

Sunday Gospel Readings with *Lectio Divina*

Year C: Year of Luke

“The Roman Catholic Bishops of Scotland once more recommend this resource for the prayerful reading of the word of God. The 2008 Synod of Bishops in Rome had as its theme the word of God and *Lectio Divina* was recognised, described and recommended as an important expression of the Church’s love of Sacred Scripture (see the Message to the People of God, 9). The Bishops are grateful to the Scottish Bible Society and all those who have worked to produce this volume based on the readings for Year C of the Lectionary.”

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

“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



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.



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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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.

LECTIO:

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.

MEDITATIO:

- 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.

PORATIO:

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.

CONTEMPLATIO:

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.*

REPENT AND BELIEVE

Luke 13:1-9

¹ At that time some people were there who told Jesus about the Galileans whom Pilate had killed while they were offering sacrifices to God. ² Jesus answered them, "Because those Galileans were killed in that way, do you think it proves that they were worse sinners than all the other Galileans?" ³ No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did. ⁴ What about those eighteen people in Siloam who were killed when the tower fell on them? Do you suppose this proves that they were worse than all the other people living in Jerusalem?" ⁵ No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did."

⁶ Then Jesus told them this parable: "There was once a man who had a fig tree growing in his vineyard. He went looking for figs on it but found none. ⁷ So he said to his gardener, 'Look, for three years I have been coming here looking for figs on this fig tree, and I haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it go on using up the soil?' ⁸ But the gardener answered, 'Leave it alone, sir, just one more year; I will dig round it and put in some manure. ⁹ Then if the tree bears figs next year, so much the better; if not, then you can have it cut down.'"

*Other Readings: Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15; Psalm 103:1-4, 6-8, 11;
1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12*



LECTIO:

Luke reveals Jesus using current events to teach important lessons. The two events are quite different; one was political, the other an accident, but in both cases many people died.

In the first event, Pilate shockingly had some Galileans murdered even while they were offering their sacrifices to God. Their lives were suddenly cut short at the very time they performed the most sacred of religious acts in the holiest place, the temple.

We don't know why Pilate chose to have people killed in the temple. People thought that these Galileans must have been really bad to be killed in this way. They speculated that God took no pleasure in their sacrifices and so allowed this sacrilege to occur.

Then Jesus considers a second event, this time a complete accident, when a tower collapsed killing eighteen people.

Jesus makes it clear that in both cases the people that died were no worse than his listeners or anyone else. He insists we must all repent and turn away from our sins otherwise we will be judged and punished by God.

Jesus develops his teaching by telling a parable about a fig-less fig tree. The tree has not produced any figs for three years and is in danger of being cut down. The gardener asks for one more year so he can give it special attention to help it produce fruit. But if the tree remained barren after all the extra care it would be removed.

Jesus warns his listeners not to be like the fig tree. Changed lives bear kingdom fruit and his teaching was an opportunity for them to consider their lives, repent and turn to God.



MEDITATIO:

- What does this passage have to say about thinking we are better than others? Whose standard is the one that counts?
- Do you see any link between Jesus and the gardener who begged for the chance to care for the fig tree and save it from being destroyed?
- What do you think the figs might represent in this parable?
- Consider what the passage tells us about God's character – his patience, mercy and holiness.



ORATIO:

Use the verses from Psalm 103 for a time of fellowship and prayer with God. Remember his love, mercy and kindness. Worship him for his holiness. Thank him that he forgives our sins – even though we don't deserve it.

Ask him how your life could be more fruitful for him.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Jesus' death on the cross opened a door into God's presence (Hebrews 4:14-16). Now we can come before God's throne at any time. Sit or kneel in God's presence for a while and consider his pure holiness.

LOST AND FOUND

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

¹ One day when many tax collectors and other outcasts came to listen to Jesus, ² the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law started grumbling, “This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them!” ³ So Jesus told them this parable:

¹¹ Jesus went on to say, “There was once a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to him, ‘Father, give me my share of the property now.’ So the man divided his property between his two sons. ¹³ After a few days the younger son sold his part of the property and left home with the money. He went to a country far away, where he wasted his money in reckless living. ¹⁴ He spent everything he had. Then a severe famine spread over that country, and he was left without a thing. ¹⁵ So he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. ¹⁶ He wished he could fill himself with the bean pods the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat. ¹⁷ At last he came to his senses and said, ‘All my father’s hired workers have more than they can eat, and here I am about to starve! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father and say, Father, I have sinned against God and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired workers.’ ²⁰ So he got up and started back to his father.

“He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms round his son, and kissed him. ²¹ ‘Father,’ the son said, ‘I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.’ ²² But the father called his servants. ‘Hurry!’ he said. ‘Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. ²³ Then go and get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast! ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.’ And so the feasting began.

²⁵ “In the meantime the elder son was out in the field. On his way back, when he came close to the house, he heard the music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him, ‘What’s going on?’ ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come back home,’ the servant answered, ‘and your father has killed the prize calf, because he got him back safe and sound.’

