

SUNDAYS OF ADVENT 2022



INTRODUCTION

We hope you enjoy this aid to your scripture reflection, alone or with others, this Advent.

Lectio Divina is a practical approach to praying the scriptures. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, *Lectio Divina* occurs “where the Word of God is so read and meditated that it becomes prayer.” The three key moments of this approach to the scriptures are reading, reflection and prayer. We read the Word of God to understand it; we reflect on the Word to see how it can apply to our lives; we pray in order to be transformed by the Word.

These three “moments” of *Lectio Divina* can be summed up by three questions:

- i. When we read, we ask: “What does the text say in itself?”*
- ii. When we reflect, we ask: “What does the text say to me/us?”*
- iii. When we pray, we ask: “What does the text lead me/us to say?”*

*Thanks to Fr Sean Maher, Kildare & Leighlin,
who wrote these reflections and prayers.*



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READ
REFLECT
PRAY

FIRST SUNDAY

MT 24:37-44

READ

The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect

Jesus said to his disciples: 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept all away. It will be like this when the Son of Man comes. Then of two men in the fields one is taken, one left; of two women at the millstone grinding, one is taken, one left.

'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at

what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.’

The Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECT

Two images govern this passage from Matthew, the image of the “day” and the image of “being awake and alert.” Both deserve some attention.

Noah’s day—a drop of rain, a soft day, down for a good while now, when will it stop? The point of this image is that we have little enough real understanding of what any day will bring. What seems a quiet gentle day may be the worst day in the life of the person beside you on the bus. What seems a “lost” day may well be a day that will change your life. Christ, in speaking of the significance of the day, situates himself within the tradition of the Prophets of Israel, who often spoke of the Day of the Lord in dramatic terms, as a day of dramatic divine intervention. When people took note of how important this day might be, they often asked when it will be. In return, they were told, it is today, it is tomorrow, it is every day—God can and will act in a powerful and dramatic way.

That leads us to the second aspect—the call to be awake. We can miss that dramatic and powerful intervention of God. We can even live our entire lives missing what is important and what is divine by a constant preoccupation with the imminent. The call is to remember and become aware of how and

where God is acting and has acted in my life—to enter into a consciousness of where God is speaking to us and how he is showing himself to us. That demands action and contemplation from us—an action that seeks to prepare for the coming of the master of the house with concrete and real acts of prayer and service, but with an underlying sense of contemplation that seeks to “stand ready” in the deepest and innermost heart of our being.

PRAY

As evening draws dark,
As our world seems to sleep,
As nature seeks to rest,
As time the year draws to close
And as darkness falls,

Help us Lord, to become aware and attentive to the grace of your presence.
Help us to prepare the house for the coming back of the Master who brings
back to it a sense of security and peace.
Amen.

READ
REFLECT
PRAY

SECOND SUNDAY

MT 3:1-12

READ

The one who follows me will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said:

A voice cries in the wilderness:
Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight.

This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round

his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 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.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECT

One of the guiding questions for the reading of the Gospel of Matthew is simply: Where is God? For the first readers this was pretty imminent: their Temple was destroyed and their city was occupied. It looked as if their culture was ruined. In that context, they began to look again at their own sense of who Christ is and what the Gospel means, in the light of the culture of the People of God and the promises made to them. If the Temple was gone, where did God dwell among them? If the land the People had lost their autonomy, where was the Kingdom of God?

Into that confusion is introduced this figure of some impact. Dressed like an Old Testament Prophet, with a toughness of expression and yet with a diet of one who seeks to live in simplicity and gentleness—who is he and what does he say?

Firstly, he is, as he says himself, “a voice in the wilderness”—a gentle voice, perhaps, that is carried on the breath of the desert wind, calling for a straight path and a new way for God to enter into lives.

No longer could people expect the privilege of birth or the traditions of race to be the pathway to God. A new road to this kingdom was opening up, across the desert of human experience. Where is the Kingdom? John says it is very near! Where is God? He is in the one who is coming, with fire and the Spirit, to bring everything to the joy of a new harvest.

PRAY

As we gather together thoughts of the past year, Lord, help us to remember that you have been with us along that pathway—in the cold days of winter, in the lengthening light of spring, in the warmth of high summer and in the falling leaves of autumn, you were there. Now, help us to close the door on this year, with thankfulness and with a call for mercy, and show us where the new road of 2023 might begin, the straight road that will show us new moments to know your presence and the coming of your kingdom.

READ
REFLECT
PRAY

THIRD SUNDAY
MT 11:2-11

READ

'A greater than John the Baptist has never been seen'

John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' Jesus answered, 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.'

As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about

John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says:

'Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you.

'I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECT

Just a few days ago, we celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception and we read the Gospel of the Annunciation, the moment when humanity, through Mary, accepts to become again the shrine of God's presence in Creation. It is a beautiful story of one aspect of the believer, who stands with Mary to say "yes" to the Father and opens the door to the adventure of faith.

