




# Sunday Gospel Readings with *Lectio Divina*

Year A: Year of Matthew

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“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instructions for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.”

**2 Timothy 3:16-17**  
*Good News Bible*

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Our springboard into the year of Matthew, year A of the three-year lectionary cycle, has been two remarkable events which took place in 2010. The Edinburgh 2010 Conference in June, marking the centenary of the 1910 World Missionary Conference and the visit in September of Pope Benedict XVI.

Like Matthew's Gospel, the two events remind us that the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ is fundamentally incarnational – rooted in humanity and in the unfolding of human history.

Once again we commend to you this prayerful resource, which invites us, through the ancient Christian practice of *Lectio Divina*, to allow the Word of God to take root in our heart and give direction to our life, so that in all we are and do and say, we will bear witness that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God; that his word is ever ancient and ever new; and his command to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth is as urgent today as it has ever been.

*Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland*



These *Lectio Divina* outlines are also available in Albanian, Dutch, French, Greek, Maltese, Portuguese, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and other languages.

For full details visit [www.wordforliving.org](http://www.wordforliving.org)



## INTRODUCTION

These weekly outlines combine the Liturgy's Sunday Gospel readings with the *lectio divina* approach to Holy Scripture.

*Lectio divina* is a dynamic, life-oriented approach to reading Holy Scriptures encouraged by both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. It provides a framework for a faithful and respectful reading of the Bible that is sincere and authentic.

*Lectio divina* is a blessing for the entire Church as it opens up the rich truths of Scripture for every Christian. Through it believers are invited to read, understand and deepen their appreciation of the Scriptures and to seek guidance for their lives in the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

Our real goal is to meet our Lord as we read his Word and allow him to transform our lives to be more like him through the work of the Holy Spirit.

All the information necessary for you to have a meaningful encounter with God's Word is included in this booklet. These outlines can be used individually or in groups.

The following pages introduce the four steps of *lectio divina* with some extra tips for using these outlines in groups.

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## ABOUT LECTIO DIVINA

### History

*Lectio divina* dates back to the early Church Fathers around 300 AD. The four steps were first recorded by a monk, Guigo Cartujo, in 1173. These steps Lectio (Reading), Meditatio (Meditation), Oratio (Prayer) and Contemplatio (Contemplation) remain central today although methods differ.

### Overview

In essence *lectio divina* is a simple way to meet with the Lord through reflection and prayer based on Holy Scripture. It is not a study method. Background knowledge can be helpful but is not essential.

Used in groups a structure is necessary but for individuals the steps need not be followed rigidly. Our aim is meeting God, not just completing the steps themselves. So when the Lord impresses something on us we need to stop and wait. We can always come back to the steps another time. We don't want to lose what God is saying to us.

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Acknowledgement: Thanks to the American Bible Society [www.americanbible.org](http://www.americanbible.org) for granting permission to adapt material from *Encuentro Con La Biblia/Encounter With the Bible* for use in the introduction.

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*Sunday Gospel Readings with Lectio Divina Year A: Matthew*

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## LECTIO – READING

Reading the Scripture passage humbly and prayerfully is the foundation for everything else that follows and cannot be rushed. So begin with a prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to 'lead you into all the truth' (John 16:13).

Read the passage slowly and carefully. Avoid being tempted to look at the Lectio comments or any of the other steps at this stage.

Have a notebook and pencil ready. Underline, or make a note of, any words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down any questions that occur to you. Read the passage several times and read it aloud. Give yourself time to understand and appreciate what is being said.

Now read the Lectio comments and reflect on the ways they are similar or different to your first thoughts.

## MEDITATIO – MEDITATION

Meditation deepens our appreciation of the passage and helps us to explore its riches. We read in 2 Timothy 3:16 that 'All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instructions for right living...' So approach Scripture in faith expecting God to speak to you. He may reveal something of himself to you. He might highlight an attitude or behaviour of yours that needs to change. He might show you a promise to encourage and strengthen you.

*Here are some suggested approaches you may find helpful.*

Use your imagination. Picture the passage; put yourself into the scene and become part of the story. See things through the eyes of the other characters, listen to what they say, watch their reactions, imagine how they feel. Keep coming back to Jesus. Get to know him; delight yourself and become fascinated by him, his words, his actions, the way he responds – everything about him.

Ask questions. Use your own questions and the questions given to think more deeply about the passage and what God wants to say to you. Ask Jesus why he did and said what he did. Try to understand his reasons and intentions. Allow time to be quiet, to listen and hear his answer.

Let the Word be a mirror for you. As we read the Bible it shows us more of what the Christian life looks like and where ours needs to change. We see how God's Word applies to our daily life, as an individual, and as part of our community and society. We will find promises and encouragement, challenges and demands. If we are willing God will nurture and free us to be more fully human and fully alive.

## ORATIO – PRAYER

Prayer opens up a conversation between God and us. In the Psalms we see how the writers pour out their feelings to God, often mixing hopes and fears side by side. God values our honesty. We can't hide anything from him anyway. Using the words of the responsorial psalm can help us but we can also use our own words to have a heart-to-heart conversation with a very special friend.

Through prayer we make our response to the light God's Word has shed on how we are living our lives. Now we can bring what is happening in our own life and in our community before God. We speak and listen, listen and reflect – it is a conversation with God.

## CONTEMPLATIO – CONTEMPLATION

To help us interpret the Gospel reading the Liturgy provides two further Scripture readings. Reflecting on these can both enrich our understanding of the text and bring into focus a response we may need to make to the Lord.

Contemplation gives us the opportunity for an intimate time of communion with God. Be still before God and invite him in. Few words, if any, are necessary here. Enjoy time in his presence. Just be with him and let him love you. Let him refresh your soul.

### *Review*

After you have finished your time of reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation you may want to jot down in a notebook any experiences or thoughts that particularly impressed you. You may find it helpful to look back at these later.

## USING THESE OUTLINES IN GROUPS

When *lectio divina* is used in a group a little preparation is needed.

### **L**ECTIO:

Try one or more of the following ways of reading the passage. See what works best for your particular group.

Individual reading. To start with give everyone time to read through the passage silently.

Proclamation of the Word. One person reads (proclaims) the Word. This is the traditional manner of reading in the liturgical celebration.

Two readers. Two people read the text aloud alternately.

Each person reads a verse. This is a way of involving each participant, inviting each to read from his own Bible, so that the reading is attentive and dynamic.

Audio version. If you have access to a recorded version of the text you could also use that. You may notice different words are stressed.

With different characters. Approach the text somewhat like a drama, in which one person is the narrator/reader, another takes the part of Jesus, a third takes another character. This can be the most dynamic or engaging method and helps us to identify just what the different characters in the passage are saying.

### **M**EDITATIO:

- In the group setting, it is important that everyone is given time to participate, to share what the Lord has been saying to them. While the Lord speaks through his Word, he also speaks to us through our brothers and sisters. So as we listen to others we need to open our hearts to hear the Lord's voice speaking through them.
- It is important that everyone in the group understands that this sharing is to build one another up and enrich our experience. It is not necessary that everyone agrees about what is shared. You need to be careful to avoid this time turning into a debate or argument. The Lord knows us each as individuals so will have different things to say to us personally at this specific point in our lives.
- You can start with a simple question like "What catches your attention in this passage?" and use the printed questions. The aim is to help everyone feel comfortable to speak and share how the text has inspired them. Gently keep the group focused on the text and what God is saying.

### **O**RATIO:

We suggest you give people time for personal silent prayer before God. You can also give opportunity for people to pray out loud in their own words and use verses from the responsorial prayer. The aim should be to help each person make a personal response to the Lord during this time.

### **C**ONTEMPLATIO:

Contemplation by its very nature is an individual exercise and silence is necessary. If you have room it may be helpful to suggest people move so they have their own 'personal space'.



\*The Scripture references for the Psalms follow the Hebrew numbering used in many recent Bibles including the Jerusalem Bible but some Bibles use different numbering. If Psalm 23 The Good Shepherd is numbered as Psalm 22 in your Bible, please refer to your church lectionary for all the correct Psalm references for your Bible.