²⁸ “The elder brother was so angry that he would not go into the house; so his father came out and begged him to come in. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look, all these years I have worked for you like a slave, and I have never disobeyed your orders. What have you given me? Not even a goat for me to have a feast with my friends! ³⁰ But this son of yours wasted all your property on prostitutes, and when he comes back home, you kill the prize calf for him!’ ³¹ ‘My son,’ the father

answered, ‘you are always here with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.’ ”

Other Readings: Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 33:2-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

LECTIO:

This parable is one of the best known illustrations of God’s love and mercy. It shows Jesus’ love for sinners is rooted in God the Father’s love.

The story speeds through the younger son’s squandering of his inheritance, humiliation, repentance and decision to risk returning home.

The father welcomes his son back with open arms and throws a feast to celebrate. Not so the older brother, who resents his father’s lavish forgiveness.

MEDITATIO:

- Make a list of the different challenges the two sons faced.
- Which son do you identify with most? What does this passage have to say to you?
- What can we learn from the actions of the father?

ORATIO:

Prayerfully read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. Ask the Holy Spirit what to pray and then respond to his leading.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider the father’s great love for both his sons. Now think about God’s love and mercy for you.

A LESSON IN MERCY

John 8:1-11

¹ Then everyone went home, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early the next morning he went back to the Temple. All the people gathered round him, and he sat down and began to teach them. ³ The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught committing adultery, and they made her stand before them all. ⁴ “Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵ In our Law Moses commanded that such a woman must be stoned to death. Now, what do you say?” ⁶ They said this to trap Jesus, so that they could accuse him. But he bent over and wrote on the ground with his finger.

⁷ As they stood there asking him questions, he straightened himself up and said to them, “Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her.” ⁸ Then he bent over again and wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard this, they all left, one by one, the older ones first. Jesus was left alone, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ He straightened himself up and said to her, “Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?”

¹¹ “No one, sir,” she answered.

“Well, then,” Jesus said, “I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again.”

Other Readings: Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:8-14



LECTIO:

This week we read another example of Jesus’ forgiveness and mercy. A woman has been caught in adultery. The Pharisees, knowing Jesus’ compassion for sinners, take this opportunity to try and trap him.

Picture the scene. Jesus is teaching in the temple, the holiest place for the Jews which Jesus described as ‘my Father’s house’. A crowd of people are gathered around listening to what he has to say.

A group of Pharisees and teachers of the Law arrive and make a woman stand before Jesus and the crowd. They declare that she was caught in adultery and that the punishment required by the Law of Moses is death by stoning (Deuteronomy 22: 22-24). Then comes the loaded question, “Now, what do you say?” They pretend to accuse only the woman, but they are actually looking for a chance to accuse (and try) Jesus.

The man with whom she was committing adultery is not mentioned, nor is her husband. The atmosphere must have been electric. It was quite literally a matter of life and death. All eyes shift from the woman, whose life hangs in the balance, to Jesus. What will he say?

Jesus bends down and writes on the ground. What did he write? Why? Perhaps Jesus wanted to draw attention away from the terrified woman, perhaps he was considering his answer. John gives no explanation.

Jesus’ answer is masterful. He is well aware of the intended trap. He silences the accusers without contradicting the Law or condoning the sin. The woman is eventually left on her own before Jesus. As he was without sin he could have carried out the punishment but he tells her she is free to go. He wants to give her the opportunity to repent and tells her not to sin again.



MEDITATIO:

- Compare the way the Pharisees treated this woman with the way Jesus treated her. Consider their actions and motives. How did they differ? Were there any points of agreement?
- Imagine yourself firstly as one of the Pharisees, then as this frightened woman. What impact do you think this encounter would have had on you?
- What can we learn from this passage about our attitudes to our own behaviour and our attitudes to others?



ORATIO:

Thank God for his grace and mercy. He knows our weaknesses and when we sin we can come to him to be forgiven and restored. Ask God to deepen your appreciation of these wonderfully undeserved gifts.

Pray through Psalm 126 and give thanks for ‘What marvels the Lord has worked for us!’

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any attitudes in you that should change.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider the images of water in Isaiah 43 and Psalm 126. Let God reveal its life-sustaining, refreshing and cleansing properties. Now relate this to God’s forgiveness and grace in your life.

WELCOME THE KING

Luke 19:28-40

²⁸ After Jesus said this, he went on ahead of them to Jerusalem. ²⁹ As he came near Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead ³⁰ with these instructions: "Go to the village there ahead of you; as you go in, you will find a colt tied up that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here."

³¹ If someone asks you why you are untying it, tell him that the Master needs it."

³² They went on their way and found everything just as Jesus had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying it?"

³⁴ "The Master needs it," they answered, ³⁵ and they took the colt to Jesus. Then they threw their cloaks over the animal and helped Jesus get on. ³⁶ As he rode on, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When he came near Jerusalem, at the place where the road went down the Mount of Olives, the large crowd of his disciples began to thank God and praise him in loud voices for all the great things that they had seen: ³⁸ "God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory to God!"

