

## 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.

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# Lectio Divina

**Sunday, March 12, 2023**

*Third Sunday of Lent*

## Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to help us read the Scriptures in the same way that you read them to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. With the light of the Word in the Bible, you helped them to discover the presence of God in the distressing events surrounding your condemnation to death. The cross, which seemed to put an end to all hope, was revealed to them as the source of life and resurrection.

Create in us the silence necessary to hear your voice in creation and in the Scriptures, in the events of daily life and in people, above all in the poor and the suffering. May your word give us direction, just as it did to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, so that we too will experience the power of your resurrection and bear witness to others that you are alive in our midst as the source of community, of justice and of peace. We ask this of you, Jesus, son of Mary, you who revealed the Father to us and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

## Gospel Reading - John 4, 5-42

### **A Key for Unlocking the Text:**

The text describes the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. It is a very human conversation, which shows how Jesus related to people and how he himself learned and became enriched in talking with others. While reading the text, try to be aware of what surprises you most about the attitude both of Jesus and the woman.

### **A Division of the Text to Assist a Careful Reading:**

- Jn 4,5-6: Sets the scene in which the dialogue takes place
- Jn 4,7-26: Describes the dialogue between Jesus and the woman
  - 7-15: about water and thirst
  - 16-18: about the husband and family
  - 19-25: about religion and the place for adoration
- Jn 4,27-30: Describes the effect of the conversation on the woman
- Jn 4,31-38: Describes the effect of the conversation on Jesus
- Jn 4,39-42: Describes the effect on the mission of Jesus in Samaria

### **The Text:**

- 5-6: So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.
- 7-15: There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would

have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

- 16-18: Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly."
- 19-26: The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."
- 27-30: Just then his disciples came. They marvelled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, "What do you wish?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the city and were coming to him.
- 31-38: Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." So the disciples said to one another, "Has any one brought him food?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour; others have laboured, and you have entered into their labor."
- 39-42: Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So, when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

## A Moment of Silent Prayer

so that the Word of God can enter into us and light up our lives.

## Some Questions

*to help us in our meditation and prayer.*

- What most attracted your attention in Jesus' attitude to the woman during the dialogue? What method did Jesus use to help the woman become aware of a deeper dimension to life?
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- What most attracted your attention about the attitude of the Samaritan woman during her conversation with Jesus? How did she influence Jesus?
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- Where in the Old Testament, is water associated with the gift of life and the gift of the Holy Spirit?
- How does Jesus' attitude during the conversation question me or touch something within me or correct me?
- The Samaritan woman led the discussion towards religion. If you could come across Jesus and talk to him, what would you like to talk about? Why?
- Do I adore God in spirit and in truth or do I find my security in rituals and regulations?

## A Key to the Reading

*for those who wish to go deeper.*

### **The Symbolism of Water:**

- Jesus uses the word water in two senses. The first sense is the material, normal sense of water that one drinks; the second is the symbolic sense as the source of life and the gift of the Spirit. Jesus uses a language that people can understand and, at the same time, awakes in them, the desire to go deeper and to discover a more profound meaning to life.
- The symbolic sense of water has its roots in the Old Testament, where it is frequently a symbol for the action of the Spirit of God in people. For example, Jeremiah compares running water to water in a cistern (Jer. 2,13). The more water is taken from a cistern, the less it has; the more water is taken from a stream of living water, the more it has. Other texts from the Old Testament: Is.12,3; 49,10; 55,1; Ez. 47, 1-3. Jesus knew the traditions of his people and he uses these in his conversation with the Samaritan woman. Suggesting the symbolic meaning of water, he suggests to her (and to the readers) various episodes and phrases from the Old Testament.

### **The Dialogue between Jesus and the Woman:**

- Jesus meets the woman at the well, a traditional place for meetings and conversations (Gen 24,10-27;29,1-14). He starts off from his own very real need because he is thirsty. He does this in such a way that the woman feels needed and she serves him. Jesus makes himself needy in her regard. From his question, he makes it possible for the woman to become aware that he depends on her to give him something to drink. Jesus awakens in her the desire to help and to serve.
- The conversation between Jesus and the woman has two levels.
  - **The superficial level**, in the material sense of water that quenches someone's thirst, and in the normal sense of husband as the father of a family. At this level the conversation is tense and difficult and does not flow. The Samaritan woman has the upper hand. At the beginning, Jesus tries to meet her by

talking about daily chores (fetching water), but he does not succeed. Then he tries by talking about family (call your husband), and still there is no breakthrough. Finally the woman speaks about religion (the place of adoration). Jesus then gets through to her by the door she herself has opened.

