

# 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, April 17, 2022**

*Easter Sunday*

## **Let us invoke the Holy Spirit**

Lord Jesus Christ, today your light shines in us, source of life and joy. Send the Spirit of love and truth, so that, like Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John, we too may discover and interpret in the light of the Word, the signs of your divine presence in our world. May we welcome these signs in faith that we may always live in the joy of your presence among us, even when all seems to be shrouded in the darkness of sadness and evil.

## The Gospel: John 20: 1-9

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

For John, the Evangelist, the resurrection of Jesus is the decisive moment in the process of his glorification, indissolubly linked with the first phase of this glorification, namely his passion and death.

The event of the resurrection is not described in the spectacular and apocalyptic details of the synoptic Gospels. For John, the life of the Risen One is a reality that asserts itself silently, in the discreet and irresistible power of the Spirit.

The fact of the faith of the disciples is announced, "While it was still dark" and begins through the vision of the material signs that recall the Word of God. Jesus is the great protagonist of the story, but he does not appear personally.

### **The Text:**

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. 4 They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; 5 and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.

6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, 7 and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself.

8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

### **A Subdivision of the Text for a Better Understanding:**

- Verse 1: introduction and events prior to the description of the situation;
- Verse 2: Mary's reaction and the first announcement of the newly discovered fact;
- Verses 3-5: the immediate reaction of the disciples and the interaction among them.
- Verses 6-7: verification of the event announced by Mary;
- Verses 8-9: the faith of the other disciple and its relationship with the Sacred Scriptures.

## **A Moment of Interior and Exterior Silence**

*to open our hearts and make room within for the Word of God:*

### **A Slow Re-reading of the Whole Passage;**

- I too am in the garden: the empty sepulchre is before my eyes;
- I allow Mary Magdalene's words to echo within me;
- I too run with her, Peter and the other disciple;
- I allow myself to be immersed in the joyful wonder of the faith in Jesus Christ, even though, like them, I do not see him with my bodily eyes.

### **The Gift of the Word to Us**

- *Chapter 20 in John*: this is quite a fragmented text where it is clear that the editor has intervened several times to put the stress on some themes and to unify the various texts received previously from preceding sources, at least three sources.
- *The day after the Sabbath*: it is "the first day of the week" and, in Christian circles, inherits the sacredness of the Jewish Sabbath. For Christians it is the first day of the new week, the beginning of the new time, the memorial day of the resurrection called "the day of the Lord" (*dies Domini*).
- Here and in verse 19, the Evangelist adopts an expression that is already traditional for Christians (e.g.: *Mk* 16: 2, 9; *Acts* 20: 7) and is older than the expression that later became characteristic of the first evangelization: "the third day" (e.g.: *Lk* 24: 7, 46; *Acts* 10: 40; *1Cor* 15: 4).

- *Mary Magdalene*: This is the same woman as the one present at the foot of the cross with other women (19: 25). Here she seems to be alone, but the words in verse 2 ("*we do not know*") show that the original story, worked on by the Evangelist, told of more women, as is true of the other Gospels (cfr *Mk* 16: 1-3; *Mt* 28: 1; *Lk* 23: 55-24: 1).
- However the synoptics (cfr *Mk* 16: 1; *Lk* 24: 1), do not specify the reason for her visit to the sepulchre, seeing that it is inferred that the rite of burial had already been carried out (19: 40); perhaps, the only thing missing is the funereal lamentation (cfr *Mk* 5: 38). In any case, the fourth Evangelist reduces to a minimum the story of the discovery of the empty sepulchre so as to focus the attention of the reader on what comes after.
- *Early, while it was still dark*: Mark (16: 2) says something different, but from both we understand that it was the very early hours of the morning, when the light is very weak and still pale. Perhaps John stresses the lack of light in order to contrast symbolically the *darkness-lack* of faith and *light-welcoming* of the Gospel of the resurrection.

- *The stone had been taken away from the tomb*: the Greek work is generic: the stone had been "taken away" or "removed" (different from: *Mk* 16: 3-4).

The verb to "take away" recalls Jn 1: 29: the Baptist points Jesus out as "Lamb who takes away the sin of the world." Perhaps the Evangelist wishes to recall the fact that this stone "taken away," flung away from the sepulchre is the material sign that death and sin have been "taken away" by the resurrection of Jesus?