³⁹ Then some of the Pharisees in the crowd spoke to Jesus. "Teacher," they said, "command your disciples to be quiet!"

⁴⁰ Jesus answered, "I tell you that if they keep quiet, the stones themselves will start shouting."

You may also wish to read the full Gospel reading for today: Luke 22:14 – 23:56

Other Readings: Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 24; Psalm 47; 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).

Luke begins by describing the remarkable provision of a colt for Jesus to ride on. The disciples find everything 'just as Jesus had told them' (verse 32). Luke simply gives us these details without any further comment although Matthew (21:5) interprets this as the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy (Zechariah 9:9-10). Zechariah proclaims a King who comes as Saviour on a colt, not with horses and chariots. Jesus is in control and is fully 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 hail 'the king who comes in the name of the Lord' (verse 38) and echo the words of the angels at Jesus' birth (Luke 2:13-14).

This is the last thing the Pharisees wanted to happen. They didn't accept Jesus or his teaching and wanted to prevent others from following him. Nothing could be worse than this noisy hero's welcome. They may also have feared the intervention of the Roman soldiers so they asked Jesus to tell the people to be quiet.

But Jesus' reply (verse 40) indicates that the people's praise was only right and proper. In fact the occasion demanded it. If the people didn't fulfil this requirement then God would cause the very stones of Jerusalem to shout out in praise.

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 (21:10) tells us, 'When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was thrown into uproar. "Who is he?" the people asked.'



MEDITATIO:

- Mingle with the crowd and imagine what this occasion must have been like. Enrich your understanding by reading the accounts from the other Gospel writers in Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11 and John 12:12-19.
- Consider the contrast between the humble colt Jesus is riding on and the hero's welcome. What does this tell us?
- Reflect on some of the miracles and 'great things' Jesus had done in his ministry.
- To their credit the disciples followed Jesus' instructions concerning the colt. What can we learn from this? Are you willing to obey God even when you don't fully understand why he is asking you to do something?



ORATIO:

Write your own psalm of thanksgiving to Jesus or simply speak out your praise to God for our wonderful Saviour. Today's Psalms can help you get started.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Ponder in awe at Jesus' humility revealed so eloquently in Philippians 2:6-11 and worship him proclaiming, 'Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'

A SERVANT ATTITUDE

John 13:1-15

¹It 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.

²Jesus 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. ³Jesus knew that the Father had given him complete power; he knew that he had come from God and was going to God. ⁴So he rose from the table, took off his outer garment, and tied a towel round his waist. ⁵Then he poured some water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel round his waist. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Are you going to wash my feet, Lord?"

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

⁸Peter 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."

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

¹⁰Jesus 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."

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

¹²After 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. ¹³"You call me Teacher and Lord, and it is right that you do so, because that is what I am. ¹⁴I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I 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:

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

By washing their feet Jesus humbles himself in a way that would have shocked the disciples. The host would normally provide water for guests to wash their own feet when entering the house (Luke 7:44). A servant or slave might be given the task, or disciples might possibly wash their teacher's feet, but not the other way round. This was completely unexpected.

This self-humiliation is a deep symbol for the crucifixion of Christ. We cannot gain salvation by our actions. It is by the humble sacrifice of the Son of God that we are saved.

Peter does not understand this sign at first and protests. Jesus insists that Peter must allow him to wash his feet. Peter misunderstands again and wants to be purified completely. What Jesus is looking for here is humility – which is the only way we can receive his gift of salvation.

In this practical action Jesus also demonstrates a very important lesson to the disciples and to us – we must serve one another just as he serves us.



MEDITATIO:

- Think about what an incredible act of humility this is. The Son of God is washing the feet of his disciples!
- Jesus humbled himself to death on a cross for us. We can do nothing to redeem ourselves. We simply have to respond to God's great love and accept his gift of salvation. Marvel at this wonderful gift.
- Consider how willing you are to serve other Christians in your church. Ask God to help you follow Jesus' example and to show you ways you can serve your fellow Christians.



ORATIO:

Thank God for the great humility of Jesus who saved us from sin and eternal death. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you overcome pride and selfishness.

Pray the words of Psalm 116:12 as your own prayer today. Listen to anything the Holy Spirit may say to you.

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



CONTEMPLATIO:

Spend some time reflecting on Christ's love and humble sacrifice, his painful death for our sake, his never ending desire to be in fellowship with us and to draw us to God the father.

THE OBEDIENT SERVANT

John 18:1-19:42

John 18

¹ 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. ² Judas, the traitor, knew where it was, because many times Jesus had met there with his disciples. ³ 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. ⁴ Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward and asked them, “Who is it you are looking for?”

⁵ “Jesus of Nazareth,” they answered.

“I am he,” he said.

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

“Jesus of Nazareth,” they said.

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

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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?”

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

¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ The High Priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching.

²⁰ 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. ²¹ Why, then, do you question me? Question the people who heard me. Ask them what I told them – they know what I said.”