## BUILD WISELY

### Matthew 7:21-27

<sup>21</sup>“Not everyone who calls me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who do what my Father in heaven wants them to do. <sup>22</sup>When Judgement Day comes, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord! In your name we spoke God’s message, by your name we drove out many demons and performed many miracles!’ <sup>23</sup>Then I will say to them, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you wicked people!’

<sup>24</sup>“So then, anyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. <sup>25</sup>The rain poured down, the rivers overflowed, and the wind blew hard against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on rock.

<sup>26</sup>“But anyone who hears these words of mine and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup>The rain poured down, the rivers overflowed, the wind blew hard against that house, and it fell. And what a terrible fall that was!”

*Other Readings: Deuteronomy 11:18, 26-28, 32; Psalm 31:1-3, 16, 24;*

*Romans 3:21-25, 28*



## LECTIO:

Today’s reading marks the end of Jesus’ teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. It is also helpful to look at the preceding verses. In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus teaches that people have a choice of two gates: one is narrow and the way hard, the other wide and easy. The majority choose the easy way but it leads to hell. Only a few find the path that leads to heaven. This is followed in verses 15-20 with the image of two types of tree, explaining that genuine disciples produce good fruit.

Today’s text continues this theme. Jesus makes it clear that the Christian lifestyle boils down to a simple choice – obedience. It is not enough to merely read or listen to Jesus’ teaching. The mark of a true disciple is doing what God asks us to do (verses 21 and 24).

Jesus speaks about a Judgement Day at the end of time for everyone, including Christians. This was not a new idea in Jesus’ day, but here he wants everyone to understand the importance of discipleship to the final outcome. Jesus reveals that he himself is the judge and will make the final decision on who gets into heaven and who doesn’t.

The sobering thing is that outward appearances can be deceptive. People may appear to have done amazing things for God but Jesus sees into people’s hearts. He sees their true motives and whether they have put Jesus’ teaching into practice in their lives.

We are back to choices again. Who makes the wise choice? The person who builds wisely on a rock will not see the storms of life wash away what he builds. How does he learn where and what to build? Like Jesus – by listening to God and obediently following his directions.



## MEDITATIO:

- What makes someone wise according to Jesus? How wise do you consider yourself to be using this criterion?
- What do you consider are the foundations of the Christian faith? How important are they in your everyday life?
- Jesus makes it clear that we can expect ‘storms’ in our lives. Has your faith been tested by any ‘storms’ or upsets such as a sudden bereavement or the loss of a job or other event?
- What sustains your faith in times of testing?



## ORATIO:

Read Romans 3:21-25 and 28. These verses remind us that our salvation is a free gift from God based entirely on his grace and made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Living out our lives in obedience to God’s mercy is a true disciple’s response. Ask God to help you obey him and live a life that pleases him.



## CONTEMPLATIO:

Jesus says, ‘Whoever loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and my Father and I will come to him and live with him’ (John 14:23). Take some time to reflect on this verse.



## OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

### Matthew 4:1-11

<sup>1</sup> Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the Devil. <sup>2</sup> After spending 40 days and nights without food, Jesus was hungry. <sup>3</sup> Then the Devil came to him and said, "If you are God's Son, order these stones to turn into bread."

<sup>4</sup> But Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Human beings cannot live on bread alone, but need every word that God speaks.'"

<sup>5</sup> Then the Devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, the Holy City, set him on the highest point of the Temple, <sup>6</sup> and said to him, "If you are God's Son, throw yourself down, for the scripture says:

'God will give orders to his angels about you;  
they will hold you up with their hands,  
so that not even your feet will be hurt on the stones.'"

<sup>7</sup> Jesus answered, "But the scripture also says, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

<sup>8</sup> Then the Devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in all their greatness. <sup>9</sup> "All this I will give you," the Devil said, "if you kneel down and worship me."

<sup>10</sup> Then Jesus answered, "Go away, Satan! The scripture says, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!'"

<sup>11</sup> Then the Devil left Jesus; and angels came and helped him.

*Other Readings: Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Psalm 51:1-4, 10-12, 15; Romans 5:12-19*



### LECTIO:

The events we read about today happened early in Jesus' ministry and were under God's control, as verse 1 makes clear.

The Holy Spirit leads Jesus on his divine mission, into the desert. He stays there for forty days and fasts the whole time. Forty is significant as a time of preparation in the Old Testament. It recalls Moses fasting forty days on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28) and the Israelites spending forty years in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 29:5-6).

Matthew only tells us about three specific temptations. In the first, the Devil tempts Jesus to use his supernatural power to meet his own physical need. Jesus rejects him, identifying with us; we need more than just physical food. The implication is clear that we also need 'spiritual food' from God.

Next, the Devil tempts Jesus to prove his divine nature by throwing himself off the temple so God will send his angels to rescue him.

Lastly, he offers to give Jesus power over the nations if he will worship him. Jesus really had come to save people from the Devil's control, but not this way.

These three examples illustrate the core of every temptation: the desire to push God aside, to regard him as secondary and redundant, relying solely on one's own strength, and to put the world right without God.

The Devil's cunning deceptions don't deceive Jesus, even when he uses scripture itself (Psalm 91:11-12) to tempt him. Jesus in turn rejects every temptation with scripture, quoting successively from Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16 and 6:13. Authentic interpretation of a portion of scripture must be consistent with the whole of scripture.

The essence of all temptation is the offer of an appealing alternative to God's way of doing things. This is true for Jesus and for us.



### MEDITATIO:

- What helped Jesus overcome these temptations? What lessons can we learn to help us overcome the temptations we face?
- What do you think Jesus means when he quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3 in Matthew 4:4. Do you consider God's Word an essential part of your daily food? How do you let God's Word nourish you?
- What are the day-to-day temptations that you face?



### ORATIO:

'Create a pure heart in me, O God,  
and put a new and loyal spirit in me.  
Give me again the joy that comes from your salvation,  
and make me willing to obey you.' Psalm 51:10, 12

Psalm 51 offers us a way to come before God in repentance and ask for his forgiveness. Read the whole Psalm and allow your own prayer to flow to God.



### CONTEMPLATIO:

As we start this season of Lent we look forward to Jesus' victory on the cross over sin so we can enjoy salvation living. Meditate on these wonderful words from Romans 5:15, 17,

'...but God's grace is much greater,...  
All who receive God's abundant grace and are freely put right with him  
will rule in life through Christ.'

## GOD'S CHOSEN ONE

### Matthew 17:1-9

<sup>1</sup> Six days later Jesus took with him Peter and the brothers James and John and led them up a high mountain where they were alone. <sup>2</sup> As they looked on, a change came over Jesus: his face was shining like the sun, and his clothes were dazzling white. <sup>3</sup> Then the three disciples saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. <sup>4</sup> So Peter spoke up and said to Jesus, "Lord, how good it is that we are here! If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

<sup>5</sup> While he was talking, a shining cloud came over them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased – listen to him!"

<sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard the voice, they were so terrified that they threw themselves face downwards on the ground. <sup>7</sup> Jesus came to them and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid!" <sup>8</sup> So they looked up and saw no one there but Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> As they came down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Don't tell anyone about this vision you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from death."

*Other Readings: Genesis 12:1-4; Psalm 33:4-5, 18-20, 22; 2 Timothy 1:8-10*



### LECTIO:

Jesus chooses only his first three disciples – Peter, John and James – to climb a mountain with him for a prayer time. And the disciples witness something remarkable.

The first thing they notice is Jesus' face shining. Then they spot his clothes have turned dazzling white. Next, he is talking with Moses and Elijah.

The appearance of these two men, both major figures in Israel's history, is significant. Moses led the exodus of God's people out of slavery in Egypt. And many Jews expected the prophet Elijah to return before the coming of the Messiah.

