 2016, Pope Francis advised: "Divisions are the weapon that the devil has most at hand to destroy the Church from within." These divisions are at play today once we move our understanding of gospel events from faith to rationalism or pragmatism.

Father Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap, the Pontifical Household preacher, puts it well in his 1st Lenten homily in 2008: If many people find belief in demons absurd, it is because they take their beliefs from books, they pass their lives in libraries and at desks... How could a person know anything about Satan if he has never encountered the reality of Satan, but only the idea of Satan in cultural, religious and ethnological traditions? They treat this question with great certainty and a feeling of superiority, doing away with it all as so much "medieval obscurantism." But it is a false certainty.

It is like someone who brags about not being afraid of lions and proves this by pointing out that he has seen many paintings and pictures of lions and was never frightened by them. On the other hand, it is entirely normal and consistent for those who do not believe in God to not believe in the devil. The episode of Jesus' temptations in the desert that is read on the First Sunday of Lent helps us to have some clarity on this subject.

First of all, do demons exist? That is, does the word "demon" truly indicate some personal being with intelligence and will, or is it simply a symbol, a manner of speaking that refers to the sum of the world's moral evil, the collective unconscious, collective alienation, etc.? Many intellectuals do not believe in demons in the first sense. But it must be noted that many great writers, such as Goethe and Dostoyevsky, took Satan's existence very seriously. Baudelaire, who was certainly no angel, said that "the demon's greatest trick is to make people believe that he does not exist." - *Translation by Joseph*

G. Trabbic .

St Teresa, who battled Satan, and St John of the Cross, firmly believed in Satan as a being, as did Pope Paul VI: "one of the greatest needs is the defense from that evil which is called the Devil. Evil is not merely a lack of something but an effective agent, a living spiritual being, perverted and perverting. A terrible reality, mysterious and frightening..."

Thus, we don't have to abandon a literal or historical view of these events merely because it defies our modernist senses. Moreover, it would be overly presumptive to redefine Luke's narrative, of an interaction between the Son of God and the Prince of Evil, as something that must have occurred on merely human terms or in the imagination.

Luke intends to remind us in these scenes that the temptations were addressed to Jesus by an external agent. They are not the result of a psychological crisis or because He finds Himself in a personal conflict with someone. The temptations, rather, lead back to the "temptations" which Jesus experienced in His ministry: hostility, opposition, rejection. Such "temptations" were real and concrete in His life. He had no recourse to His divine power to solve them. These trials were a form of "diabolical seducing" (Fitzmyer), a provocation to use His divine power to change the stones into bread and to manifest Himself in eccentric ways.

The temptations end with this expression: "Having exhausted every way of putting Him to the test, the devil left Jesus (4: 13). Therefore, the three scenes which contain the temptations are to be considered as the expression of all temptations or trials which Jesus had to face. But the fundamental point is that Jesus, insofar as He is the Son, faced and overcame the "temptation". Furthermore, He was tested and tried in His fidelity to the Father and was found to be faithful.

A last consideration regarding the third temptation. In the first two temptations the devil provoked Jesus to use His divine Sonship to deny His human finiteness, to avoid providing for Himself bread like all men, requiring from Him an illusory omnipotence. In both of these, Jesus does not respond, saying, "I do not want to!", but appeals to the law of God, His Father: "It is written... it has been said..." A wonderful lesson. But the devil does not give in and presents a third provocation, the strongest of all: to save Himself from death. In one word, to throw Himself down from the pinnacle meant a sure death. The devil quotes scripture, Psalm 91, to invite Jesus to the magic and spectacular use of divine protection, and in the last instance, to the denial of death. This passage in the Gospel of Luke launches a strong warning: the erroneous use of the Word of God can be the occasion of temptations. How is that? My way of relating myself to the Bible is placed in crisis especially when I use it only to give moral teachings to others who are in difficulty or in a state of crisis. We refer to certain pseudo-spiritual discourses which are addressed to those who are in difficulty: "Are you anguished? There is nothing else you can do but pray and everything will be solved". This means to ignore the consistency of the anguish which a person has and which frequently stems from a biochemical fact or a psycho-social difficulty, or a mistaken way of placing oneself before God. It would be more coherent to say: Pray and ask the Lord to guide you in having recourse to the human mediation of the doctor or of a wise and knowledgeable

friend so that they can help you in lessening or curing you of your anguish. One cannot propose biblical phrases, in a magic way, to others, neglecting to use the human mediation. "The frequent temptation is that of making a bible of one's own moral, instead of listening to the moral teachings of the Bible." (X. Thévenot).