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

²³ 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?”

²⁴ Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the High Priest.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ Again Peter said “No” – and at once a cock crowed.

²⁸ 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. ²⁹ So Pilate went outside to them and asked, “What do you accuse this man of?”

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

³¹ 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.” ³² (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.)

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

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

³⁵ 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?”

³⁶ 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!”

³⁷ 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.”

³⁸ “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. ³⁹ 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?”

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

John 19

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

⁴ 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.” ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Look! Here is the man!”

⁶ 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.”

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

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

But Jesus did not answer. ¹⁰ 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.”

¹¹ 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.”

¹² 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!”

¹³ 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”.) ¹⁴ It was then almost noon of the day before the Passover. Pilate said to the people, “Here is your king!”

¹⁵ 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!”

¹⁶ Then Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

So they took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷ He went out, carrying his cross, and came to “The Place of the Skull”, as it is called. (In Hebrew it is called “Golgotha”.) ¹⁸ There they crucified him; and they also crucified two other men, one on each side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate wrote a notice and had it put on the cross. “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”, is what he wrote. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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.’”

²² Pilate answered, “What I have written stays written.”

²³ 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. ²⁴ 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.

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

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

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

²⁹ 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. ³⁰ Jesus drank the wine and said, “It is finished!”

Then he bowed his head and died.

³¹ 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. ³² So the soldiers went and broke the legs of the first man and then of the other man who had been crucified with Jesus. ³³ But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they did not break his legs. ³⁴ One of the soldiers, however, plunged his spear into Jesus’ side, and at once blood and water poured out. ³⁵ (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.) ³⁶ This was done to make the scripture come true: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” ³⁷ And there is another scripture that says, “People will look at him whom they pierced.”

³⁸ 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. ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ 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.

⁴¹ 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. ⁴² Since it was the day before the Sabbath and because the tomb was close by, they placed Jesus’ body there.

THE OBEDIENT SERVANT

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*



LECTIO:

John provides us with a compelling account of Jesus' passion. He gives us a different perspective to the other Gospel writers.

Jesus is shown suffering at the hands of the powers of this world (18:12, 22; 19:1-3). Throughout all the trials Jesus remains in charge of the situation. He is the judge of those who now judge him but he submits voluntarily to their authority at this time (19:17).

John includes an instruction from Jesus to 'the disciple he loved' - a reference to John himself (John 21:24) - to look after his mother. This shows Jesus' concern for his mother's welfare even from the cross.

John also writes about the soldier piercing Jesus' side with a spear instead of breaking his legs as in the case of the two others that were crucified with him (19:32-34). John explains 'this was done to make the scripture come true' referring to Psalm 34:20 and Zechariah 12:10.

We are also told 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 Baptism and the Holy Eucharist.

Then we meet Joseph of Arimathea, who asks Pilate for Jesus' body, and Nicodemus (19:38-40). The two men bury Jesus in a new tomb close to where he died. They were both important Jewish council members and also secret disciples of Jesus. Jesus had spoken to Nicodemus about his death and his words include 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.'

MEDITATIO:

- What do we learn about Jesus from this Passion narrative? What touches you most?
- Consider why Jesus endured the pain and humiliation of death on the cross.
- What did Jesus mean when he said 'it is finished'? What is the significance of this for you today?
- Two other characters, Peter and Pilate, feature strongly in these two chapters. What do we learn about them?

ORATIO:

'Let us be brave, 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

Before you pray today read the verses the liturgy offers us from Hebrews. They explain why we can dare to come before Almighty God in prayer and tell us that Jesus is 'the source of eternal salvation'. Consider these words and make your own response to God.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Isaiah 53 spells out what Jesus did for us. Take some time to read through this moving portrait of the 'suffering servant'. Verses 5, 6 and 7 remind us Jesus was pierced for our faults, crushed for our sins. His suffering brings us peace and we are healed, though we were like sheep gone astray. Jesus bore it all humbly, never opening his mouth. Spend some time marvelling at all Jesus accomplished for us at Calvary.

HE IS RISEN

John 20:1-9

¹Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the entrance. ²She went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

³Then Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb. ⁴The two of them were running, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent over and saw the linen wrappings, but he did not go in. ⁶Behind him came Simon Peter, and he went straight into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there ⁷and the cloth which had been round Jesus’ head. It was not lying with the linen wrappings but was rolled up by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in; he saw and believed. ⁹(They still did not understand the scripture which said that he must rise from death.)

Other Readings: Acts 10:34, 37-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Colossians 3:1-4



LECTIO:

This is a compelling narrative. Jesus’ body has disappeared and Mary Magdalene is first on the scene. You can read about her encounter with Jesus in the verses following today’s reading.

This passage focuses mainly on the two disciples, Peter and another whom tradition identifies as the apostle John.