- *So she ran and went to Peter and the other disciple*: Mary Magdalene runs to those who share her love for Jesus and her suffering for his atrocious death, now made worse by this new discovery. She turns to them, perhaps because they were the only ones who had not run away with the others and remained in contact with each other (cfr 19: 15 e 26 - 27). She wants to share at least with them this final pain of the outrage committed against the body.

We see how Peter and the "beloved disciple" and Magdalene are characterized by a special love that unites them with Jesus: it is indeed reciprocal love that makes them capable of sensing the presence of the loved person.

- *The other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved*: is someone who appears only in this Gospel and only beginning with chapter 13, when he exhibits great intimacy with Jesus and deep understanding with Peter (13: 23-25). He appears at every decisive moment of the passion and of the resurrection of Jesus, but remains anonymous and many theories have been advanced on his identity. He is probably the anonymous disciple of the Baptist who follows Jesus together with Andrew (1: 35.40). Since the fourth Gospel never speaks of John the apostle and keeping in mind that this Gospel recounts details clearly known to an eyewitness, the "disciple" has been identified with John the apostle. The fourth Gospel has always been attributed to him even though he may not have materially written it, yet the origin of this particular tradition is that this Gospel and other writings are attributed to John. This also explains why he is someone who is somewhat idealized.
- *"The one whom Jesus loved"*: It is clear that this is an addition not from the apostle, who would not have dared boast of having such a close relationship with the Lord, but from his disciples who wrote most of the Gospel and who coined this expression after reflection on the clearly privileged love between Jesus and this (cfr 13: 25; 21: 4. 7). Where we read the simpler expression "the other disciple" or "the disciple," obviously the editors did not make the addition.

- *They have taken the Lord out of the tomb:* these words, which recur in verses 13 e 15, show that Mary was afraid that body-snatchers had taken the body, a thing common then, so much so that the Roman Emperor had to promulgate severe decrees to check this phenomenon. In Matthew (28:11—15), the chief priests use this possibility to discredit the fact of the resurrection of Jesus and, eventually, to justify the lack of intervention on the part of the soldiers who guarded the tomb.

*The Lord:* the title "Lord" implies an acknowledgement of divinity and evokes divine omnipotence. That is why this term was used by Christians for the risen Jesus. Indeed, the fourth Evangelist uses this term only in Paschal stories (see also 20: 13).

- *We do not know where they have laid him:* these words recall what happened to Moses, whose place of burial was unknown (*Dt* 34: 10). Another implicit reference is to the words of Jesus himself when he says that it is impossible to know where he was going (7: 11, 22; 8: 14, 28, 42; 13: 33; 14: 1-5; 16: 5).
- *They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter...but he did not go in:* This passage shows the anxiety that these disciples were living through.

The fact that the "other disciple" stopped, is more than just a gesture of politeness or respect towards someone older, it is the tacit acknowledgement that Peter, within the apostolic group, held a place of pre-eminence, even though this is not stressed. It is, therefore, a sign of communion. This gesture could also be a literary device to move from the event in terms of faith in the resurrection to the following and peak moment in the story.

- *The linen cloths lying and the napkin...rolled up in a place by itself:* although the other disciple did not go in, he had already seen something. Peter, crossing the entrance of the sepulchre, discovers the proof that no theft of the body took place: no thief would have wasted time to unfold the body, spread the cloths in an orderly fashion (*on the ground* would be translated better by "spread out" or "laid carefully on the floor") and then to roll up the napkin in a place by itself. Such an operation would have been complicated also because the oils with which the body had been anointed (especially myrrh) acted like glue, causing the cloths to stick perfectly and solidly to the body, almost as what happened to mummies. Besides, the napkin is folded; the Greek verb can also mean "rolled," or it could indicate that that piece of light cloth had, in large part, preserved the form of the face over which it had been placed, almost like a mortuary mask. The cloths are the same as those cited in Jn 19: 40.

Everything is in order in the sepulchre, even though the body of Jesus is not there, and Peter was well able to see inside the sepulchre because the day was breaking. Different from Lazarus (11: 44), then, Christ rises abandoning completely his funerary trappings. Ancient commentators note that, in fact, Lazarus had to use the cloths again for his definitive burial, while Christ had no further use of them because he was not to die again (cfr *Rm* 6: 9).