In Luke's account (Luke 9:31) the prophets talk with Jesus about how he will soon fulfil God's purpose through his death (or 'exodus', the literal meaning of the word Luke uses) in Jerusalem. Jesus will fulfil God's salvation plan for humankind, bringing everlasting deliverance.

This breath-taking experience may have strengthened Jesus. He faced many testing days ahead, days that ended with his death on the cross. The shining cloud reveals God's presence and veils his glory. As at Jesus' baptism, God speaks. He affirms Jesus as his Son whom he has chosen. And this time God adds the instruction to the disciples to 'listen to him'.

This event, together with the other miracles and teaching that surround it, should have enlightened the disciples. But they needed to travel much further with Jesus. In fact, it wasn't until they met him after the resurrection that they really understood who he was and his God-given mission on earth.



### MEDITATIO:

- What range of feelings or emotions do you think the disciples experienced?
- God says of Jesus, "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased—listen to him!" What do you think the three disciples would have made of this?
- Why do you think Jesus told them not to discuss this vision with anyone until after they saw the Son of Man raised from the dead?
- Where has God appeared veiled by a cloud before?



### ORATIO:

'The words of the Lord are true,  
and all his works are dependable. ...  
May your constant love be with us, Lord,  
as we put our hope in you.' Psalm 33:4, 22

How easy do you find it to listen to God? Read through Psalm 33. You may simply want to focus on a few verses like the two above. Ask God to speak to you. Then make your response to him in prayer.



### CONTEMPLATIO:

'He saved us and called us to be his own people, not because of what we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace.' 2 Timothy 1:9

In the reading from 2 Timothy 1:8-10 the apostle Paul encourages us not to be ashamed of witnessing for our Lord or suffering for the Good News. Consider your response to this.

## LIFE-GIVING WATER

*John 4:5-15, 25-26, 39, 41-42\**

<sup>5</sup>In Samaria he came to a town named Sychar, which was not far from the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup>Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

<sup>7</sup>A Samaritan woman came to draw some water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink of water." <sup>8</sup>(His disciples had gone into town to buy food.)

<sup>9</sup>The woman answered, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan – so how can you ask me for a drink?" (Jews will not use the same cups and bowls that Samaritans use.)

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered, "If only you knew what God gives and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you life-giving water."

<sup>11</sup>"Sir," the woman said, "you haven't got a bucket, and the well is deep. Where would you get that life-giving water?" <sup>12</sup>It was our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well; he and his sons and his flocks all drank from it. You don't claim to be greater than Jacob, do you?"

<sup>13</sup>Jesus answered, "All those who drink this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>but whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring which will provide him with life-giving water and give him eternal life."

<sup>15</sup>"Sir," the woman said, "give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw water."

<sup>25</sup>The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah will come, and when he comes, he will tell us everything."

<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, "I am he, I who am talking with you."

<sup>39</sup>Many of the Samaritans in that town believed in Jesus because the woman had said..., "He told me everything I have ever done."... <sup>41</sup>Many more believed because of his message, <sup>42</sup>and they said to the woman, "We believe now, not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him, and we know that he really is the Saviour of the world."

*\*The full reading is John 4:5-42, this is a shortened version.*

*Other Readings: Exodus 17:3-7; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9; Romans 5:1-2, 5-8*

## LECTIO:

Today we stand by the well as Jesus talks to a Samaritan woman. John is the only Gospel writer to tell us about this dramatic encounter.

The Jews took a very dim view of the Samaritans. At the time it wouldn't have been culturally acceptable for a man to be alone with a woman unless they were married or related. So it was doubly unusual for Jesus to speak to this Samaritan woman alone.

Life for this woman has been tough and she is living with a man who is not her husband. Her previous husbands may have divorced her; it was easy, they just had to write a letter of divorce and the marriage was history.

But Jesus' words touched her and his knowledge of her life struck home. She took up the offer of everlasting water instantly. And, unable to keep this amazing encounter to herself, she ran to tell others in the town to come and meet Jesus.

## MEDITATIO:

- This woman had experienced a lot of rejection and judgement in her life. Jesus chooses to speak to her on her own. What does this reveal about his respect for her as an individual? What can we learn from this?
- This woman would have been looked down upon in her community. Why do you think Jesus chose to reveal himself as the Messiah to her?
- Make your own response to Jesus' offer of life-giving water.
- In what ways can you invite others to meet Jesus?

## ORATIO:

Every time we pray we can have a personal conversation with Jesus just like this Samaritan woman. God loves you and cares for you, whatever your situation. Open your heart up to God in prayer now. The living water – the life that Jesus offers – is for you too.

## CONTEMPLATIO:

Jesus met this woman at the well. Sit with a glass of water and as you sip it allow God to speak to you. Spend some time reflecting on the true worship that Jesus is looking for (verse 23).



## ONE THING I DO KNOW

**John 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-36\***

<sup>1</sup> As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been born blind.

<sup>6</sup> After he said this, Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud with the spittle; he rubbed the mud on the man's eyes <sup>7</sup> and said, "Go and wash your face in the Pool of Siloam." (This name means "Sent".) So the man went, washed his face, and came back seeing.

<sup>8</sup> His neighbours, then, and the people who had seen him begging before this, asked, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?"

<sup>9</sup> Some said, "He is the one," but others said, "No he isn't; he just looks like him."

So the man himself said, "I am the man."

<sup>13</sup> Then they took to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. <sup>14</sup> The day that Jesus made the mud and cured him of his blindness was a Sabbath. <sup>15</sup> The Pharisees, then, asked the man again how he had received his sight. He told them, "He put some mud on my eyes; I washed my face, and now I can see."

<sup>16</sup> Some of the Pharisees said, "The man who did this cannot be from God, for he does not obey the Sabbath law."

Others, however, said, "How could a man who is a sinner perform such miracles as these?" And there was a division among them.

<sup>17</sup> So the Pharisees asked the man once more, "You say he cured you of your blindness – well, what do you say about him?"

"He is a prophet," the man answered.

<sup>34</sup> They answered, "You were born and brought up in sin – and you are trying to teach us?" And they expelled him from the synagogue.

<sup>35</sup> When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

<sup>36</sup> The man answered, "Tell me who he is, sir, so that I can believe in him!"

*\*This is a shortened form of today's reading. The full reading is John 9:1-41.*

*Other Readings: 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14*



### LECTIO:

We know from the earlier chapters in John's Gospel that Jesus was not popular with the Pharisees. They were watching him closely, looking for any opportunity to accuse him.

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Such an opportunity presents itself when a man is brought before them who Jesus has healed on the Sabbath. This is not the first time Jesus has crossed the Jewish authorities by healing on the Sabbath (see John 5:1-18).

The Pharisees strictly observed the law which didn't permit any work on the Sabbath (Exodus 23:12, 31:12-17). Jesus observed the Sabbath too but disagreed with the Pharisees on what constituted 'work'. Healing, in Jesus' opinion, was doing good and bringing praise to God – truly honouring the Sabbath.

This blind man has a rollercoaster of a time. Imagine his joy at being able to see for the very first time in his life! But instead of being able to celebrate, things get complicated. Some people doubt him (verse 9). The Pharisees finally believe him after his parents confirm he was born blind but end up expelling him from the synagogue (verse 34).

Physical healing is wonderful but an even greater healing is still to come. Jesus searches for the man, revealing himself as the Son of Man and inviting him to believe. The man confesses his faith in Jesus and his spiritual blindness is cured too.



### MEDITATIO:

- Consider how Jesus treated this man. Compare this with the Pharisees' response. What can we learn from this?
- In 1 Samuel 16:7 we are told that God looks at the heart and not outward appearances. How does this relate to our Gospel reading? Do we make judgements about people based on their appearance or social status?
- The Pharisees thought they were doing what God wanted but ended up working against God. How can we avoid doing this ourselves?
- Have you met God in such a way that you feel confident enough in your own spiritual experience to be able to stand your ground when others question you?



### ORATIO:

Psalm 23 can resonate on many levels. Focus on a couple of verses each day this week and make them your personal prayer.

Pray for those you know who need physical and spiritual healing.



