

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 Divina

Sunday, May 15, 2022

Fifth Sunday of Easter

LECTIO

Opening Prayer:

Lord Jesus, help us understand the mystery of the Church as community of love. When you gave us the new commandment of love as the charter of the Church, you told us that it is the highest value. When you were about to leave your disciples, you wished to give them a memorial of the new commandment, the new statute of the Christian community. You did not give them a pious exhortation, but rather a new commandment of love. In this "relative absence, we are asked to recognize you present in our brothers and sisters. In this Easter season, Lord Jesus, you remind us that the time of the Church is the time of charity, the time of encounter with you through our brothers and sisters. We know that at the end of our lives we shall be judged on love. Help us encounter you in each brother and sister, seizing every little occasion of every day.

Gospel Reading – John 13: 31-35

31 When he had gone, Jesus said: Now has the Son of man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified. 32 If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself, and will glorify him very soon. 33 Little children, I shall be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and, as I told the Jews, where I am going, you cannot come.

34 I give you a new commandment: love one another; you must love one another just

as I have loved you. 35 It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognize you as my disciples.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence:

The passage of the Gospel we are about to meditate, recalls Jesus' farewell words to his disciples. Such a passage should be considered a kind of sacrament of an encounter with the Person of Jesus.

MEDITATIO

Preamble to Jesus' Discourse:

Our passage is the conclusion to chapter 13 where two themes crisscross and are taken up again and developed in chapter 14: the place where the Lord is going; and the theme of the commandment of love. Some observations on the context within which Jesus' words on the new commandment occur may be helpful for a fruitful reflection on their content.

First, v. 31 says, "when he had gone", who is gone? To understand this we need to go to v. 30 where we read that «as soon as Judas had taken the piece of bread he went out. It was night." Thus, the one who went out was Judas. Then, the expression, "it was night," is characteristic of all the «farewell discourses», which take place at night. Jesus' words in Jn 13: 31-35 are preceded by this immersion into the darkness of the night. What is the symbolical meaning of this? In John, night represents the peak of nuptial intimacy (for instance the wedding night), but also one of extreme anguish. Other meanings of the dark night are that it represents the moment of danger par excellence, it is the moment when the enemy weaves plans of vengeance against us, it expresses the moment of desperation, confusion, moral and intellectual disorder. The darkness of night is like a dead end.

In Jn 6, when the night storm takes place, the darkness of the night expresses an experience of desperation and solitude as they struggle against the dark forces that stir the sea. Again, the time marker "while it was still dark" in Jn 20: 1 points to the darkness which is the absence of Jesus. Indeed, in John's Gospel, the light of Christ cannot be found in the sepulchre, that is why darkness reigns (20: 1).

Therefore, "farewell discourses" are rightly placed within this time framework. It is almost as if the background color of these discourses is separation, death or the departure of Jesus and this creates a sense of emptiness or bitter solitude. In the Church of today and for today's humanity, this could mean that when we desert Jesus in our lives we then experience anguish and suffering.

When reporting Jesus' words in 13: 31-34, concerning his departure and imminent death, John recalls his own past life with Jesus, woven with memories that opened his eyes to the mysterious richness of the Master. Such memories of the past are part of our own faith journey.

It is characteristic of "farewell discourses" that whatever is transmitted in them, especially at the tragic and solemn moment of death becomes an inalienable patrimony, a covenant to be kept faithfully. Jesus' "farewell discourses" too synthesize whatever he had taught and done so as to draw his disciples to follow in the direction he pointed out to them.

A Deepening:

As we read the passage of this Sunday of Easter, we focus, first of all, on the first word used by Jesus in his farewell discourse: "Now". «Now has the Son of man been

glorified». Which «now» is this? It is the moment of the cross that coincides with his glorification. This final part of John's Gospel is a manifestation or revelation. Thus, Jesus' cross is the «now» of the greatest epiphany or manifestation of truth. In this glorification, there is no question of any meaning that has anything to do with "honour" or "triumphalism", etc.

On the one hand there is Judas who goes into the night, Jesus prepares for his glory: When he had gone, Jesus said: "Now has the Son of man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified. If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself, and will glorify him very soon" (v. 31-32). Judas' betrayal brings to maturity in Jesus the conviction that his death is "glory." The hour of death on the cross is included in God's plan; it is the "hour" when the glory of the Father will shine on the world through the glory of the "Son of man." In Jesus, who gives his life to the Father at the "hour" of the cross, God is glorified by revealing his divine essence and welcoming humankind into communion with him.

