

# 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, January 15, 2023**

*Second Sunday in Ordinary Time*

## Opening Prayer

In this prayerful reading of the Gospel of John, we recall the words of John Henry Newman to accompany and stimulate us, words that he liked to use in prayer to the Lord: Stay with me, and I shall begin to shine as you shine; to shine so as to be light for others. Jesus, the light will all come from you: nothing will be because of me. It will be you who shines on others through me. Grant that I may praise you thus, in the way that you like most, shining on all those who are around me. Give them and me your light; enlighten them together with me, through me. Teach me to spread your praise, your truth, your will. Grant that I may make you known not through words but by example, that influence of solidarity that comes from what I do, visibly resembling your saints, and clearly full of the love that grows in my heart for you» (*Meditations and Devotions*).

Gospel Text - John 1: 29-34

29 The next day, he saw Jesus coming towards him and said, 'Look, there is the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. 30 It was of him that I said, "Behind me comes one who has passed ahead of me because he existed before me." 31 I did not know him myself, and yet my purpose in coming to baptize with water was so that he might be revealed to Israel.' 32 And John declared, 'I saw the Spirit come down on him like a dove from heaven and rest on him. 33 I did not know him myself, but he who sent me to baptize with water had said to me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest is the one who is to baptize with the Holy Spirit." 34 I have seen, and I testify that he is the Chosen One of God.'

## A Prayerful Silent Pause

The Word of God demands that we want and welcome it through a meditation of silence. Quieten yourself, allow yourself to welcome the presence of God in his Word; a silence that makes room in your heart so that God may come and talk to you.

## A Symbolical Reading

This Gospel passage speaks of two animals of great spiritual value in the Bible: the lamb and the dove. The first alludes to significant texts in the Bible: the paschal meal of the exodus (cc. 12-13); the glory of the Christ-Lamb in the Apocalypse.

### The Symbol of the Lamb:

Let us turn our attention to the symbol of the «Lamb (*amnos*) of God», and to its meaning.

- A first biblical allusion for an understanding of this expression used by John the Baptist to point out the person of Jesus, is the figure of the **victorious Lamb** in the book of the Apocalypse: in 7: 17 the Lamb is the shepherd of the nations; in 17:14 the Lamb squashes the evil powers on earth. In Jesus' time, people imagined that at the end of time a victorious lamb or one that would destroy the powers of sin, injustice and evil would appear. This idea conforms to the eschatological preaching of John the Baptist who warned that God's anger was imminent (Lk 3: 7), that the axe was already laid at the roots of the trees, and that God was ready to cut down and throw on the fire every tree that did not bear good fruit (Lk 3: 9). Mt 3: 12 and Lk 3: 17.

Another very powerful expression with which the Baptist introduces Jesus is in Matthew 3: 12: «His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out». It is not wrong to think that John the Baptist could describe Jesus as the lamb of God who destroys the sin of the world. In fact, in 1 John 3: 5 it is written: «Now you know that he appeared in order to abolish sin»; and in 3: 8: «It was to undo all that the devil has done that the Son of God appeared». It is possible that John the Baptist greeted Jesus as the victorious lamb who, by God's command, was to destroy evil in the world.

- A second biblical allusion is to **the Lamb as the suffering servant**. This figure of the suffering servant or of Jhwh is the subject of four canticles in Deutero-Isaiah: 42: 1-4, 7, 9; 49: 1-6, 9, 13; 50: 4-9, 11; 52: 13-53, 12. We need to ask ourselves whether the use of «Lamb of God» in John 1: 29 is not colored by the use of "lamb" to allude to the suffering Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 53. Did John really consider Jesus the lamb as the suffering Servant?

There certainly are no clear proofs that the Baptist made such a connection, nor are there proofs that exclude such a possibility. Indeed, in Isaiah 53: 7 it is written that the Servant:

«never opened his mouth, like a sheep that is dumb before its shearers, never opening its mouth». This description is applied to Jesus in Acts 8: 32, and so this likeness between the Suffering Servant and Jesus was made by the early Christians (see Mt 8: 17 = Is 53: 4; Heb 9: 28 = Is 53: 12).