### CONTEMPLATIO:

Do you remember when God first invited you to believe in him? Consider the ways God's grace has worked in your life right up to today.

## RESURRECTION LIFE

*John 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33-45\**

<sup>3</sup>The sisters sent Jesus a message: "Lord, your dear friend is ill."

<sup>4</sup>When Jesus heard it, he said, "The final result of this illness will not be the death of Lazarus; this has happened in order to bring glory to God, and it will be the means by which the Son of God will receive glory."

<sup>5</sup>Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup>Yet when he received the news that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was for two more days. <sup>7</sup>Then he said to the disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

<sup>17</sup>When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had been buried four days before.

<sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died!" <sup>22</sup>But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask him for."

<sup>23</sup>"Your brother will rise to life," Jesus told her.

<sup>24</sup>"I know," she replied, "that he will rise to life on the last day."

<sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup>and all those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

<sup>27</sup>"Yes, Lord!" she answered. "I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

<sup>33</sup>Jesus saw her weeping, and he saw how the people who were with her were weeping also; his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved. <sup>34</sup>"Where have you buried him?" he asked them.

"Come and see, Lord," they answered.

<sup>35</sup>Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup>"See how much he loved him!" the people said.

<sup>37</sup>But some of them said, "He gave sight to the blind man, didn't he? Could he not have kept Lazarus from dying?"

<sup>38</sup>Deeply moved once more, Jesus went to the tomb, which was a cave with a stone placed at the entrance. <sup>39</sup>"Take the stone away!" Jesus ordered.

Martha, the dead man's sister, answered, "There will be a bad smell, Lord. He has been buried four days!"

<sup>40</sup>Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believed?" <sup>41</sup>They took the stone away. Jesus looked up and said, "I thank you, Father, that you listen to me. <sup>42</sup>I know that you always listen to me, but I say this for the sake of the people here, so that they will believe that you sent me." <sup>43</sup>After he had said this, he called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup>He came

out, his hands and feet wrapped in grave clothes, and with a cloth round his face. "Untie him," Jesus told them, "and let him go."

<sup>45</sup>Many of the people who had come to visit Mary saw what Jesus did, and they believed in him.

*\*This is a shortened form of today's reading. The full reading is John 11:1-45.*

*Other Readings: Ezekiel 37:12-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:8-11*

### LECTIO:

Mary and Martha are very close friends of Jesus so they are dismayed when he appears to arrive too late – after their brother has died.

From the outset Jesus is aware that his Father has a glorious plan (verse 4) but that still doesn't prevent him from sharing their grief (verses 33-35).

Jesus declares 'I am the resurrection and the life' and promises that those who believe in him will never die (verses 25-26). Martha expresses her faith that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead so that people will believe he is the Son of God. Many people do believe but for the religious leaders Jesus now poses so great a threat that they plot to kill him (verse 53).

### MEDITATIO:

- What things strike you most from this story?
- What does this miracle demonstrate about Jesus' authority?
- 'I am the resurrection and the life.' What does this statement mean for you? What do you think about eternal life?

### ORATIO:

Respond to God in prayer. Bring your hopes and fears to him and thank him for his loving care.

### CONTEMPLATIO:

Read Romans 8:8-11 and let these verses strengthen your faith and confidence in God's promises.

## WHO IS HE?

### Matthew 21:1-11

<sup>1</sup> As Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to Bethphage at the Mount of Olives. There Jesus sent two of the disciples on ahead <sup>2</sup> with these instructions: “Go to the village there ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied up with her colt beside her. Untie them and bring them to me.” <sup>3</sup> And if anyone says anything, tell him, “The Master needs them; and then he will let them go at once.”

<sup>4</sup> This happened in order to make what the prophet had said come true:

<sup>5</sup> “Tell the city of Zion,

Look, your king is coming to you!

He is humble and rides on a donkey  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

<sup>6</sup> So the disciples went and did what Jesus had told them to do: <sup>7</sup> they brought the donkey and the colt, threw their cloaks over them, and Jesus got on. <sup>8</sup> A large crowd of people spread their cloaks on the road while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> The crowds walking in front of Jesus and those walking behind began to shout, “Praise to David’s Son! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise God!”

<sup>10</sup> When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was thrown into an uproar. “Who is he?” the people asked.

<sup>11</sup> “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee,” the crowds answered.

*Other Readings: Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22:7-8, 16-19, 22-23; Philippians 2:6-11*



## LECTIO:

We begin Holy Week with Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. What an occasion it must have been, loaded with symbolic images and meaning.

Jesus’ starting point, the Mount of Olives, is significant as it is associated in scripture with the coming of the Lord (Zechariah 14:4).

Matthew begins by describing the remarkable provision of a donkey and colt for Jesus to ride on. The disciples follow Jesus’ instructions and return with the animals that he had told them they would find. Matthew (verse 4) interprets this as the fulfilment of Zechariah’s prophecy (Zechariah 9:9-10) proclaiming a King who comes as Saviour on a lowly colt, not with powerful horses and chariots. Jesus is fully in control and aware of what his last few days on earth will bring.

People spread their cloaks on the road before Jesus, a customary greeting for a victorious king or important person (2 Kings 9:13). They shout, ‘God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord’ (verse 9), echoing the words of Psalm 118:25-26.

Jesus’ dramatic entrance couldn’t have come at a worse time for the Pharisees. Jerusalem was packed with pilgrims who had come to celebrate the Passover (Luke 22:7). Matthew tells us, ‘When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was thrown into uproar. “Who is he?” the people asked.’ (verse 10).

The Pharisees didn’t accept Jesus or his teaching and wanted to prevent others from following him. Nothing could be worse than this noisy, public, hero’s welcome. They may have feared, with good reason, the brutal intervention of the Roman soldiers to restore public order.

His followers believed Jesus to be the Messiah; the religious leaders didn’t believe him and many were undecided. And people’s responses to Jesus still vary today. Who is Jesus – a prophet, a healer, a good teacher or is he the Messiah, the Son of God?



## MEDITATIO:

- ‘Who is he?’ This was the crucial question when Jesus entered Jerusalem and it continues to be the crucial question for every single person ever since. What do you believe and why?
- What can we learn from the actions of the disciples in this passage?
- What does the way Jesus entered Jerusalem reveal to us about him and his mission?



## ORATIO:

Use Philippians 2:6-11 to give thanks to God for his willingness to send his Son to leave heaven, become a man and die on the cross for our sins. Bow before him in worship and extol the ‘name that is greater than any other name’.



## CONTEMPLATIO:

Jesus died to save you so that you can spend all eternity rejoicing in his presence. Have you invited him to be Lord of your life? Are there elements of Jesus’ teaching you still resist and are unwilling to accept? Is there more you need to surrender to God today?

## A SERVANT HEART

### John 13:1-15

<sup>1</sup>It was now the day before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. He had always loved those in the world who were his own, and he loved them to the very end.

<sup>2</sup>Jesus and his disciples were at supper. The Devil had already put into the heart of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, the thought of betraying Jesus. <sup>3</sup>Jesus knew that the Father had given him complete power; he knew that he had come from God and was going to God. <sup>4</sup>So he rose from the table, took off his outer garment, and tied a towel round his waist. <sup>5</sup>Then he poured some water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel round his waist. <sup>6</sup>He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Are you going to wash my feet, Lord?"

<sup>7</sup>Jesus answered him, "You do not understand now what I am doing, but you will understand later."

<sup>8</sup>Peter declared, "Never at any time will you wash my feet!"

"If I do not wash your feet," Jesus answered, "you will no longer be my disciple."

<sup>9</sup>Simon Peter answered, "Lord, do not wash only my feet, then! Wash my hands and head, too!"

<sup>10</sup>Jesus said, "Those who have had a bath are completely clean and do not have to wash themselves, except for their feet. All of you are clean – all except one."

<sup>11</sup>(Jesus already knew who was going to betray him; that is why he said, "All of you, except one, are clean.")