An additional key to the reading:

However, both sides of this argument tend to be too simplistic, and just as it would be mistaken to advise a hungry person to just pray for a meal to appear, it is just as erroneous to reduce St John of the Cross' Dark Night to a mere psycho-social difficulty, as well as St Terese's visions, or St Paul of the Cross or St Teresa of Calcutta's difficulties. We are then left with the task of discerning between these two recourses. St Ignatius of Loyola, who himself experienced suffering on both physical and spiritual levels, offers much guidance on discernment in these matters. A spiritual director can also help. Satan uses division to separate us from God, and Gnosticism, pragmatism, rationalism, and empiricism all have elements that drive us to decide "this I can do" and "this other maybe God could help", letting us decide, in a typically ever growing circle, that we can do without God, and relegating Him out of our lives.

The contemporary world expects God to come like earthquakes and thunder, rolling in to fix things. If that were so, there would be no opportunity for faith and no free will. God speaks as in a small whispering sound (1 Kings 19: 11-12), and when we don't hearit, we think He hasn't answered. Even more relevant would be to pray for guidance on where help or consolation is to be found, whether it be spiritual or physical, including recourse to the sacraments, Eucharistic Adoration, or the Rosary as well as finding a friend. Every hardship can be an opportunity to increase one's faith, even if it means doing some of the work oneself. "Amen, I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Mt 17: 20).

In this time of Lent I am invited to get close to the Word of God with the following attitude: a tireless and prayerful devotion to the Word of God, reading it with a constant bond of union with the great traditions of the Church, and in dialogue with the problems of humanity today.

Oratio

Psalm 119:

How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of Yahweh!

Blessed are those who observe His instructions, who seek Him with all their hearts,

Let us renew ourselves in the Spirit And put on the new man

Jesus Christ, our Lord,

in justice and in true sanctity. (St. Paul).

and, doing no evil, who walk in His ways.

You lay down Your precepts to be carefully kept.

*Let us follow Jesus Christ and serve Him
with a pure heart and good conscience. (Rule of Carmel)*

May my ways be steady in doing Your will.
Then I shall not be shamed,
if my gaze is fixed on Your commandments.

*Let us follow Jesus Christ and serve Him
with a pure heart and good conscience. (Rule of Carmel)*

I thank You with a sincere heart
for teaching me Your upright judgments. I shall do Your will;
do not ever abandon me wholly.

*Let us renew ourselves in the Spirit And put on the new man
Christ Jesus, our Lord,
created according to God the Father
in justice and in true sanctity. Amen (St. Paul).*

Final Prayer:

Lord, we look for You and we desire to see Your face, grant us that one day, removing the veil, we may be able to contemplate it.

We seek You in Scripture which speaks to us of You and under the veil of wisdom, the fruit of human searching.

We look for You in the radiant faces of our brothers and sisters, in the marks of Your Passion in the bodies of the suffering.

Every creature is signed by Your mark, everything reveals a ray of Your invisible beauty.

You are revealed in the service of the brother, You revealed Yourself to the brother by the faithful love which never diminishes.

Not the eyes but the heart has a vision of You, with simplicity and truth we try to speak with You.

Contemplatio

To prolong our meditation we suggest a reflection of Benedict XVI:

"Lent is the privileged time of an interior pilgrimage toward the One who is the source of mercy. It is a pilgrimage in which He Himself accompanies us through the desert of our poverty, supporting us on the way toward the intense joy of Easter. Even in the "dark valley" of which the Psalmist speaks (Psalm 23: 4), while the tempter suggests that we be dispersed or proposes an illusory hope in the work of our hands, God takes care of us and supports us. [...] Lent wants to lead us in view of the victory of Christ over

every evil which oppresses man. In turning to the Divine Master, in converting ourselves to Him, in experiencing His mercy, we discover a "look" which penetrates in the depth of ourselves and which can encourage each one of us."



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

06MAR2022 - FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT; RITE OF ELECTION

Dig a little deeper this Lent

If practicing our religion is easy, we're not practicing our religion. This is one valuable lesson we glean from the time Jesus spends in the desert. Challenges to spiritual discipline are many: the desire for creature comforts, the hunger to be admired, the quest for control. Engaging this 40-day exercise each year strengthens the will and purifies the heart. It enables us to prepare for the real temptations that life offers. Is my prayer vital? Have I grown self-indulgent? Is my hand open to others? Our Lenten practice should be a response to those probing questions.