Besides, in John the Baptist's description of Jesus in 1: 32-34, there are two aspects that recall the figure of the Servant: in v. 32 John the Baptist says that he saw the Spirit coming down on Jesus and resting on him; in 34 he identifies Jesus as the chosen of God. Thus also in Isaiah 42: 1 (a passage the synoptics also connect with the baptism of Jesus) we read: «Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights (see Mk 1: 11). I have endowed him with my spirit».

Again in Isaiah 61: 1: «The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh has been given to me». These biblical allusions strengthen the possibility that the Evangelist made a connection between the Servant of Isaiah 42; 53 and the Lamb of God.

In other parts of John's Gospel, we also find Jesus described with the traits of the suffering Servant (12: 38 = Is 53: 1).

One interesting aspect to be noticed is that the Lamb of God is said to take away the sin of the world. In Isaiah 53: 4, 12, it is said that the Servant bears or takes on himself the sins of many. By his death, Jesus takes away sin or takes it on himself.

Thus according to the second interpretation, the Lamb as suffering Servant, is Christ who offers himself freely to eliminate sin from the world and restore his brothers and sisters in the flesh back to God.

We find a modern confirmation of this interpretation of Jesus as "Lamb of God" in a document of the Italian bishops: «The Apocalypse of John, going even to the ultimate depths of the mystery of the One sent by the Father, recognizes in him the Lamb who is sacrificed "since the foundation of the world" (Apc 13: 8), the One whose wounds healed us (1 Pt 2: 25; Is 53: 5)» (*Communicating the Gospel in a changing world*, 15).

- A third biblical allusion is **the Lamb as the paschal lamb**. John's Gospel is full of Paschal symbolism especially in relation to the death of Jesus. For the Christian community for whom John is writing his Gospel, the Lamb takes away the sin of the world by his death. In fact, in John 19: 14 it is written that Jesus was sentenced to death at midday on the eve of the Pasch, that is at the time when priests began to sacrifice paschal lambs in the Temple for Easter. Another connection of the paschal symbolism with the death of Jesus is that while Jesus was on the cross, a sponge soaked in vinegar was raised up to him on a stick (19: 29), and it was the stick or hyssop that was dipped into the blood of the paschal lamb to sprinkle the doorposts of the Israelites (Ex 12: 22). Then in John 19: 36 the fulfilment of Scripture that not one bone of Jesus would be broken, is clearly a reference to the text in Exodus 12: 46 where it is written that not one bone of the paschal lamb must be broken. The description of Jesus as the Lamb is found in another of John's works, namely the Apocalypse: in 5: 6 mention is made of the sacrificed lamb; in 7: 17 and 22: 1 the Lamb is the one from whom flows the spring of living water and this aspect is also an allusion to Moses who made water to flow from the rock; finally, in 5: 9 reference is made to the redeeming blood of the Lamb, another paschal motif that recalls the salvation of the houses of the Israelites from the danger of death.

There is a parallel between the blood of the lamb sprinkled on the doorposts as a sign of liberation and the blood of the lamb offered in a sacrifice of liberation. Soon Christians began to compare Jesus to the paschal lamb and, in doing so, they did not hesitate to use sacrificial language: «Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed» (1 Cor 5: 7), including Jesus' task of taking away the sin of the world.

## The Symbol of the Dove:

This second symbol also has several aspects to it. First of all, the expression “like a dove” was common to express the affective connection with the nest. In our context it says that the Spirit has found its nest, its natural habitat of love in Jesus. Moreover, the dove symbolizes the love of the Father that rests on Jesus as in a permanent dwelling place (see Mt 3: 16; Mk 1: 10; Lk 3: 22).

Then the expression «like a dove» is used in connection with the verb to descend to express that it is not a question of the physical aspect of a dove but the way the Spirit descends (like the flight of a dove), in the sense that it does not strike terror but rather inspires trust. Such biblical symbolism of the dove does not have parallel symbolisms in the Bible; however, an old rabbinical exegesis compares the hovering of the Spirit of God over the primordial waters to the fluttering of the dove over its nest. It is not impossible that in using this symbol, John wanted to say that the descent of the Spirit in the shape of a dove was a clear reference to the beginning of creation: the incarnation of God’s plan in Jesus is the summit and aim of God’s creative activity.