<sup>12</sup>After Jesus had washed their feet, he put his outer garment back on and returned to his place at the table. "Do you understand what I have just done to you?" he asked. <sup>13</sup>"You call me Teacher and Lord, and it is right that you do so, because that is what I am. <sup>14</sup>I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you.

*Other Readings: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116:12-13, 15-18;  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26*



## LECTIO:

These events are set within the context of the Passover meal. Our Old Testament reading (Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14) reminds us of the huge significance this feast had for Jews. It was a feast remembering God's miraculous deliverance of his people.

John is the only gospel writer to give us this precious example of Jesus washing the disciples' feet.

Jesus' actions must have stunned the disciples. Normally the host provided water for guests entering the house to wash their own feet (Luke 7:44). Sometimes a servant or slave might attend to the task. Very occasionally, disciples might wash their teacher's feet. But never the other way round. This is unprecedented.

Peter protests strongly but then submits even though he still misunderstands Jesus' purpose and wants complete purification. In this practical action, Jesus demonstrates a very important lesson to the disciples and to us – we must serve one another just as he serves us. Humility and servanthood are marks of true discipleship.

What Jesus is really looking for is humility – the only doorway to the gift of salvation. We cannot gain salvation by our own actions; only accepting the humble sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross can redeem us.



## MEDITATIO:

- Imagine Jesus washing your feet. How would you feel? What would you say to him?
- How willing are you to follow Jesus' example and serve others? In what practical ways can you do this?
- Judas sat at the table and no doubt allowed Jesus to wash his feet. So Jesus humbled himself before his betrayer (verse 11). What does this tell us about Jesus, and indeed about Judas too?



## ORATIO:

Make Psalm 116 your prayer for the next day or two. Consider Jesus' feelings and actions as you read these words. Listen to what the Holy Spirit might say to you and consider the words of the Psalmist in verse 12,

'What can I offer the Lord for all his goodness to me?'



## CONTEMPLATIO:

Reflect on Christ's love, humility and painful death for us. Consider too his never ending desire to draw us into fellowship with the Trinity.



## GREATER LOVE HAS NO MAN

**John 18:1 – 19:42**

John 18

<sup>1</sup> After Jesus had said this prayer, he left with his disciples and went across the brook called Kidron. There was a garden in that place, and Jesus and his disciples went in. <sup>2</sup> Judas, the traitor, knew where it was, because many times Jesus had met there with his disciples. <sup>3</sup> So Judas went to the garden, taking with him a group of Roman soldiers, and some temple guards sent by the chief priests and the Pharisees; they were armed and carried lanterns and torches. <sup>4</sup> Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward and asked them, “Who is it you are looking for?”

<sup>5</sup> “Jesus of Nazareth,” they answered.

“I am he,” he said.

Judas, the traitor, was standing there with them. <sup>6</sup> When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they moved back and fell to the ground. <sup>7</sup> Again Jesus asked them, “Who is it you are looking for?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” they said.

<sup>8</sup> “I have already told you that I am he,” Jesus said. “If, then, you are looking for me, let these others go.” <sup>9</sup> (He said this so that what he had said might come true: “Father, I have not lost even one of those you gave me.”)

<sup>10</sup> Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the High Priest’s slave, cutting off his right ear. The name of the slave was Malchus. <sup>11</sup> Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back in its place! Do you think that I will not drink the cup of suffering which my Father has given me?”

<sup>12</sup> Then the Roman soldiers with their commanding officer and the Jewish guards arrested Jesus, bound him, <sup>13</sup> and took him first to Annas. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year. <sup>14</sup> It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jewish authorities that it was better that one man should die for all the people.

<sup>15</sup> Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. That other disciple was well known to the High Priest, so he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the High Priest’s house, <sup>16</sup> while Peter stayed outside by the gate. Then the other disciple went back out, spoke to the girl at the gate, and brought Peter inside. <sup>17</sup> The girl at the gate said to Peter, “Aren’t you also one of the disciples of that man?”

“No, I am not,” answered Peter.

<sup>18</sup> It was cold, so the servants and guards had built a charcoal fire and were standing round it, warming themselves. So Peter went over and stood with them, warming himself.

<sup>19</sup> The High Priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching.

<sup>20</sup> Jesus answered, “I have always spoken publicly to everyone; all my teaching was done in the synagogues and in the Temple, where all the people come together.

I have never said anything in secret. <sup>21</sup> Why, then, do you question me? Question the people who heard me. Ask them what I told them – they know what I said.”

<sup>22</sup> When Jesus said this, one of the guards there slapped him and said, “How dare you talk like that to the High Priest!”

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered him, “If I have said anything wrong, tell everyone here what it was. But if I am right in what I have said, why do you hit me?”

<sup>24</sup> Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the High Priest.

<sup>25</sup> Peter was still standing there keeping himself warm. So the others said to him, “Aren’t you also one of the disciples of that man?”

But Peter denied it. “No, I am not,” he said.

<sup>26</sup> One of the High Priest’s slaves, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, spoke up. “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?” he asked.

<sup>27</sup> Again Peter said “No” – and at once a cock crowed.

<sup>28</sup> Early in the morning Jesus was taken from Caiaphas’ house to the governor’s palace. The Jewish authorities did not go inside the palace, for they wanted to keep themselves ritually clean, in order to be able to eat the Passover meal. <sup>29</sup> So Pilate went outside to them and asked, “What do you accuse this man of?”

<sup>30</sup> Their answer was, “We would not have brought him to you if he had not committed a crime.”

<sup>31</sup> Pilate said to them, “Then you yourselves take him and try him according to your own law.”

They replied, “We are not allowed to put anyone to death.” <sup>32</sup> (This happened in order to make the words of Jesus come true, the words he used when he indicated the kind of death he would die.)

<sup>33</sup> Pilate went back into the palace and called Jesus. “Are you the King of the Jews?” he asked him.

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, “Does this question come from you or have others told you about me?”

<sup>35</sup> Pilate replied, “Do you think I am a Jew? It was your own people and the chief priests who handed you over to me. What have you done?”

<sup>36</sup> Jesus said, “My kingdom does not belong to this world; if my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. No, my kingdom does not belong here!”

<sup>37</sup> So Pilate asked him, “Are you a king, then?”

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this one purpose, to speak about the truth. Whoever belongs to the truth listens to me.”

<sup>38</sup> “And what is truth?” Pilate asked.

Then Pilate went back outside to the people and said to them, “I cannot find any reason to condemn him. <sup>39</sup> But according to the custom you have, I always set free a prisoner for you during the Passover. Do you want me to set free for you the King of the Jews?”



<sup>40</sup> They answered him with a shout, “No, not him! We want Barabbas!” (Barabbas was a bandit.)

John 19

<sup>1</sup> Then Pilate took Jesus and had him whipped. <sup>2</sup> The soldiers made a crown out of thorny branches and put it on his head; then they put a purple robe on him <sup>3</sup> and came to him and said, “Long live the King of the Jews!” And they went up and slapped him.

<sup>4</sup> Pilate went out once more and said to the crowd, “Look, I will bring him out here to you to let you see that I cannot find any reason to condemn him.” <sup>5</sup> So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Look! Here is the man!”

<sup>6</sup> When the chief priests and the temple guards saw him, they shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Pilate said to them, “You take him, then, and crucify him. I find no reason to condemn him.”

<sup>7</sup> The crowd answered back, “We have a law that says he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.”

<sup>8</sup> When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid. <sup>9</sup> He went back into the palace and asked Jesus, “Where do you come from?”

But Jesus did not answer. <sup>10</sup> Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Remember, I have the authority to set you free and also to have you crucified.”

<sup>11</sup> Jesus answered, “You have authority over me only because it was given to you by God. So the man who handed me over to you is guilty of a worse sin.”

<sup>12</sup> When Pilate heard this, he tried to find a way to set Jesus free. But the crowd shouted back, “If you set him free, that means that you are not the Emperor’s friend! Anyone who claims to be a king is a rebel against the Emperor!”