- *Peter...saw...the other disciple...saw and believed:* at the beginning of the story, Mary also "saw." Although some translations use the same verb, the original text uses three different verbs (*theorein* for Peter; *blepein* for the other disciple and Mary Magdalene; *idein*, here, for the other disciple), allowing us to understand that there is a growth in the spiritual depth of this "seeing" that, in fact, culminates in the faith of the other disciple.

The anonymous disciple had certainly not seen anything other than that which Peter had observed. Perhaps he interprets what he sees differently from others because of

the special relationship of love he had with Jesus (Thomas' experience is emblematic, 29: 24-29). In any case, as indicated by the tense of the Greek verb, his is still an initial faith, so much so that he cannot find ways of sharing this experience with Mary or Peter or any of the other disciples (there is no further reference to this).

However, for the fourth Evangelist the double "see and believe" is quite meaningful and refers exclusively to faith in the resurrection of the (cfr 20: 29), Because it was impossible to believe truly before the Lord had died and rose (cfr 14: 25-26; 16: 12-15). The double vision- faith, then, characterizes the whole of this chapter and "the beloved disciple" is presented as a model of faith who succeeds in understanding the truth about God through material (cfr also 21: 7).

- *As yet they did not know the Scripture:* this obviously refers to all the other disciples. Even for those who had lived close to Jesus, then, it was difficult to believe in Him, and for them, as for us also, the only gateway that allows us to cross the threshold of authentic faith is knowledge of the Scriptures (cfr *Lk* 24: 26-27; *1Cor* 15: 34; *Acts* 2: 27-31) in the light of the events of the resurrection.

## A Few Questions

- What, in the concrete, does it mean for us "to believe in Jesus the Risen One"? What difficulties do we encounter? Does the resurrection solely concern Jesus or is it really the foundation of our faith?
- The relationship that we see between Peter, the other disciple and Mary Magdalene is clearly one of great communion in Jesus. In what persons, realities, institutions do we today find this same understanding of love and the same "common union" founded on Jesus? Where can we read the concrete signs of the great love for the Lord and "his own" that inspired all the disciples?
- When we look at our lives and the reality that surrounds them, both near and far, do we see as Peter saw (he saw reality, but holds on to them, that is, to the death and burial of Jesus) or do we see as the other disciple saw (he sees facts and discovers in them signs of new life).

## Let us Pray

*with a hymn taken from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians (paraphrase of 1: 17-23).*

The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,  
may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,  
having the eyes of your hearts enlightened,  
that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,  
and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power  
in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places,  
far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named,

not only in this age but also in that which is to come;and he has put all things under his feet

and has made him the head over all things for the church,  
which is his body,  
the fullness of him who fills all in all.

## Closing Prayer

*The liturgical context is of great importance in praying this Gospel and the event of the resurrection of Jesus, which is the hub of our faith and of our Christian life. The sequence that characterizes the Eucharistic liturgy of today and of the whole week leads us to praise the Father and the Lord Jesus.*

Christians, to the Paschal Victim offer sacrifice and praise.

The sheep are ransomed by the Lamb; and Christ, the undefiled  
has sinners to his Father reconciled. Death with life contended:

Combat strangely ended!

Life's own Champion, slain,Yet lives to reign.

Tell us Mary:

say what you see upon the way. The tomb the living did enclose; I saw Christ's  
glory as he rose! The angels there attesting;

Shroud with grave-clothes resting. Christ, my hope, has risen:

He goes before you into Galilee.

That Christ is truly risen from the dead we know.

Victorious king,

your mercy show.

*We may conclude our prayer also with this lively invocation by a contemporary poet, Marco Guzzi:*

Love, Love, Love!

I wish to feel, live and express all this Love,

Which is a joyful commitment in the world and a happy contact with the others.

Only you free me, only you release me.

And the snows fall to water

the greenest of valleys in creation.



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

**17 APR**2022 - SOLEMNITY OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD (EASTER SUNDAY)

## The tree of life blossoms again

A teaching from the Law of Moses says it all: "Cursed be the one who hangs from a tree" (Deut. 21:23). The body of such a person was to be buried the same day, or the land would be defiled. Religious leaders sought a verdict of crucifixion from the Romans for precisely this reason: to quell talk that Jesus was God's chosen. It's also why Jesus' disciples rushed to gain permission to take him down from the cross that same day. Like every kingdom paradox, of course, the "cursed tree" becomes a tree of life for those who believe. Celebrate this hope today!