The love of God for Jesus (corresponding to the movement of the dove returning to its nest) urges him to pass on the fullness of his divine essence (the Spirit is love and loyalty).

## The Message

- **Christ is our salvation:** The Baptist had the task of pointing out in Jesus «the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world». The proclamation of the Gospel, the word of Jesus Christ, is as essential and indispensable today as it was yesterday. We never cease to need liberation and salvation. Proclaiming the Gospel does not mean communicating theoretical truths nor is it a collection of moral teachings. Rather, it means allowing people to experience Jesus Christ, who came into the world – according to John’s witness – to save humankind from sin, evil and death. So we cannot transmit the Gospel and at the same time not pay attention to the daily needs and expectations of people. To speak of faith in Jesus, lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, means to speak to people of our time, first asking ourselves what do they seek in the depths of their heart.
- “If we wish to hold on to an appropriate criterion..., we shall need to nurture two complementary focal points... Jesus Christ is witness to both. The first consists of our effort to listen to the culture of our world so as to discern the seeds of the Word already present there, even beyond the visible borders of the Church. To listen to the most intimate expectations of our contemporaries, consider seriously their wishes and desires, seek to understand that which burns in their hearts and what makes them afraid and diffident”. Besides, paying attention to the needs and expectations of people «does not mean renouncing what is different in Christianity, or the transcendence of the Gospel... the Christian message points to a fully human way of life but does not limit itself to presenting mere humanism. Jesus Christ came so that we may partake of the divine life, of that life which has been called “the humanity of God.” (*Communicating the Gospel in a changing world* n. 34)
- **The Spirit does not come only to rest on Jesus**, but to possess him permanently so that he may share himself with others in baptism. Finally, the lamb who pardons sins and “the dove of the Church, meet in Christ”. Here is a quotation from St. Bernard where he brings together the two symbols: “The lamb is among animals that which the dove is among birds: innocence, sweetness and simplicity.”

Some practical suggestions:

- Renew our availability to collaborate with the mission of Christ in communion with the Church by helping people to be free of evil and of sin.

- To stand by men and women on their journey that they may live in hope in Jesus who liberates and saves.
- To give witness to one's joy in experiencing the efficacy of the word of Jesus in one's life.
- To live by communicating faith giving witness to Jesus, savior of every person.

## Psalm 40

*This psalm speaks of the situation of a person who, freed from some oppression, finds no more authentic attitude in reply to God than an existential and total availability to his word.*

I waited, I waited for Yahweh,  
 then he stooped to me and heard my cry for help. He put a fresh song in my mouth,  
 praise of our God. You wanted no sacrifice or cereal offering,  
 but you gave me an open ear,  
 you did not ask for burnt offering or sacrifice for sin; then I said, 'Here I am, I am coming.'  
 In the scroll of the book it is written of me, my delight is to do your will;  
 your law, my God, is deep in my heart.  
 I proclaimed the saving justice of Yahweh in the great assembly. See, I will not hold my  
 tongue, as you well know.

## Closing Prayer

Father, who on the day of the Lord gather your people to celebrate  
 the One who is First and Last,  
 the Living One who has conquered death,  
 grant us the strength of your Spirit so that, having broken the chains of evil, we may  
 render you the free service  
 of our obedience and love,  
 so that we may reign with Christ in glory.  
 For He is God, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and  
 ever. (From the *Liturgy*)



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

**15**JAN<sub>2023</sub>

## Tend your inner lamp

Why do we take so many pictures of sunsets and sunrises? Why fill our homes with chandeliers, lamps, and candles? To the eye, light is incredibly attractive. It illuminates all that surrounds it, offering us not simply its own glow, but redeeming the whole environment swallowed by darkness and delivering it back to us. People who carry an inner light are similar. We're attracted to their aura, but even more so to how clear and bright reality appears when we're in their company. Saints attract others with their light long before the church bestows on them the customary halo. Let your light shine!

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

**Today's readings:**

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; John 1:29-34 (64).