The narrator tells us that John believes Jesus is risen as soon as he sees the abandoned linen in the grave. What causes John to believe Jesus is alive? Some commentators believe it was the folding of the grave clothes in a particular style – Jesus’ style, one that John recognised. Whoever had done this was not dead but alive. Surely this must be Jesus. This is John’s first encounter with the risen Christ.

Did John share his belief with Peter? We don’t know. All we are told is that the disciples still did not understand the scripture which said Jesus must rise from the dead. This would soon change. But for each person it was a slightly different experience.

Mary Magdalene, Peter, John and the other disciples meet Jesus face to face in the verses following today’s reading in John’s account.

The eye witness accounts of these disciples are fundamental to the faith of Christians. They knew that Jesus died on the cross, they knew precisely where he was buried and each personally met with the risen Christ. These encounters with the risen Lord confirmed their belief that he was indeed who he said he was - the promised Messiah, the Son of God.



MEDITATIO:

- Picture yourself on that first morning after Jesus’ crucifixion. Waking up, trying to eat and drink, and going with Mary Magdalene or Peter and John to the tomb. What would you think and feel? And by contrast, how would you feel going to bed that night?
- Think about how you might explain to a friend who doesn’t follow Jesus why the events that took place that first Easter are still so important today.



ORATIO:

Today is one of the most joyful in the church calendar. The words of the other gospel writers ‘He is not here; he has been raised’ (Matthew 28:6) echo down the centuries. Bring your own praise and express your joy and thanks to God. Use the verses from Psalm 118 to help you.



CONTEMPLATIO:

‘You have been raised to life with Christ, so set your hearts on the things that are in heaven, where Christ sits on his throne at the right-hand side of God.’

Colossians 3:1-4 tells us that in Christ we have experienced our own ‘resurrection’ into a new spiritual life. Spend some time reflecting on what it means to have your life ‘hidden with Christ in God’ and setting your heart and mind on heaven instead of earthly concerns.

MY LORD AND MY GOD

John 20:19-31

¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." ²² Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

²⁴ One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ 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."

²⁶ 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." ²⁷ 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!"

²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!"

³⁰ In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. ³¹ 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 5:12-16; Psalm 118:2-4, 22-27; Revelation 1:9-13, 17-19



LECTIO:

Once again John takes us behind closed doors to share a precious encounter with the risen Christ. Many similar accounts circulated among the Christians living in Jerusalem after his death in about 30 AD. The gospel writers used these same stories for teaching.

Today we are bystanders at a Sunday meeting of the disciples. Suddenly Jesus appears and the disciples are overjoyed. Jesus sends them to spread the gospel, gives them authority to forgive sins and breathes on them to receive the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, one of the twelve disciples, Thomas, was not there to share the experience. When the others tell him they have seen the living Lord Jesus, he doesn't believe them. Rather brashly he declares he will only believe if he can touch the nail scars in Jesus' hands and the wound in his side.

The community meet again the next Sunday. This time Thomas is with them. The Lord appears and greets them. Shockingly, he invites Thomas to probe his wounds by putting his fingers in the torn hands and his entire hand in the hole in Jesus' side.

Confronted with the undeniable reality of Jesus' presence Thomas is overwhelmed and declares Jesus to be his Lord and his God.

Thomas made a confession of faith because he saw the risen Christ. And Jesus looks ahead to all those who will come after and believe without seeing him physically.



MEDITATIO:

- Imagine the joy and excitement that the disciples must have felt when they saw the risen Jesus.
- Thomas' faith was ignited as he saw the risen Lord. Do you believe or are you looking for further proof before you can accept Jesus as your living Lord?
- Jesus said to his disciples 'Peace be with you'. Consider the significance of these reassuring words.



ORATIO:

'My Lord and my God'. This was Thomas's declaration of faith. It is a simple yet profound prayer. Can you make it your own and pray it throughout this coming week? Be open to God speaking to you as you make your own confession of faith and trust in him.



CONTEMPLATIO:

We continue to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Consider the verses from Psalm 118:

'His love is eternal.' (verse 4)

'The stone which the builders rejected as worthless turned out to be the most important of all. This was done by the Lord; what a wonderful sight it is! This is the day of the Lord's victory; let us be happy, let us celebrate.' (verses 22-24)

DO YOU LOVE ME?

John 21:1-19

¹ After this, Jesus appeared once more to his disciples at Lake Tiberias. This is how it happened. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael (the one from Cana in Galilee), the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples of Jesus were all together. ³ Simon Peter said to the others, "I am going fishing."

"We will come with you," they told him. So they went out in a boat, but all that night they did not catch a thing. ⁴ As the sun was rising, Jesus stood at the water's edge, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Then he asked them, "Young men, haven't you caught anything?"

"Not a thing," they answered.

⁶ He said to them, "Throw your net out on the right side of the boat, and you will catch some." So they threw the net out and could not pull it back in, because they had caught so many fish.

⁷ The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Peter heard that it was the Lord, he wrapped his outer garment round him (for he had taken his clothes off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples came to shore in the boat, pulling the net full of fish. They were not very far from land, about a hundred metres away. ⁹ When they stepped ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there with fish on it and some bread. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

¹¹ Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net ashore full of big fish, 153 in all; even though there were so many, still the net did not tear. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and eat." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ So Jesus went over, took the bread, and gave it to them; he did the same with the fish.