<sup>13</sup> When Pilate heard these words, he took Jesus outside and sat down on the judge’s seat in the place called “The Stone Pavement”. (In Hebrew the name is “Gabbatha”.) <sup>14</sup> It was then almost noon of the day before the Passover. Pilate said to the people, “Here is your king!”

<sup>15</sup> They shouted back, “Kill him! Kill him! Crucify him!”

Pilate asked them, “Do you want me to crucify your king?”

The chief priests answered, “The only king we have is the Emperor!”

<sup>16</sup> Then Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

So they took charge of Jesus. <sup>17</sup> He went out, carrying his cross, and came to “The Place of the Skull”, as it is called. (In Hebrew it is called “Golgotha”.) <sup>18</sup> There they crucified him; and they also crucified two other men, one on each side, with Jesus between them. <sup>19</sup> Pilate wrote a notice and had it put on the cross. “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”, is what he wrote. <sup>20</sup> Many people read it, because the place where Jesus was crucified was not far from the city. The notice was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. <sup>21</sup> The chief priests said to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The

King of the Jews’, but rather, ‘This man said, I am the King of the Jews.’”

<sup>22</sup> Pilate answered, “What I have written stays written.”

<sup>23</sup> After the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier. They also took the robe, which was made of one piece of woven cloth without any seams in it. <sup>24</sup> The soldiers said to one another, “Let’s not tear it; let’s throw dice to see who will get it.” This happened in order to make the scripture come true:

“They divided my clothes among themselves and gambled for my robe.”

And this is what the soldiers did.

<sup>25</sup> Standing close to Jesus’ cross were his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing there; so he said to his mother, “He is your son.”

<sup>27</sup> Then he said to the disciple, “She is your mother.” From that time the disciple took her to live in his home.

<sup>28</sup> Jesus knew that by now everything had been completed; and in order to make the scripture come true, he said, “I am thirsty.”

<sup>29</sup> A bowl was there, full of cheap wine; so a sponge was soaked in the wine, put on a stalk of hyssop, and lifted up to his lips. <sup>30</sup> Jesus drank the wine and said, “It is finished!”

Then he bowed his head and died.

<sup>31</sup> Then the Jewish authorities asked Pilate to allow them to break the legs of the men who had been crucified, and to take the bodies down from the crosses. They requested this because it was Friday, and they did not want the bodies to stay on the crosses on the Sabbath, since the coming Sabbath was especially holy. <sup>32</sup> So the soldiers went and broke the legs of the first man and then of the other man who had been crucified with Jesus. <sup>33</sup> But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they did not break his legs. <sup>34</sup> One of the soldiers, however, plunged his spear into Jesus’ side, and at once blood and water poured out. <sup>35</sup> (The one who saw this happen has spoken of it, so that you also may believe. What he said is true, and he knows that he speaks the truth.) <sup>36</sup> This was done to make the scripture come true: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” <sup>37</sup> And there is another scripture that says, “People will look at him whom they pierced.”

<sup>38</sup> After this, Joseph, who was from the town of Arimathea, asked Pilate if he could take Jesus’ body. (Joseph was a follower of Jesus, but in secret, because he was afraid of the Jewish authorities.) Pilate told him he could have the body, so Joseph went and took it away. <sup>39</sup> Nicodemus, who at first had gone to see Jesus at night, went with Joseph, taking with him about 30 kilogrammes of spices, a mixture of myrrh and aloes. <sup>40</sup> The two men took Jesus’ body and wrapped it in linen with the spices according to the Jewish custom of preparing a body for burial.

<sup>41</sup> There was a garden in the place where Jesus had been put to death, and in it there was a new tomb where no one had ever been buried. <sup>42</sup> Since it was the day before the Sabbath and because the tomb was close by, they placed Jesus’ body there.

# GREATER LOVE HAS NO MAN

*John 18:1 – 19:42*

*Other Readings: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 31:1, 5, 11-12, 14-16, 24; Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9*



## **L**ECTIO:

John's account of Jesus' passion begins with his betrayal and arrest at night. Judas leads the Roman soldiers and temple guards to a garden where Jesus often met with his disciples. However John makes it clear that Jesus is not taken by surprise and does not seek to evade his arrest, 'Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward...' (18:4).

Jesus is taken before Annas and Caiaphas the High Priest. John doesn't give as much detail as the other gospel writers about Jesus' trial before the Jewish authorities (see Matthew 26:57-67, Mark 14:53-65, Luke 22:54-55, 63-71) but notes it was Caiaphas who advised the Jewish authorities that 'it was better that one man should die for all the people' (18:14).

The Jewish authorities have passed their sentence but require Roman permission to implement it. So they take Jesus to Pilate, who finds no reason to sentence Jesus to death. In fact he says this to the people no fewer than three times (18:38, 19:4, 6) and tries to release Jesus. But when the crowd openly call into question Pilate's allegiance to the Emperor he gives in and hands Jesus over to be crucified.

John also includes some details not found in the other three Gospels. One of these is an instruction from Jesus on the cross to 'the disciple he loved' – this is traditionally regarded as a reference to John himself – to look after his mother (John 19:26-27). He alone records Jesus' tender words and care for his mother.

Another such detail is the description of the soldier piercing Jesus' side with a spear instead of breaking his legs as in the case of the other two men crucified with him (19:32-34). John explains, 'this was done to make the scripture come true', referring to Zechariah 12:10.

We learn also that when Jesus' side was pierced 'blood and water poured out'. On a literal level this is conclusive proof that Jesus was dead, answering sceptics who later tried to deny the resurrection on the basis that Jesus was not actually dead. Some also suggest that on a symbolic level the blood and water represent Holy Eucharist or Holy Communion and baptism.

After Jesus is crucified Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate if he can bury Jesus. Pilate gives his permission and Joseph, along with Nicodemus, prepares Jesus' body for burial and then buries him in a new tomb (19:38-40). They were both important Jewish council members and secret disciples of Jesus. John is the only gospel writer to mention Nicodemus' involvement here. He also records the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3 which includes one of the Bible's most famous verses, John 3:16,

'For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.'

## **M**EDITATIO:

- What do we learn about Jesus from this Passion narrative? What touches you most and why?
- In answering Pilate Jesus says, 'I was born and came into the world for this one purpose, to speak about the truth. Whoever belongs to the truth listens to me.' (18:37). What is the 'truth' Jesus is speaking about? Are you continuing to listen to Jesus?
- Jesus endured the pain and humiliation of death on the cross. What difference does this make to the way you live your life?
- What did Jesus mean when he said, 'it is finished'? What is the significance of this for you today?

## **O**RATIO:

Prayerfully read Isaiah 52:13–53:12. Worship the suffering servant who was pierced for our faults and crushed for our sins. Give thanks for all Jesus accomplished on the cross for you. Surrender your burdens and sins to the loving Lord who paid the price so you can be free.

## **C**ONTEMPLATIO:

'Let us have confidence, then, and approach God's throne, where there is grace. There we will receive mercy and find grace to help us just when we need it.' Hebrews 4:16

Read Hebrews 4:14-16 and 5:7-9. These verses encourage and strengthen us to 'hold firmly to the faith' (verse 14).

Meditate on Jesus our high priest who understands our human weaknesses but lived on earth without sin and is 'the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him' (verse 9).

## FILLED WITH JOY

### Matthew 28:1-10

<sup>1</sup> After the Sabbath, as Sunday morning was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly there was a violent earthquake; an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone away, and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards were so afraid that they trembled and became like dead men.

<sup>5</sup> The angel spoke to the women. "You must not be afraid," he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has been raised, just as he said. Come here and see the place where he was lying. <sup>7</sup> Go quickly now, and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from death, and now he is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him!' Remember what I have told you."

<sup>8</sup> So they left the tomb in a hurry, afraid and yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

<sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Peace be with you." They came up to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. <sup>10</sup> "Do not be afraid," Jesus said to them. "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

*Other Readings: Romans 6:3-11; Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23*



## LECTIO:

This is Matthew's resurrection narrative, where we learn of Jesus' victory, how he overcame death and sin forever when he died on the cross for us. We have the victory now, though our bodily resurrection won't happen until the end of time.

