

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

Luke Dysinger, OSB, is a Benedictine monk of Saint Andrew's Abbey, Valyermo, California

Lectio Divina

Sunday, March 3, 2024

Third Sunday of Lent

Opening Prayer

Spirit of truth, sent by Jesus to guide us to the whole truth, enlighten our minds so that we may understand the Scriptures. You who overshadowed Mary and made her fruitful ground where the Word of God could germinate, purify our hearts from all obstacles to the Word. Help us to learn like her to listen with good and pure hearts to the Word that God speaks to us in life and in Scripture, so that we may observe the Word and produce good fruit through our perseverance.

Gospel Reading - John 2: 13-25

- Context and Structure:

Our passage follows immediately on the first sign that Jesus gave in Cana of Galilee (2: 1-12). Some expressions and phrases are repeated in both scenes and lead us to think that the author wanted to contrast the two scenes. In Cana, a village in Galilee, during a wedding feast, a Jewish woman, the mother of Jesus, expresses her unconditional faith in Jesus and invites others to accept His word (2: 3-5). On the other hand, "the Jews," during the Paschal celebration in Jerusalem, refuse to believe in Jesus and do not accept His word. In Cana, Jesus worked His first sign (2: 11) and here the Jews ask for a sign (2: 18) but then do not accept the sign Jesus gives them (2: 20).

The development of our little story is quite simple. Verse 13 places in a framework a context of space and time that is very precise and significant: Jesus goes to Jerusalem for the Paschal feast. Verse 14 introduces the scene that provokes a strong reaction on the part of Jesus. Jesus' action is described in verse 15 and is caused by Jesus himself in verse 16. Jesus' action and words in turn provoke two reactions: first, that of the disciples, one of admiration (2: 17); and second, that of the "Jews," one of dissent and indignation (2: 18). They want an explanation from Jesus (2: 19) but they are not open to receive it (2: 20). At this point the narrator intervenes to interpret Jesus' words authentically (2: 21). "The Jews" cannot understand the real meaning of Jesus' word. However, neither can the disciples, who admire Him as a prophet full of zeal for God, grasp the meaning at this point. It is only after the fulfillment that they will believe in Jesus' word (2: 22). Finally, the narrator offers us a brief account of Jesus' reception by the crowds in Jerusalem (2: 23-25). Yet, this faith, founded only on His signs, does not impress Jesus.

- The Text:

Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money changers seated there. He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace. "His disciples recalled the words of Scripture, Zeal for your house will consume me.

At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken.

While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well.

A Moment of Prayerful Silence

that the Word of God may penetrate and enlighten our life.

Some Questions

- Am I able to entrust myself completely to God's hands in an act of faith, or do I ask for signs?

- God gives me many signs of His presence in my life. Am I capable of seeing and accepting them?
- Am I satisfied with exterior worship, or do I try to offer God the worship of my obedience in my daily life?
- Who is Jesus for me? Am I aware that only in Him and through Him is it possible to meet God?

A Key to the Reading

for those who wish to go deeper into the theme.

- "The Jews"

John's Gospel is characterized by a long argument concerning the identity of Jesus. In this Christological argument, on the one hand we have Jesus and on the other "the Jews." But this argument, rather than reflecting the historical situation at the time of Jesus, reflects the situation which developed towards the 80s of the first century between the followers of Jesus and the Jews who had not accepted Him as the Son of God and Messiah. It is certain that the conflict had already begun at the time of Jesus, but the gap between the two groups, both of whom were Jews, became set when those who did not accept Jesus as Son of God and Messiah and held Him to be a blasphemer, expelled the disciples of Jesus from the synagogue, that is, from the community of Jewish believers (see Jn 9: 22; 12: 42; 16: 2).

Hence, "the Jews" that we often come across in the fourth Gospel, do not represent the Jewish people. They are literary characters in the Christological argument that evolves in this Gospel. They do not represent a race, but those who have taken the clear position of an absolute rejection of Jesus. In any reading of the Gospel, "the Jews" are all those who refuse Jesus, no matter what the race or time to which they belong.

- The Signs

The healings and other thaumaturgical acts of Jesus that the synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) call miracles, John calls signs. As signs, they point to something that goes beyond the visible action. They reveal the mystery of Jesus. Thus, for instance, the healing of the man born blind reveals Jesus as light of the world (Jn 8: 12; 9: 1-41), the raising of Lazarus from the dead reveals Jesus as the resurrection and the life (see Jn 11: 1-45).

In our passage, "the Jews" ask for a sign in the sense of a proof that will authenticate Jesus' words and actions. But in the fourth Gospel, Jesus does not work signs as proof guaranteeing faith. A faith founded on signs is shallow and not sufficient. It is only an initial faith that may lead to true faith (see Jn 20: 30-31) but may also not do so (see Jn 6: 26).

John's Gospel asks us to go beyond signs, not to dwell on the spectacular, but to see the deepest meaning in the revelation that the signs point to.