- **The deeper level**, in the symbolic sense of water as the image of the new life brought by Jesus, and of the husband as the symbol of the union of God with the people. At this level, the conversation flows perfectly. After revealing that he himself is offering the water of new life, Jesus says, "Go and get your husband and then return." In the past, the Samaritans had five husbands, or five idols, attached to the five groups of people who were taken off by the King of Assyria (2 Kings 17, 30-31). The sixth husband, the one the woman had at present, was not truly her husband: "the one you have now is not your husband" (Jn. 4,18). What the people had did not respond to their deepest desire: union with God, as a husband who unites himself to his spouse (Is. 62,5; 54,5). The true husband, the seventh, is Jesus, as promised by Hosea: "I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy. I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord." (Hos. 2, 21-22). Jesus is the bridegroom who has arrived (Mk. 2, 19) to bring new life to the woman who has been searching for it her whole life long, and until now, has never found it. If the people accept Jesus as "husband", they will have access to God wherever they are, both in spirit and in truth (vv. 23- 24).

\* Jesus declares his thirst to the Samaritan woman but he does not drink. This is a sign that we are talking about a symbolic thirst, which had to do with his mission: the thirst to accomplish the will of his Father (Jn. 4, 34). This thirst is ever present in Jesus and will be until his death. At the moment of his death, he says, "I am thirsty" (Jn. 19, 28). He declares his thirst for the last time and so he can say, "It is accomplished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (Jn. 19,30). His mission had been accomplished.

### **The Importance of Women in the Gospel of John:**

In John's Gospel, women feature prominently seven times, which are decisive for the spreading of the Good News. To women are given functions and missions, some of which, in the other Gospels, are attributed to men:

- At the wedding feast in Cana, the mother of Jesus recognizes the limits of the Old Testament and affirms the law of the Gospel, "Do whatever he tells you." (Jn. 2, 1-11).
- The Samaritan woman is the first person to have revealed to her by Jesus the great secret, that he is the Messiah. "It is I who speak to you." (Jn. 4,26). She then becomes the evangelizer of Samaria (Jn. 4, 28-30. 39-42).
- The woman, who is called an adulteress, at the moment of receiving the forgiveness of Jesus, becomes the judge of the patriarchal society (or of male power) that seeks to condemn her. (Jn. 8, 1-11).
- In the other Gospels it is Peter who makes the solemn profession of faith in Jesus (Mt. 16, 16; Mk. 8,29; Lk. 9,20). In the Gospel of John, it is Martha, sister of Mary and Lazarus, who makes the solemn profession of faith (Jn. 11,27).
- Mary, the sister of Martha, anoints the feet of Jesus for the day of his burial (Jn. 12,7). At the time of Jesus, the one who died on a cross was not buried nor embalmed. Mary anticipated the anointing of Jesus' body. This means that she accepted Jesus as the Messiah-Suffering Servant, who must die on the cross. Peter did not accept this (Jn.13,8) and sought to dissuade Jesus from this path (Mt. 16,22). In this way, Mary is presented as a model for the other disciples.

- At the foot of the cross, Jesus says, "Woman, behold your son; son, behold your mother" (Jn. 19,25-27). The Church is born at the foot of the cross. Mary is the model for the Christian community.
- Mary Magdalene must announce the Good News to the brothers (Jn. 20,11-18). She receives an order, without which all the other orders given to the apostles would have no effect or value.
- The Mother of Jesus appears twice in John's Gospel: at the beginning, at the wedding feast in Cana (Jn. 2, 1-5), and at the end, at the foot of the cross (Jn. 19, 25-27). In both cases, she represents the Old Testament that waits for the arrival of the New, and, in both cases, assists its arrival. Mary unites what has gone before with what would come later. At Cana, it is she, the Mother of Jesus, symbol of the Old Testament, who perceives its limits and takes steps so that the New will arrive. At the hour of Jesus' death, it is the Mother of Jesus, who welcomes the "Beloved Disciple." In this case the Beloved Disciple is the new community, which has grown around Jesus. It is the child that has been born from the Old Testament. In response to Jesus' request, the son, the New Testament, welcomes the Mother, the Old Testament, into his home. The two must journey together. The New Testament cannot be understood without the Old. It would be a building without a foundation. The Old without the New would be incomplete. It would be a tree without fruit.

## Psalm 19 (18)

God speaks to us through nature and through the Bible The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their  
voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.  
In them he has set a tent for the sun,  
which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man runs its  
course with joy.  
Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them;  
and there is nothing hid from its heat.  
The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are  
right, rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is  
clean, enduring forever;  
the ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they  
than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the  
honeycomb.  
Moreover, by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.  
But who can discern his errors? Clear thou me from hidden faults.  
Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over  
me!  
Then I shall be blameless,  
and innocent of great transgression.  
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O  
Lord,  
my rock and my redeemer.

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## Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your word, which has helped us see better the will of the Father. Let your Spirit illumine all that we do and give us the strength to carry out that which your Word has made us see. Let us, like Mary, your Mother, not only listen to the Word but also put it into practice. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.



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

## 12MAR<sub>2023</sub> - Truth be told

Pontius Pilate famously asked Jesus, “What is truth?” Pilate didn’t stick around for the answer (which in itself says a lot), but if he had, he might have heard something like the definition the Catechism of the Catholic Church provides: “Truth as uprightness in human action and speech is called truthfulness, sincerity, or candor. Truth or truthfulness is the virtue which consists in showing oneself true in deeds and truthful in words, and in guarding against duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy.” Now we have a sense of what it means to imitate Christ in all things.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

**Today's readings:**

Exodus 17:3-7; Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; John 4:5-42 (28).