In a few simple words, Matthew describes the moment when the women discover Jesus is alive. These words speak volumes. Threaded through every simple word is the wonder the women must have experienced at discovering Jesus alive.

Matthew sets the scene – there was an earthquake and then an angel descended from heaven and rolled the massive stone away. The guards look on trembling with fear and become like 'dead men'. They were probably frozen with fear, unable to speak or move.

The two women go to the tomb perhaps as a focus for their grief and to mourn. They are not expecting to meet a living Jesus at all – far from it.

Knowing how frightened the two women must be the angel tells them not to be afraid and explains that Jesus is no longer dead but has been raised back to life, just as he said he would be.

The angel shows them the empty tomb and sends them on their way back to the disciples to give them the dramatic news – Jesus has risen from the dead!

On the way to tell the disciples they meet Jesus face to face. They are the first witnesses of the empty tomb and its real meaning. The tomb was not empty because someone had desecrated it and stolen Jesus' body. It was empty because Jesus had risen from the dead.

In the verses after our reading (verses 11-15) we learn that the guards report what they had seen to the chief priests who assemble an emergency meeting. They offer the soldiers a large sum of money as a bribe to keep quiet about what they really saw. Instead they lie and say that the disciples stole Jesus' body during the night while they were asleep.



## MEDITATIO:

- As you celebrate this wonderful day in the life of the church try to imagine just how amazed and excited the two women must have been when Jesus met them.
- Think about the first time Jesus came 'alive' for you. Has your faith and wonder in Jesus' resurrection grown or diminished over the years?
- Consider the contrast between the two women and the guards. Both witnessed the most significant event in human history. The women proclaim the good news. The guards lie to conceal it. What can we learn from this?



## ORATIO:

Faith in the resurrection of Jesus is a fundamental part of our Christian faith. Pray through Romans 6:3-11 asking God to bring these promises to life in your heart and experience.



## CONTEMPLATIO:

How would you summarise the Easter events for a friend who wants to know the real significance of Easter? Try jotting down the details to help sort out the important facts and remember them.

## MEETING THE RISEN CHRIST

### *John 20:19-31*

<sup>19</sup> It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. <sup>20</sup> After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup> Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

<sup>24</sup> One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

Thomas said to them, “Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup> A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then stretch out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!”

<sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, “Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!”

<sup>30</sup> In his disciples’ presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.

*Other Readings: Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24; 1 Peter 1:3-9*



### LECTIO:

In the Synoptic Gospels and in John’s Gospel, we find descriptions of a number of meetings between the disciples and the risen Christ. The entire faith of the Church is based upon the testimony of those who met Jesus alive after having seen him die on the cross. The apostle Paul strongly defends Jesus’ physical resurrection in response to doubts among the Christians in Corinth (1 Corinthians 15).

Jesus’ resurrection confirmed all he had said and done. It also assured the disciples’ faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

Thomas is not present when Jesus appears to the other disciples and he is not willing to accept their testimony. He wants to see Jesus for himself and touch his wounds. Jesus graciously allows Thomas to come to faith in his resurrection on his own terms. But Jesus is mindful of the majority of Christians who believe in his resurrection through the gift of faith, the testimony of God’s word and the simple witness of other Christians who daily say, ‘we believe that Jesus died and rose again’.

In this passage Jesus also commissions the disciples to continue his mission of restoring people into right relationship with God and extending God’s kingdom rule on earth, saying, ‘As the Father sent me, so I send you.’ This is followed immediately with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The passage ends with a clear declaration of faith. Real life is only possible lived out through faith in Jesus.



### MEDITATIO:

- Have you encountered the risen Christ and accepted his lordship and divinity? How did you come to accept Jesus as your Lord and God?
- Is your faith in Jesus something that is only formal or intellectual? How does it affect your daily life?
- What do you feel Jesus has sent you to do? What part can the Holy Spirit play in this?



### ORATIO:

Prayerfully offer your life to God, especially the areas that you find difficult to surrender to his Lordship. Pray the words ‘Jesus, My Lord and God’ as you submit each area to him.



### CONTEMPLATIO:

Three times in this passage Jesus says to his disciples ‘Peace be with you’. We all need to hear these words. God’s peace keeps our hearts and minds safe (Philippians 4:7). Take some time to be renewed by God’s peace.



## OPENED EYES

### *Luke 24:13-35*

<sup>13</sup> On that same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a village named Emmaus, about 11 kilometres from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup> and they were talking to each other about all the things that had happened. <sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed, Jesus himself drew near and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> they saw him, but somehow did not recognize him. <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to them, "What are you talking about to each other, as you walk along?"

They stood still, with sad faces. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been happening there these last few days?"

<sup>19</sup> "What things?" he asked.

"The things that happened to Jesus of Nazareth," they answered. "This man was a prophet and was considered by God and by all the people to be powerful in everything he said and did. <sup>20</sup> Our chief priests and rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and he was crucified. <sup>21</sup> And we had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free! Besides all that, this is now the third day since it happened. <sup>22</sup> Some of the women of our group surprised us; they went at dawn to the tomb, <sup>23</sup> but could not find his body. They came back saying they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he is alive. <sup>24</sup> Some of our group went to the tomb and found it exactly as the women had said, but they did not see him."

<sup>25</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said! <sup>26</sup> Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then to enter his glory?" <sup>27</sup> And Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets.

<sup>28</sup> As they came near the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther; <sup>29</sup> but they held him back, saying, "Stay with us; the day is almost over and it is getting dark." So he went in to stay with them. <sup>30</sup> He sat down to eat with them, took the bread, and said the blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They said to each other, "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"

<sup>33</sup> They got up at once and went back to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven disciples gathered together with the others <sup>34</sup> and saying, "The Lord is risen indeed! He has appeared to Simon!"

<sup>35</sup> The two then explained to them what had happened on the road, and how they had recognized the Lord when he broke the bread.

*Other Readings: Acts 2:14, 22-23; Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-11; 1 Peter 1:17-21*

*Sunday Gospel Readings with Lectio Divina Year A: Matthew*

## LECTIO:

It is the third day after Jesus' death. The tomb is open and Jesus' body is missing. Despite Jesus' promise that he would rise on the third day these two disciples seem to have given up hope and leave for Emmaus.

Jesus joins them but they do not recognise him. He explains how the Messiah's death and resurrection are essential to God's purposes and have been revealed in the scriptures. It is only when he breaks bread with them that their eyes are opened.

They rush back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples. They arrive to find that Jesus has also appeared to Simon. So at this point in Luke's account there are three eyewitnesses to the risen Christ. Many more will join them before Jesus ascends to heaven.

## MEDITATIO:

- Jesus revealed himself to these two disciples when they were discouraged. What can we learn from this?
- What other lessons can you learn from this passage?

## ORATIO:

Thank Jesus that he has paid the price for your sin through his death and resurrection. Invite him to come alongside you and reveal more of himself to you. Pray for those you know who are feeling discouraged or have doubts about their faith.

## CONTEMPLATIO:

The two disciples walked about 11 kilometres back to Jerusalem, mostly at night, to encourage their fellow disciples. Consider your response to the good news of the gospel and how you can share it with others.



## LISTEN TO THE SHEPHERD

### John 10:1-10

<sup>1</sup> Jesus said, "I am telling you the truth: the man who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> The man who goes in through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him; the sheep hear his voice as he calls his own sheep by name, and he leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought them out, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> They will not follow someone else; instead, they will run away from such a person, because they do not know his voice."

<sup>6</sup> Jesus told them this parable, but they did not understand what he meant.

<sup>7</sup> So Jesus said again, "I am telling you the truth: I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All others who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate. Whoever comes in by me will be saved; they will come in and go out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life – life in all its fullness.

*Other Readings: Acts 2:14, 36-41; Psalm 23:1-6; 1 Peter 2:20-25*



### LECTIO:

To help us understand this passage more clearly we also need to read the following verses in John 10:11-18. In verses 1-5 Jesus tells the parable of the shepherd. He explains the meaning in verses 7-16.