- Jesus, New Temple

The temple in Jerusalem was the place of God's presence in the midst of the people. Yet the prophets constantly insisted that it was not sufficient to go to the temple and offer sacrifices there in order to be accepted by God (see Is 1: 10-17; Jer 7: 1-28; Am 4: 4-5; 5: 21-27). God wants obedience and a life morally straight and just. If the exterior cult does not express such a vital attitude, then it is empty (see 1 Sam 15: 22). Jesus inserts Himself in that prophetic tradition of the purification of the cult (see Zec 14: 23 and Mic 3: 1 for the action of the coming "Messiah" in this context). The disciples admire Him for

this and immediately think that for this attitude He will have to pay personally like Jeremiah (see Jer 26: 1-15) and other prophets. But in John's Gospel, Jesus' action is more than a prophetic gesture of zeal for God. It is a sign that prefigures and proclaims the great sign of the death and resurrection of Jesus. More than just a purification, that which Jesus does is to abolish the temple and the cult there celebrated, because from now on the place of the presence of God is the glorified body of Jesus (see Jn 1: 51; 4: 23).

Psalm 50

The Cult According to God's Will

The Mighty One, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to its setting. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.

Our God comes, He does not keep silence; before Him is a devouring fire,
round about Him a mighty tempest.

He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that He may judge His people:

"Gather to Me My faithful ones,

who made a covenant with Me by sacrifice!" The heavens declare His righteousness,
for God himself is judge!

"Hear, O My people, and I will speak.

O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God. I do not reprove you for your sacrifices;

your burnt offerings are continually before me. I will accept no bull from your house,
nor he-goat from your folds.

For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.

I know all the birds of the air,

and all that moves in the field is mine. "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world and all that is in it is mine.

Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High; and call upon me in the day of trouble;

I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

But to the wicked God says,

"What right have you to recite My statutes, or take My covenant on your lips?

For you hate discipline,

and you cast My words behind you.

If you see a thief, you are a friend of his; and you keep company with adulterers. You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit.

You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son.

These things you have done and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself.

But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you.

Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver!

He who brings thanksgiving as his sacrifice honors me; to those who go the right way

I will show the salvation of God!

Closing Prayer

Father, You have constituted Your Son, Jesus, new temple of the new and eternal covenant, built not by the hands of human beings but by the Holy Spirit. Grant that, as we welcome in faith His Word, we may dwell in him and thus adore You in spirit and in truth. Open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and sisters who are the members of the body of Christ, so that in serving them we may offer You the cult that you desire from us. We ask You this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Invest time each week to
expand your vocabulary and
deepen your faith.

03 March 2024

WORD OF THE WEEK

Anointing of the Sick

\ə-ˈnɔɪnt-tɪŋ ˈæv ˈθə
ˈsɪk\

A sacrament for the recovery and salvation of a critically ill or injured person formerly called Extreme Unction (“last **anointing**”). No longer reserved for those near death, one may be **anointed** before surgery, in extreme age or illness, after losing consciousness, or when no longer coherent.

Pronunciation: <https://tinyurl.com/Take5-anointing-the-sick>

CONTEXT

Anointing of the Sick permits us to touch with our hands God’s compassion for humanity.

—Pope Francis

When the church **anoints** a sick person, it **anoints** a member of its own body.

—Sister Susan Wood, S.C.L.

By the grace of the sacrament of **Anointing of the Sick**, the sick person receives the strength and the gift of uniting more closely to Christ’s Passion.

—Catechism of the Catholic Church

WHY IT MATTERS

The mercy of God extends to the body as well as soul of each person. Jesus ministered to the sick and suffering both physically and spiritually. The church continues this ministry in its care for the whole person.

From *Rites of the Catholic Church as revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*: The Church obeys Jesus’ command to care for the sick by visiting those in poor health but also by raising them up through the **sacrament of Anointing** and by nourishing them with the Eucharist during their illness. The church offers prayers for the sick to commend them to God, especially in the last crisis of life.

RELATED WORDS

Extreme Unction | Consecration | Holy Oils | Chrism

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

What is the Anointing of the Sick?

One of the seven sacraments of the church, **Anointing of the Sick** recalls the healing presence and power of Jesus when we touch our mortality most vulnerably. From ancient times oil was valued for its healing and beautifying properties and in preparing bodies for burial.

The ordinary minister of the sacrament is the priest. However, it’s presumed that others share the event: family, friends, caregivers. Elements of the ritual include prayers, scripture, laying hands on the recipient, and **anointing** of the head and hands. A water sprinkling rite may be included, and affected areas of the sick person’s body may also be **anointed**. When in danger of death, additional sacraments of Reconciliation and Communion (*viaticum*, or “on the way with you”) are also administered.

—Alice Camille, from *Questions Catholics Ask* <http://tinyurl.com/QCA-anointing-the-sick>

REFLECTION OF THE WEEK

MEMORIAL OF SAINT JOHN OF GOD, RELIGIOUS (MARCH 8)

Power players in prayer

When it comes to your health, you can always turn to the saints for help. Feeling sick? Ask Saint John of God, patron of the sick and hospitals, to intercede on your behalf. Suffering from arthritis? Invoke Saint Alphonsus Ligouri. Have a headache? Entreat Saint Teresa of Ávila. Catholics also have the sacrament of **Anointing of the Sick**, to bring further healing.

READINGS: 1 John 3:14-18; Matthew 25:31-40 (539 <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/0308-memorial-john-god.cfm>). “*Let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.*”

FAITH IN ACTION

No matter the physical outcome, remember that the primary purpose of our petitionary prayer is to draw us closer to God, which will truly and wholly heal us.