¹⁴ This, then, was the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from death.

¹⁵ After they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?"

"Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my lambs." ¹⁶ A second time Jesus said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷ A third time Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was sad because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" so he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!"

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep. ¹⁸ I am telling you the truth: when you were young, you used to get ready and go anywhere you wanted to; but when

you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will bind you and take you where you don't want to go." ¹⁹ (In saying this, Jesus was indicating the way in which Peter would die and bring glory to God.) Then Jesus said to him, "Follow me!"

Other Readings: Acts 5:27-32, 40-41; Psalm 30:1, 3-5, 10-12; Revelation 5:11-14

LECTIO:

Realising Jesus is on the beach Peter literally plunges in, this time leaping overboard in his eagerness to get to the Lord.

Jesus has some important words for Peter. He wanted first to hear Peter's confession of love. Jesus really tested him by asking him three times, 'do you love me?' It's a painful reminder of Peter's denials of Jesus. Then Jesus commits his mission to Peter, 'take care of my sheep'.

MEDITATIO:

- Consider Jesus' great mercy towards Peter. Although Peter denied him, Jesus gave him the opportunity to be restored and fulfil his calling to lead the early church.
- Compare Peter's response here to his response in Luke 5:4-8 when there was another remarkable catch of fish. What has changed?

ORATIO:

Imagine Jesus is asking you the question, 'do you love me?' Spend some time with the Lord and make your own response.

CONTEMPLATIO:

'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be praise and honour, glory and might, for ever and ever!'

John gives us a glimpse of heaven in Revelation 5:11-14. Read through these verses several times and bring your own worship and adoration before the throne.

FOLLOWING THE SHEPHERD

John 10:27-30

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never die. No one can snatch them away from me. ²⁹ What my Father has given me is greater than everything, and no one can snatch them away from the Father's care. ³⁰ The Father and I are one."

Other Readings: Acts 13:14, 43-52; Psalm 100:1-3, 5; Revelation 7:9, 14-17



LECTIO:

These few verses form part of a longer passage in which John reports a lively debate between Jesus and the people about his relationship to God the Father.

It ended with the people wanting to stone Jesus! When Jesus challenged their murderous intentions they answered, 'We do not want to stone you because of any good deeds, but because of your blasphemy! You are only a man, but you are trying to make yourself God!'(John 10:33).

Jesus sees deeper into their hearts than they realised. He knew they would not accept him 'for they are not my sheep' (verse 26). And they were not his sheep because the Father had not given them to him as his believers.

Jesus hints at the mysterious gift and wonderful grace of faith. No one can believe in Jesus unless he is given the grace by the Father.

In John 6 Jesus conveys this idea in another way. Jesus told his puzzled listeners that he was the bread of God and they needed to feed on him if they wanted to live (John 6:25-59). Once again the gracious gift of God is needed for faith to believe. And the Father is the sole giver of grace.

If God the Father gifts an individual with grace, that person belongs to Jesus and becomes one of Jesus' 'sheep'. They are given the ability to grow in understanding of all that Jesus teaches and to receive eternal life. But for growth to occur we need to be in constant touch with Jesus.

The people who wanted to stone Jesus had not yet received the Father's gift of faith. If their hearts and minds were open, they would have seen that this was an opportunity to seek the Father's help and grace to believe. But the 'goats' declined (Matthew 25:32) and refused to accept Jesus as God's Son.

In this age of uncertainties we can have no stronger promise than the one Jesus gives to those who follow him: no one and nothing can separate us from God. This is explained further in Romans 8:38-39. It is the truth – nothing can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus. This promise is not only for this life but extends beyond our death into eternity.



MEDITATIO:

- In these few verses Jesus mentions several benefits of being one of his sheep. Think about what each one means to you.
- As Christians we believe that God knows everything, but sometimes we act and pray as though he doesn't. In verse 27 Jesus reminds us that he knows each of his sheep individually. Do you find this reassuring or uncomfortable? Consider your response to this.
- 'My sheep listen to my voice... and they follow me.' How good are you at listening to Jesus' voice and doing what he says? Ask Jesus what would be best for you to do to help you be more obedient.
- If faith in Jesus is a gift from the Father, how should this influence our attitude to people who don't believe in Jesus?



ORATIO:

Bring what God reveals to you from this passage and your time of meditation to him in prayer. Don't rush this – take your time.

Read Psalm 100 and use this to give thanks to God for giving you the gift of faith in Jesus.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Have you considered that as a believer you are the gift of the Father to his Son, Jesus? Think about your relationship with Jesus your shepherd.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

John 13:31-35

³¹ After Judas had left, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man's glory is revealed; now God's glory is revealed through him. ³² And if God's glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once. ³³ My children, I shall not be with you very much longer. You will look for me; but I tell you now what I told the Jewish authorities, 'You cannot go where I am going.' ³⁴ And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."