Jesus' (the Son's) glory consists of his "extreme love" for all men and women, even to giving himself for those who betray him. The Son's love is such that he takes on himself all those destructive and dramatic situations that burden the life and history of humankind. Judas' betrayal symbolizes, not so much the action of an individual, as that of the whole of evil humanity, unfaithful to the will of God.

However, Judas' betrayal remains an event full of mystery. An exegete writes: In betraying Jesus, "it is revelation that is to blame; it is even at the service of revelation" (Simoons, *According to John*, 561). In a way, Judas' betrayal gives us the chance of knowing Jesus better; his betrayal has allowed us to see how far Jesus loves his own. Don Primo Mazzolari writes: "The apostles became Jesus' friends, whether good friends or not, generous or not, faithful or not, they still remain his friends. We cannot betray Jesus' friendship: Christ never betrays us, his friends, even when we do not deserve it, even when we rebel against him, even when we deny him. In his sight and in his heart we are always his "friends." Judas is the Lord's friend even at the moment when he carries out the betrayal of his Master with a kiss" (*Discourses* 147).

The New Commandment:

Let us focus our attention on the new commandment.

In v. 33 we note a change in Jesus' farewell discourse. He no longer uses the third person. The Master now addresses "you". This «you» is in the plural and he uses a Greek word that is full of tenderness "children" (*tekniá*). In using this word and by his tone of voice and openness of heart, Jesus concretely conveys to his disciples the immensity of the tenderness he holds for them.

What is also interesting is another point that we find in v.34: "that you love one another as I have loved you." The Greek word *kathòs* (as) is not meant for comparison: love one another as I have loved you. Its meaning may be consecutive or causal: "Because I have loved you, so also love one another."

There are those who like Fr. Lagrange see in this commandment an eschatological meaning: during his relative absence and while waiting for his second coming, Jesus wants us to love and serve him in the person of his brothers and sisters. The new commandment is the only commandment. If there is no love, there is nothing. Magrassi writes: "Away with labels and classifications: every brother is the sacrament of Christ. Let us examine our daily life: can we live with our brother from morning till night and not accept and love him? The great work in this case is ecstasy in its etymological sense, that is, to go out of myself so as to be neighbor to the one who needs me, beginning with those nearest to me and with the most humble matters of everyday

life' (Living the church, 113).

For our reflection:

- Is our love for our brothers and sisters directly proportional to our love for Christ?
- Do I see the Lord present in the person of my brother and sister?
- Do I use the daily little occasions to do good to others?
- Let us examine our daily life: can I live with my brothers and sisters from morning till night and not accept and love them?
- Does love give meaning to the whole of my life?
- What can I do to show my gratitude to the Lord who became servant for me and consecrated his whole life for my good? Jesus replies: Serve me in brothers and sisters: this is the most authentic way of showing your practical love for me.

ORATIO

Psalm 23: 1-6:

This psalm presents an image of the church journeying accompanied by the goodness and faithfulness of God, until it finally reaches the house of the Father. In this journey she is guided by love that gives it direction: your goodness and your faithfulness pursue me.

Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

In grassy meadows he lets me lie. By tranquil streams he leads me to restore my spirit.

He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits his name. Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death

I should fear no danger, for you are at my side.

Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me.

You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup brims over.

Kindness and faithful love pursue me every day of my life.

I make my home in the house of Yahweh for all time to come.

Praying with the Fathers of the Church:

I love you for yourself, I love you for your gifts, I love you for love of you

And I love you in such a way, That if ever Augustine were God And God Augustine,

I would want to come back and be who I am, Augustine, That I may make of you who you are,

Because only you are worthy of being who you are. Lord, you see,

My tongue raves,

I cannot express myself, But my heart does not rave.

You know what I experience And what I cannot express.

I love you, my God,

And my heart is too limited for so much love, And my strength fails before so much love, And my being is too small for so much love. I come out of my smallness

And immerse my whole being in you, I transform and lose myself.

Source of my being, Source of my every good: My love and my God.

(St. Augustine: *Confessions*)

Closing Prayer:

Blessed Teresa Scilli, seized by an ardent desire to respond to the love of Jesus, expressed herself thus:

I love you, O my God, In your gifts;

I love you in my nothingness, And even in this I understand, Your infinite wisdom;

I love you in the many varied or extraordinary events, By which you accompanied my life...