*"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth."*

## 13MAR<sub>2023</sub> - On the frontiers of servanthood

When you think of the legendary figures of the Wild West, Billy the Kid, Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley, Geronimo, and Sitting Bull come to mind. But how about Sister Blandina Segale? Add her to list—because she had encounters with many of those men and women, and her life was also the stuff of lore. Born in 1850, this Italian-American Sister of Charity of Cincinnati traveled alone through the American frontier to serve the poor and sick (including saving the life of a seriously wounded Billy the Kid), to advocate for Native American civil rights, and to fight against lynching (including protecting a contrite murderer from a mob). This Catholic Sisters Week (March 8-14) count Segale, honored by the church with the title servant of God, among the heroic sisters who have your gratitude for spreading the faith.

LENTEN WEEKDAY

**Today's readings:**

2 Kings 5:1-15b; Luke 4:24-30 (237).

*"Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place."*

## 14MAR<sub>2023</sub> - No room for hate

Fannie Lou Hamer died this day in 1977. But she nearly died in 1963, in a Mississippi jail cell—so badly beaten, as a civil rights advocate, that her cell mate didn’t think she’d survive the night. But Hamer asked her to join in singing the hymn “Walk With Me, Lord” and lived to see another day. In fact Hamer lived to testify, on television, before the 1964 Democratic National Convention. A tireless campaigner for women’s voting rights, she was also inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame. Follow Hamer’s lead in fostering forgiveness: “I feel sorry for anybody that could let hate wrap them up. Ain’t no such thing as I can hate anybody and hope to see God’s face.”

LENTEN WEEKDAY

**Today's readings:**

Daniel 3:25, 34-43; Matthew 18:21-35 (238).

*"Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him?"*

## 15MAR<sub>2023</sub> - Printing the truth is worth the struggle

On this week in 1827, *Freedom’s Journal* began publication as the first African-American newspaper in history. Founded by Protestant minister John Wilk and leading free black men in New York City, the paper would set off a revolution in U.S. media, resulting in similar papers being established nationwide, forming the black press. Daniel Rudd founded the first black Catholic newspaper in 1885, and the explosion in African-American conversions to Catholicism in the 20th century can be attributed in large part to these newspapers advertising better conditions in



the northern United States (where Catholic parishes and schools happened to be plentiful). The black press continues today in many American cities and represents one of the nation's original justice-focused professional institutions. Consider supporting a local—or national—black news outlet today.

**LENTEN WEEKDAY**

**Today's readings:**

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9; Matthew 5:17-19 ([239](#)).

*"Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life; you have the words of everlasting life."*

## **16**MAR<sub>2023</sub> - **Let God carry it**

The comedy-drama *The Banshees of Inisherin* features a man gloomy about his eventual death going to Confession over a period of weeks. Each time, the priest asks, "And how is the despair?" implying despair itself might be seen as a sin—rather tough but also tender in the way the priest wants to understand the whole man. The church upholds hope as a virtue and warns against despair because it can leave no room for God's grace. That said, our faith leaders have long shown compassion for the complexities of depression in its many forms. Whatever your emotional state, consider turning today's burdens over to God.

**LENTEN WEEKDAY**

**Today's readings:**

Jeremiah 7:23-28; Luke 11:14-23 ([240](#)).

*"But if it is by the finger of God that I drive out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you."*

## **17**MAR<sub>2023</sub> - **As luck would have it**

The Lord expects great things from us: namely, to love God with our whole heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Are humans really capable of such love? Irish writer Oscar Wilde had his doubts: "I sometimes think that God in creating man somewhat overestimated his ability." We human beings do tend to make a mess of things when left to our own devices, but luckily for us, we have a loving God who sent Jesus to show us the way to love, and the Holy Spirit to keep us on the path of love. In honor of Saint Patrick, remember to draw on the Trinity as you continually recalibrate your trajectory toward love.

**MEMORIAL OF PATRICK, BISHOP**

**Today's readings:**

Hosea 14:2-10; Mark 12:28-34 ([241](#)).

*"Straight are the paths of the LORD, in them the just walk."*

## **18**MAR<sub>2023</sub> - **The fragrance of forgiveness**

Cyril, a fourth-century bishop of Jerusalem and a doctor of the church, was instrumental in forming the church's doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit. He wrote, "The Spirit comes gently and makes himself known by his fragrance. He is not felt as a burden for God is light . . . The Spirit comes with the tenderness of a true friend to save, to heal, to teach, to counsel, to strengthen and to console." The formula for absolution in the sacrament of Reconciliation identifies the Holy Spirit as sent "for the forgiveness of sins." Celebrate the sacrament at your church this afternoon.

**MEMORIAL OF CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH**

**Today's readings:**

Hosea 6:1-6; Luke 18:9-14 ([242](#)).

*"O God, be merciful to me a sinner."*