Other Readings: Acts 14:21-27; Psalm 145:8-13; Revelation 21:1-5



LECTIO:

Today we are with Jesus and his disciples in the upper room at the Last Supper. John does not describe the 'Eucharistic meal' itself like the other gospel writers but provides different insights into Jesus' life and teaching.

Jesus waits until after Judas has left before revealing a 'new' commandment to his disciples. Knowing what Judas was harbouring in his heart it is not surprising that Jesus chooses to speak about this after he has left.

What is so special about this 'new' commandment? The requirement to love God and to love our neighbour as ourself would already have been well known to the disciples from the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). But Jesus' teaching and example of love deepen these commands. In the other three Gospels this teaching is often referred to as 'The Great Commandment' (Matthew 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34, Luke 10:25-28).

The new challenge Jesus lays before his disciples here is to love each other 'as I have loved you'. Jesus proclaims that God now makes known the divine identity and authority of the Son of Man, who is Jesus himself. Jesus' love for his disciples, for us, and for all people reflects the unconditional mutual love that exists between God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Christians, living out this mutual love in their everyday lives make God's mystical love a concrete fact to people around them and demonstrate they are Jesus' followers. In practising this unconditional love ordinary Christians draw back a veil to reveal a glimpse of heaven and the love flooding from the Holy Trinity.

Now we can see why Jesus and John place such a great emphasis upon the relationship between the persons of the Holy Trinity (John 14-16). And this is why Jesus insists that the love shared between Christians has to be modelled upon his own love towards them: self-sacrificing and unconditional.



MEDITATIO:

- What strikes you most from these verses? Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you.
- How do you feel about Jesus' command to love other Christians as Jesus loves us?
- Does Jesus ask the impossible? How can we try to obey this command? Who can we go to for help?
- Consider whether there are any ways God might want you to express his love to another Christian.



ORATIO:

Psalm 145:8-13 lists some of the characteristics of God. As God chips away at our worldliness to reveal his image and likeness we will start to reflect his nature. Prayerfully offer these verses to God.

Open your heart to God and let him speak to you. If you are experiencing difficulties in a particular relationship then bring this before the Lord.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Revelation 21:1-5 speaks of the 'new heaven and earth'. Consider this promise and think about the links between Jesus' new commandment and this vision. Think about how Jesus is clothing us, as the Church, to be his bride.

TRUSTING JESUS

John 14:23-29

²³ Jesus answered him, "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. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not obey my teaching. And the teaching you have heard is not mine, but comes from the Father, who sent me.

²⁵ "I have told you this while I am still with you. ²⁶ The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.

²⁷ "Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am leaving, but I will come back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father; for he is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you this now before it all happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe.

Other Readings: Acts 15:1-2, 22-29; Psalm 67:1-2, 4-5, 7; Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23



LECTIO:

This week we continue to read about the teaching Jesus gave to his disciples in the context of the Last Supper (John 14-17). Today's text is a response to a question from another disciple called Judas. (John 13:31-35 makes it clear this is not Judas Iscariot as he had left them earlier to betray Jesus.)

Jesus has just said that he will reveal himself to those who love him (verse 21). Judas is puzzled. Is Jesus saying he will only reveal himself to the disciples? Jesus doesn't answer Judas directly even though it is apparent his understanding is very limited. Jesus knows the disciples will get more insight after his resurrection. So for now he emphasises again his relationship to God the Father. He stresses that his teaching comes direct from the Father and that the critical point is for each one to put his teaching into action.

But Jesus makes it plain he doesn't expect us to be able to do this on our own. God the Father is going to send us a helper. The Holy Spirit is going to teach us everything we need to know to live, love and serve Jesus.

Jesus tells them he will be leaving them to go to the Father. He doesn't reveal just how soon this will be or explain the shocking nature of his death. But he does seek to reassure them. He promises them he will come back for them, that they won't be left on their own but will have the Holy Spirit to help them and he leaves his peace with them.

Jesus wants them to trust him. Even though they don't understand everything now, later they will see what he was saying and believe in him.



MEDITATIO:

- Why does Jesus put so much emphasis on living out the gospel message to express your love for him?
- How easy do you find it to trust God when you don't get the answers you expect or you don't understand things? What can we learn from this passage to help us?
- How do you relate to the Holy Spirit? Do you ask for his help to put Jesus' teaching into practice in your life?
- How does Jesus leave us his peace?



ORATIO:

Thank God for sending Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Ask God to speak to you and show you how he wants you to respond to him today. This may be out of a word or phrase from the Scripture passage or it maybe something prompted by one of the questions above. Take your time.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Think about how much God loves you and how he has shown his love for you. Marvel at the wonderful promise that the Father and Jesus come to live with us.

UNITY WITH GOD

John 17:20-26

²⁰“I pray not only for them, but also for those who believe in me because of their message. ²¹I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me. ²²I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one. ²³I in them and you in me, so that they may be completely one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me.