I love you in everything, Whether painful or peaceful; Because I do not seek,

Nor have I ever sought, Your consolations;

Only you, the God of consolations. That is why I never gloried

Nor delighted in,

That which you made me experience entirely gratuitously in your Divine love, Nor did I distress and upset myself,

When left arid and small. (Autobiography, 62)



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

15MAY2022 - FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Opening a door to the poor

Valuing families is a Catholic imperative. Yet on this International Day of Families, we face the reality that between 20 and 30 percent of the world's homeless include entire families. In the United States, nearly 60,000 families with children are without shelter on a given night. De La Salle Brother Peter Maurin co-founded the Catholic Worker Movement with Dorothy Day because he couldn't, as he said, be crazy the way the world is crazy. "What we give to the poor for Christ's sake, is what we carry with us when we die," Maurin reflected. Today, on his death date, reflect on what you will carry with you at your passing.

Today's readings:

Acts 14:21-27; Revelation 21:1-5a; John 13:31-33a, 34-35 (54).

"It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."

16MAY2022 - EASTER WEEKDAY

Bear witness

The Holy Spirit is called the "Advocate." An advocate is someone who defends, counsels, guides, and comforts. As Saint Paul said, the Advocate bears witness that we are children of God. As Catholics, we're called to advocate for others as well. Catholic Relief Services encourages "advocating for changes in existing unjust policies and the creation of new policies that benefit the common good." Want to put your faith into action through advocacy for the poor? [Visit the website of Catholic Relief Services](#) to learn how to become a voice for those whose voices have been ignored.

Today's readings:

Acts 14:5-18; John 14:21-26 (285).

"The Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything."

17MAY2022 - EASTER WEEKDAY

Erase racism

On this day in 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously against racial segregation in public schools. Four years later, the U.S. Catholic bishops issued their first pastoral letter on racism, *Discrimination and Christian Conscience*. It wasn't the first time the bishops denounced the scourge of racial injustice—nor the last. "Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father" they wrote in 1979. Commemorate Brown vs. the Board of Education by revisiting the pastoral letter *Brothers and Sisters to Us*.

Today's readings:

Acts 14:19-28; John 14:27-31a (286).

"My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you."

18MAY2022 - MEMORIAL OF JOHN I, POPE, MARTYR

Rise to the challenge

Not every pope was first a bishop, much less a cardinal, as is the custom these days. Pope and martyr John I, who we memorialize today, was an archdeacon when called to the papacy in the year 523. An archdeacon acts

as an intermediary between a bishop and the clergy of a diocese, often administering a portion of the diocese called an archdiaconate. The office has been described metaphorically as that of *oculus episcopi*, the "bishop's eye." John I must have excelled in his role to have been called to the papacy at a time of great upheaval. He responded courageously, even with his life. Be ready to be called to some surprising roles in your faith journey. Turn to John I for the inspiration to respond fully.

Today's readings:

Acts 15:1-6; John 15:1-8 (287).

"I am the vine, you are the branches."

19MAY2022 - EASTER WEEKDAY

Disagree agreeably

Today's first reading recalls the first recorded argument in the church—over whether men entering the Christian church needed to be circumcised according to Jewish tradition. During our 2,000 years of wrangling, this maxim arose: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity." Christians don't even agree on who said that, but it was Pope John XXIII's guiding principal for the important discussions of Vatican II, which modernized the church. Do you bring charity to your disagreements?

Today's readings:

Acts 15:7-21; John 15:9-11 (288).

"I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete."

20MAY2022 - EASTER WEEKDAY

Engage with epistles, emissaries, and emails

A tweet from the pope. An email newsletter about the Synod. The internet and social media are normal sources of information and conversation these days. This is especially true given our recent experience with social distancing. In the early church, mass communication was done primarily through epistles and emissaries. Epistles were letters written by notable folks, and emissaries were people sent on behalf of a notable person or group. Both were intended to communicate to a large number of people in far-flung areas. Given this Easter season, what message would you choose to broadcast far and wide?

Today's readings:

Acts 15:22-31; John 15:12-17 (289).

"So we are sending Judas and Silas who will also convey this same message by word of mouth."

21MAY2022 - EASTER WEEKDAY

Pray for one nation under God

Today is Armed Forces Day, a holiday that pays tribute to men and women who serve across all six branches in the United States military. The United States is blessed with well trained and disciplined armed forces, dedicated to defend not only the people but also the principles on which the nation was founded, including the free exercise of religion. Cherish the right that is yours to worship freely, and take a moment today to give thanks for those who are sworn to protect it and all our cherished liberties.

Today's readings:

Acts 16:1-10; John 15:18-21 (290).

"If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."