Yet faith can lead us into the darkest of dungeons. In the darkest of dungeons today, we find another voice of faith, that again of John the Baptist who dares to ask of Christ whether he is really the one who can open the doors to allow humanity into the light of God's presence. It is the situation of so many who believe and who find themselves in the dark dungeon and who cry out---are you really the one who is to come?

Christ's answer might seem enigmatic and even a sidestep—can you not see the blind are restored to sight, the hungry are fed? These were the traditional signs associated by the prophets with the coming of the anointed one. Christ shows that his presence makes a difference to those who have deep needs and deep fears. He goes on to remind us that those who, like John, cry out authentically from the dungeons of human life will know the truth of their witness and the beauty of the path they have chosen.

PRAY

As we gather together in the dark of these days, we remember those who are “in the dungeons of faith” and who cry out to know if Christ is truly with them. We think, this year, of those affected and displaced by the conflict in Ukraine, and in so many other parts of our world. We pray with Mary, who dared to say yes to God and who opened the door to life for all humanity. We pray with John the Baptist, who cried out from the depths of the dungeons to know that Christ was truly going to open doors and set us free. Lord, it is difficult for us sometimes to see how Christ is active. Help us to see where he leads and how he is present in the darkness of our world.

READ
REFLECT
PRAY

FOURTH SUNDAY

MT 1:18-24

READ

How Jesus Christ came to be born

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph; being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She

will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.’ Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son

and they will call him Emmanuel,

a name which means ‘God-is-with-us.’ When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECT

Joseph in the Gospel has a lot in common with his namesake from Genesis—they are both men of dreams. For the earlier Joseph, his dreams got him into trouble with his brothers, but then the same capacity to walk in the world of dreams brought him to high rank in Egypt. Joseph in the Gospel must have had the dreams of any young man starting off in life—a beautiful bride, hopes of a family, a good business with strong sons to help, all that would have been the hopes of a young man with a future in store.

And yet, then came the dream that would shatter all others—the dream that would mean that so much of what was expected of life would just have to fall to the side. Joseph is told not to be afraid of this new dream that shatters all other dreams. God often comes into our lives in ways we would not expect or plan.

God sometimes enters our world across the shards of broken dreams. It is not always going to go to plan. It is not always as we would have hoped. It is not always the perfect dream come true, but it is always a call to overcome our fears and to understand that even our broken dreams might be a sign that God is with us.

PRAY

Today we pray with our broken dreams and the secret fears of our hearts. It can be difficult to see plans go awry and hopes deceive. Yet one of the great understandings of faith and the Christian tradition is that God can turn all things to the good of those who follow him. As we come here with our fears into the presence of God, we ask him to give us the courage to overcome our fears and to take into our homes the bearers of new life in God's name. As we come here with broken dreams, we pray that the disappointments and the trials might become the places where we will know that God is with us. Amen.

PRAYER FOR PEACE

O Mary, Mother of God and our mother, in this time of trial we turn to you. You never cease to guide us to Jesus, the prince of peace. Amid evil and war, you remind us that God never abandons us, but continues to look upon us with love, ever ready to forgive us and raise us up to new life. He has given you to us and made your Immaculate Heart a refuge for the church and for all humanity.

Therefore, O Loving Mother, hear our prayer: help us out of the depravity of war, inspire reconciliation, restore God's peace to the world, eliminate hatred, and teach us forgiveness. Queen of the Rosary, make us realise our need to pray and to love. Queen of Peace, obtain peace for our world from your Son, the Prince of Peace.

At this hour, we stand with you beneath the cross, entrusting to you the people of Ukraine and Russia. Mother of God and our mother, to your Immaculate Heart we solemnly entrust and consecrate ourselves, the church and all humanity, especially the people of Russia and Ukraine. Accept this act that we carry out with confidence and love. Grant that war may end and peace spread throughout the world. We trust that, through your Immaculate heart, peace will dawn once more. To you we consecrate the future of the whole human family, the needs and expectations of every people, the anxieties and hopes of the world. Through your intercession, may God's mercy be poured out on the earth and the gentle rhythm of peace return to mark our days.

Amen.

Franciscus

Pope Francis

(adapted from Prayer 25th March 2022)

A PRAYER FOR OUR BISHOP-ELECT

Dear Lord,

On January 22nd we will come together
in St Mary's Cathedral for the ordination
of Fr Niall Coll as Bishop of Ossory.

In these weeks of preparation pour
out your Spirit upon him so that in his
ministry you may guide him; in his care
of us you may support him; and that
together we will realise the great hope
our faith brings.

St Kieran, St Canice, St Fergal, and all
the saints of Ossory, protect him.

Amen