Jesus uses two 'I am' statements with two metaphors to describe himself. In verse 7 he describes himself as 'the gate' and in verse 11 he refers to himself as the 'good shepherd'.

The people listening to Jesus would have been familiar with the idea of God as the shepherd and the Jewish people as his sheep. So in identifying himself as the good shepherd, Jesus identifies himself directly with God and his role in protecting and caring for his sheep.

Jesus adds that the shepherd knows each of his sheep by name and leads them. The sheep recognise his voice so they follow him out of the sheepfold, presumably to pastures where they can be fed. In verses 11-16 Jesus alludes to the fact that he will one day lay down his life for the sake of his flock. He also refers to 'other sheep', possibly Gentile converts, which will be added to form one flock.

In addition to being the good shepherd Jesus also describes himself as the gate for the sheep. The gate is the only legitimate way into the sheepfold. It is only through Jesus that we can become part of God's flock. This is summed up in John 14:6, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me.' (We will look at this passage further next Sunday.)

Jesus also compares his mission with that of false prophets and 'messiahs'. The latter steal, kill and destroy. By glorious contrast Jesus brings life – 'life in all its fullness' (verse 10).



### MEDITATIO:

- Why do you think Jesus used these two metaphors to describe himself? What does each metaphor tell you about him?
- What have you learnt about Jesus and your relationship with him today?
- Do you see Jesus as your shepherd? When do you experience him leading you? What spiritual food and water does he provide for you?
- Do you need to make any changes to allow you to hear your shepherd's voice more clearly in the future?



### ORATIO:

Psalm 23 is probably the best known of all the Psalms. Read through it verse by verse and use it as a personal prayer to God.



### CONTEMPLATIO:

Reflect on this verse from 1 Peter 2:25,

'You were like sheep that had lost their way, but now you have been brought back to follow the Shepherd and Keeper of your souls.'

## THE WAY

### *John 14:1-12*

<sup>1</sup>“Do not be worried and upset,” Jesus told them. “Believe in God and believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>There are many rooms in my Father’s house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. <sup>3</sup>And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am. <sup>4</sup>You know the way that leads to the place where I am going.”

<sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way to get there?”

<sup>6</sup>Jesus answered him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me. <sup>7</sup>Now that you have known me,” he said to them, “you will know my Father also, and from now on you do know him and you have seen him.”

<sup>8</sup>Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father; that is all we need.”

<sup>9</sup>Jesus answered, “For a long time I have been with you all; yet you do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Why, then, do you say, ‘Show us the Father’? <sup>10</sup>Do you not believe, Philip, that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I have spoken to you,” Jesus said to his disciples, “do not come from me. The Father, who remains in me, does his own work. <sup>11</sup>Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. If not, believe because of the things I do. <sup>12</sup>I am telling you the truth: those who believe in me will do what I do – yes, they will do even greater things, because I am going to the Father.

*Other Readings: Acts 6:1-7; Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19; 1 Peter 2:4-9*



## LECTIO:

This conversation takes place about the time of the Passover meal in Jerusalem. Jesus knows that his imminent arrest and crucifixion will be a severe trial for his disciples.

Jesus doesn’t say so explicitly but verses 2-4 seem to be referring to heaven. Jesus knows that after his crucifixion he will rise from the dead and join his Father in heaven.

The promise for his disciples is that after they die they too will join him in heaven, but Jesus doesn’t make this plain.

Jesus’ answer to Thomas – that he is the way, the truth, the life and the only way to the Father – probably didn’t make things any clearer for them at the time.

In his exchange with Philip, Jesus focuses on his unity with God the Father. This is a difficult concept for the disciples to understand. In fact, it has taken centuries of the Church’s meditation and reflection to scratch the surface of the mystery of the Trinity. But Jesus points out that whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father: in Jesus we can see what God the Father is like.

Our reading ends today with Jesus’ intriguing statement that his followers will do greater things than he does. This is linked to the gift of the Holy Spirit which we will read more about in the coming weeks.

It is helpful to remind ourselves of the advice Jesus gives his disciples right at the outset of this conversation:

‘Do not be worried and upset...believe in God and believe also in me’.



## MEDITATIO:

- How is Jesus the way, the truth, the life and the only way to the Father?
- How has Jesus proved to be the way for you personally? How does this affect your everyday life?
- What can we learn from this passage about trusting in God? How can you apply this in your daily life?



## ORATIO:

Psalm 33 speaks about God’s faithfulness. Read the whole Psalm and then respond to him in prayer. Like the disciples we don’t always understand everything but we can be confident that God is faithful and good.



## CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider these verses below from 1 Peter 2:4-6. Think about Jesus as the cornerstone of God’s Kingdom. Ask God how you can be a ‘living stone’ in his temple.

‘Come to the Lord, the living stone rejected by people as worthless but chosen by God as valuable. Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ. For the scripture says,

“I chose a valuable stone,  
which I am placing as the cornerstone in Zion;  
and whoever believes in him will never be disappointed.”

## A PRICELESS GIFT

### John 14:15-21

<sup>15</sup> “If you love me, you will obey my commandments. <sup>16</sup> I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you for ever. <sup>17</sup> He is the Spirit who reveals the truth about God. The world cannot receive him, because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him, because he remains with you and is in you.

<sup>18</sup> “When I go, you will not be left all alone; I will come back to you. <sup>19</sup> In a little while the world will see me no more, but you will see me; and because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> When that day comes, you will know that I am in my Father and that you are in me, just as I am in you.

<sup>21</sup> “Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. My Father will love those who love me; I too will love them and reveal myself to them.”

*Other Readings: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17; Psalm 66:1-7, 16, 20; 1 Peter 3:15-18*

## LECTIO:

This reading from John takes us right to the heart of the Passover supper and Jesus’ final instructions for his most intimate friends and disciples.

Jesus has some important points to make about his relationship with the disciples and what will happen when he goes away and the Father sends the Holy Spirit to them.

The Holy Spirit will come with an important guarantee, his permanent presence with every disciple (verses 16-17). The world, or non-believers, cannot receive the Holy Spirit because they cannot see or know him. But the disciples will. The Holy Spirit is called ‘another Helper’, that is in addition to Jesus himself.

In many ways the world stands in opposition to the disciples and Jesus but John chooses not to develop that theme here.

Jesus doesn’t go into any details about his return but leaves the disciples with the promise that ‘I will come back for you’. So his resurrection and return is promised here in verse 18. These verses reveal the deep concern Jesus has for his beloved disciples in the face of the coming storm.

Woven throughout this lesson in love is Jesus’ invitation to his disciples to live out their love for him. But he knows the disciples need all the help they can get. So Jesus turns to his Father to ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit on behalf of his disciples.

The Holy Spirit loves those who love Jesus and who keep his commandments. He also acts as advocate, helper and teacher, sustaining the disciples along the sometimes challenging path of obedience to Jesus and his commandments.

All these themes are woven into a rich tapestry of teaching. In these few verses, which are part of a much longer passage of teaching, complex ideas are spelt out with great simplicity and clarity.



## MEDITATIO:

- The Holy Spirit has various roles but Jesus pinpoints perhaps the most important in verse 17, to reveal ‘the truth about God’. We constantly need to be reminded about what God is really like because our view of God can so easily be distorted. Love and obedience will flow more easily the deeper our understanding of God’s nature. Take some time to reflect on this.
- What part does the Holy Spirit play in your relationship with God? What do you do to sustain this relationship? When are you most aware of the Holy Spirit’s guidance?



## ORATIO:

The liturgy today uses Psalm 66, or part of it, to sing God’s praises. Use some verses from this psalm to praise God, or maybe speak or write your own song of praise. Alternatively, try drawing a simple picture to express your praise.

Reflect on the events of the last week. Praise God for his presence with you throughout all that has happened, whether good or bad.



## CONTEMPLATIO:

Which of the themes in today’s teaching particularly touched your heart and spirit? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what God wants you to see and how you need to respond.