*"I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."*

**16**JAN<sub>2023</sub>

## Help the dream awaken in all hearts and minds

Many people have today off from school and work in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Why not make it a "day on" instead? Spend at least a little time working for peace and justice today, as King did every day. This is the only federal holiday that is also designated by Congress as a national day of service. The Catholic Church has embraced King's call for racial equality. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "Racism and every form of discrimination ... must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design." Lift a hand to help in your community, and pray that love banish hate.

**Today's readings:**

Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 2:18-22 (311).

*"The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them."*

**17**JAN<sub>2023</sub>

## Make space for silence

The *Apophthegmata Patrum* is a 1,600-year-old collection of writings known as the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. These texts record the teachings of the earliest Christian monks, who congregated in the desert of Egypt. The wisest among these monks was Anthony the Abbot. He wrote: "Just as fish die if they stay too long out of water, so the monks who loiter outside their cells or pass their time with men of the world lose the intensity of inner peace." When Christianity became politically accepted—and martyrdoms ceased—Anthony sought the desert to experience a different kind of sacrifice. There he found silence and solitude, too. Seek God in silence today.

MEMORIAL OF ANTHONY, ABBOT

**Today's readings:**

Hebrews 6:10-20; Mark 2:23-28 (312).

*"Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions were hungry?"*

**18**JAN<sub>2023</sub>

## There's room in this big tent

Every camper knows that it's a stretch of the imagination to think that a four-person tent can really fit four people! You're lucky if two people and a backpack fit! In Catholic circles, however, tents have a different meaning. Instead of being short on space, this tent is expandable, able to include everyone, not just one or two. This image is core to the church's "Synod on Synodality" in which all Catholics, including the marginalized, give voice to their

experience and together discern God's call. If you want more specs on this big tent, have a look at [the USCCB website](#).

**Today's readings:**

Hebrews 7:1-3, 15-17; Mark 3:1-6 (313).

*"[Jesus] said to the man with the withered hand, 'Come up here before us.' "*

**19 JAN**<sub>2023</sub>

## Come in from the cold

Christmas is over and Epiphany has faded. In much of the Northern Hemisphere, the days are cold and dark. This is when the warmth of the Christian tradition is more important than ever. Pope Francis has often encouraged Christians to practice their faith in warmth and kindness: "Let us light fires of fraternity around which people can warm themselves," he said at a 2022 meeting with migrants in Malta. That's advice we can all take to heart—and to hearth. Can you find a word or gesture today to add positive warmth to a wintry world?

**Today's readings:**

Hebrews 7:25—8:6; Mark 3:7-12 (314).

*"He had cured many and, as a result, those who had diseases were pressing upon him to touch him."*

**20 JAN**<sub>2023</sub>

## Twelve is enough

Twelve months of the year. Twelve inches in a foot. Twelve numbers on the face of a watch. We certainly like our twelves. So does the church. The most famous of course is the 12 apostles, often simply called the Twelve. There's also the 12 days of Christmas and 12 fruits of the Holy Spirit. It's not just that 12 is a handy number for grouping things, it also carries symbolic value. It signifies completion or fullness. Twelve eggs, for example, means you have a full carton. And 12 apostles means the church has everything it needs to preach the Good News. Count your spiritual blessings—by the dozen!

**Today's readings:**

Hebrews 8:6-13; Mark 3:13-19 (315).

*"He appointed Twelve, whom he also named Apostles."*

**21 JAN**<sub>2023</sub>

## No has always meant no

As a young girl of 13 or 14, Agnes refused all suitors because she had betrothed herself to Christ. As punishment, she was taken to a brothel. One man attempted to violate her, only to be mysteriously struck blind—until Agnes restored his sight. Historical or not, this story reminds us that the scandal of child sex trafficking has always been, and still is, very much with us. Millions of girls and boys are kidnapped, bought and sold, exploited and violated for profit every year. You can help end childhood sex trafficking at the [Save the Children](#) and [United Nations](#) websites. Act in honor of courageous Agnes.

MEMORIAL OF AGNES, MARTYR

**Today's readings:**

Hebrews 9:2-3, 11-14; Mark 3:20-21 (316).

*"Cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God."*