### Today's readings:

Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4 *or* 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8; John 20:1-9 *or* Luke:24:1-12 (42, 41) *or, at an afternoon or evening Mass*, Luke 24:13-35 (46).

*"They put [Jesus] to death by hanging him on a tree."*

**18 APR**2022

MONDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

## How do you solve a mystery named Mary?

There are so many women named Mary mentioned in the New Testament that we're not even certain how many there were—could be six to nine—because the same women might be identified different ways. The various Marys get mentioned 54 times in 49 verses, so it's hard to sort them all out. Not only does it reveal to readers that Mary was a popular name then, but also that Jesus had a lot of women followers who were very close to him—women who were key figures in the key moments of his life and ministry, his death, and his Resurrection. Which Mary was which might confuse us today, but their various important roles in his life are clearly deserving of honor.

### Today's readings:

Acts 2:14, 22-33; Matthew 28:8-15 (261).

*"Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went away quickly from the tomb . . . and ran to announce the news to his disciples."*

**19 APR**2022

TUESDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

## Grant us peace

Today is the anniversary of Benedict XVI becoming pope in 2005. As a theologian, Benedict wrote extensively of faith and politics in pluralistic societies. One of his prayers pleads: "God of peace, bring your peace to our violent world: peace in the hearts of all men and women and peace among the nations of the Earth." This is a good prayer to have on hand, particularly on a day that marks the anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995.

### Today's readings:

Acts 2:36-41; John 20:11-18 (262).

*"Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'"*

**20 APR**2022

WEDNESDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

## Look up!

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were grieving Jesus but failed to recognize him when he approached them. In our daily rush to and fro, it is easy to overlook what is happening all around: the dance of creation, day in and day out. As Earth Day approaches, take a moment from the busyness to contemplate with awe the beauty great and



small. Keep these words of Saint Augustine in mind about the book of God's creation: "Look above you! Look below you! Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead, He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?"

**Today's readings:**

Acts 3:1-10; Luke 24:13-35 (263).

*"Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him."*

**21**APR2022

THURSDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

## Journey into the unknown

The worldwide church is now about halfway through a process with a rather unwieldy name: "Synod on Synodality." The idea is for the church at all levels to "listen and dialogue." The word *synod* means "to travel together," and this synod is refreshing, as a bottom-up approach in a church accustomed to top-down leadership. By its nature, there is no clarity about where it leads, but the process itself is the main point. Let's pray the church's Synod Prayer for Unity, that the process "lead us closer to [God's] Son and so to one another."

**Today's readings:**

Acts 3:11-26; Luke 24:35-48 (264).

*"He stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' "*

**22**APR2022

FRIDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

## Embrace the Resurrection: Plant a garden

The Easter season gives us ample time and resources to delve into the Paschal Mystery. Scripture, liturgies, and feast days all help us embrace the Resurrection as part of our own story. That's not always easy to comprehend. Fortunately, there are glimpses of Resurrection everywhere! So much of Easter is represented through nature—lilies, tulips, lambs, bunnies—indeed the whole season of spring helps us bodily embrace the Resurrection. This Easter season, consider planting a garden or fostering a kitten (April is National Garden Month as well as Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Month, and today happens to be Earth Day as well!). Embrace the Resurrection in the world all around you.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 4:1-12; John 21:1-14 (265).

*"Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish."*

**23**APR2022

SATURDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

## Every day an Easter

Easter isn't just a day, it is a season, an ongoing feast. The Octave of Easter (Easter Sunday and the seven days that follow) has been, since the earliest centuries of Christian history, a time of extended celebration. The joy of Easter Sunday is prolonged for a full eight days, an octave of rejoicing. Every day of the Octave is treated as another Easter, a tradition preserved in our liturgy, with readings and rituals that mirror what occurs on Easter Sunday. Rise up! It's still Easter!

**Today's readings:**

Acts 4:13-21; Mark 16:9-15 (266).

*"When Jesus had risen . . . he appeared first to Mary Magdalene."*