Today's readings:

Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13 (24).

"[Jesus] was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil."

07MAR2022 - MEMORIAL OF PERPETUA AND FELICITY, MARTYRS

My peace I leave you

Saints Perpetua and Felicity shared an intense intimate bond. These two North African women were young new mothers imprisoned together by the Roman Empire for being Christians. Perpetua was a noblewoman and Felicity was her enslaved servant—but their unequal relationship was upended by their new faith, in which Saint Paul said there is “neither slave nor free.” The two held each other in the moments before their grisly public executions in an amphitheater and gave each other the kiss of peace before dying. In the face of any horror—from slavery to persecution to execution, all of which still exist in our modern times—love has power over hate.

Today's readings:

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18; Matthew 25:31-46 (224).

"When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?"

08MAR2022 - MEMORIAL OF JOHN OF GOD, RELIGIOUS

Give your life in noble pursuit

The Order of Brothers Hospitallers honors the work of Saint John of God, who was born and died on this day. John's tumultuous path—as orphan, then soldier, then suffering from mental illness—eventually led to a humble spiritual life of tending the sick and dying poor. John died as he lived, in noble pursuit: He succumbed to pneumonia after rescuing a drowning man. Founded on the *Rule of Saint Augustine*, the order consoles the world's sick and poor but also, officially, oversees medical care of the pope. Pray Augustine's "Watch, O Lord" prayer to remember the sick and dying today—and all who comfort them.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 55:10-11; Matthew 6:7-15 (225).

"So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will."

09MAR2022 - MEMORIAL OF FRANCES OF ROME, RELIGIOUS

Let your legacy be one for the ages

On this second day of National Catholic Sisters Week, we celebrate the feast of Saint Frances of Rome. Her renown as a servant of the poor was so great that centuries after her death, she became an inspiration for the first community of black nuns in America: Baltimore's Oblate Sisters of Providence, founded in 1829 by Servant of

God Mary Lange (one of the church's six venerated African Americans). Dedicated to teaching black children during slavery, the Oblates named their flagship school in the Italian noblewoman's honor, and St. Frances Academy is today the oldest continually operating black Catholic school in the nation. Like those holy sisters, let's model the charism of Saint Frances this day and always.

Today's readings:

Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32 ([226](#)).

"My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn."

10MAR2022 - LENTEN WEEKDAY

Let faith lead you to freedom

Today is the death date of abolitionist Harriet Tubman (1820-1913), whose life embodied Christian liberation. A deeply religious woman, Tubman risked her life repeatedly to lead enslaved men and women to freedom, relying on a deep bond with God for strength during these dangerous missions. Today, many people suffer injustice and lack of freedom. Whether it be a phone call to a legislator or an act of solidarity with an exploited group, take one step today that honors the tradition of Harriet Tubman.

Today's readings:

Esther C:12, 14-16, 23-25; Matthew 7:7-12 ([227](#)).

"For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

11MAR2022 - LENTEN WEEKDAY; DAY OF ABSTINENCE

Second chances are a first principle

The good news of God's forgiveness is the most confounding of Christian teachings. For those who rarely turn away from God in sin, it seems unjust that God's mercy is indiscriminate, and for those who have turned away time and again and finally come to terms with their sinfulness, it seems impossible that God's mercy is at hand. As Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B. says, "Perhaps forgiveness is the last thing mentioned in the Creed because it is the last thing learned in life." Lent is our annual crash course in the practice of forgiving—ourselves and others.

Today's readings:

Ezekiel 18:21-28; Matthew 5:20-26 ([228](#)).

"If the wicked man turns away from all the sins he committed, . . . none of the crimes he committed shall be remembered against him."

12MAR2022 - LENTEN WEEKDAY

To those to whom much is given . . .

Jewish diarist Anne Frank, whose death is observed today, once wrote: "Why can't people who have more than they need for themselves give that surplus to their fellow citizens?" In most societies, alas, gaining wealth seems more the point than giving it away. But during Lent, Catholics customarily practice almsgiving, the tradition of sharing our wealth with those in need. Remembering that "charity covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8), what better time than Lent to send some of our money to our diocesan [Catholic Charities](#) or [Catholic Relief Services](#)?

Today's readings:

Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Matthew 5:43-48 ([229](#)). *"Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord!"*