²⁴“Father! You have given them to me, and I want them to be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory, the glory you gave me; for you loved me before the world was made. ²⁵Righteous Father! The world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you sent me. ²⁶I made you known to them, and I will continue to do so, in order that the love you have for me may be in them, and so that I also may be in them.”

Other Readings: Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 97:1-2, 6-7, 9; Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20



LECTIO:

Today we share part of what has come to be known as Jesus' 'High Priestly Prayer'. This is the jewel and the final part of Jesus' teaching for his disciples before his passion.

Unity is at the heart of this prayer. Jesus prays repeatedly that his disciples will experience the same unity that he enjoys with the Father. And this prayer is not just for those disciples that were with him that evening. This unity isn't limited in any way by time or space. It is for all his believers for all time.

It is a mystery of God's grace that frail human beings can be in such unity. Two things however seem to be essential. Firstly, to be in relationship and unity with God the Father and with Jesus: 'may they be in us' (verse 21). Secondly, to have God's unconditional love in us: 'that the love you have for me may be in them' (verse 26).

This unity has a glorious purpose - to draw others to God the Father through Jesus. Through this unity people will believe that God loves them and sent Jesus to save them.

Jesus' prayer is bold and daring, but then he knows, as did the angel Gabriel who brought the news of his birth to Mary, that 'there is nothing that God cannot do.' (Luke 1:37).



MEDITATIO:

- What does this passage reveal about the relationship between God the Father, Jesus and his disciples?
- Why do you think unity is so important to Jesus? What has been your experience of unity in your church and with other Christians? What things hinder unity with others in your church community?
- When are you most aware of the presence of Jesus within your church?
- Does your relationship with God give you the freedom to make bold prayer requests like Jesus? If not, consider why this might be.



ORATIO:

Sit down and spend a while in silence. Let God speak to you and lead you to respond to him in prayer. He may encourage you to be daring and ask something that you've not had the courage to ask before because humanly speaking it seems impossible. He may direct you to pray about a relationship that needs reconciliation or for someone to believe in Jesus and know that God loves them.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider the words 'the love you have for me (Jesus) may be in them' from Jesus' prayer (verse 26). Think about how much God the Father loves Jesus.

Now consider what it means to have God's unconditional love in you. How does this affect your relationship with God? Does it overflow into your relationships with others?

DIVINE HELP

John 14:15-16, 23-26

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will obey my commandments. ¹⁶ I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you for ever.

²³ Jesus answered him, "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. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not obey my teaching. And the teaching you have heard is not mine, but comes from the Father, who sent me.

²⁵ "I have told you this while I am still with you. ²⁶ The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.

Other Readings: Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-31, 34; Romans 8:8-17



LECTIO:

We return to the gospel passage we read two weeks ago along with verses 15-16 from earlier in the chapter. This teaching is so important that Jesus repeats it to help his first disciples remember it and put it into practice. Today we too have another opportunity to consider the significance of Jesus' words.

Jesus asks the disciples to love him. Easy enough to say 'yes', you might think. But Jesus makes it clear that loving him takes far more than a simple word. Love in Jesus eyes has a very practical outcome and it takes the shape of obedience to his commandments.

Jesus continues with an amazing promise for everyone who obeys him. Both the Father and Jesus will come and live with them. Jesus does not explain exactly what this 'living with' will be like but it surely indicates a very special and intimate personal relationship.

At this point Jesus makes it clear that these words are not his own idea. This teaching comes directly from God the Father, which is of course equally true of all Jesus' words.

Jesus now talks about the helper, who he reveals as the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is overlooked as people deepen their relationships with Jesus and the Father. But he plays a huge part in our relationship with Jesus. In this reading he is revealed to be a teacher and helper for the disciples, reminding them of Jesus' teaching and helping them to understand and live it.

Perhaps in another sense the Holy Spirit is Jesus' helper too. He continues the work Jesus started in the lives of the first disciples and in us today, now that Jesus has returned to his Father.

Jesus also repeats to the disciples that he will ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit to help them after he returns to heaven and promises that the Holy Spirit will stay with them forever.



MEDITATIO:

- Consider the role of God the Father in this passage.
- Which words of Jesus strike you most from today's readings?
- How do you respond to this connection between love and obedience?
- Do you find some areas of Jesus' teaching difficult to obey and put into practice in your life? What can you do about this?
- Consider the importance of the Holy Spirit in your everyday life. Read Romans 8:1-17. Think about what this means for you.



ORATIO:

Today we remember the dramatic way the Holy Spirit filled the first disciples on the day of Pentecost. Prayerfully read Acts 2:1-11 and give thanks to God for sending us the Holy Spirit to be our helper.

Each day this week, ask the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh and help you to live in a way that will please Jesus. It's only with the Holy Spirit's help that we can obediently love and serve Jesus.



CONTEMPLATIO:

'For the Spirit that God has given you does not make you slaves and cause you to be afraid; instead, the Spirit makes you God's children, and by the Spirit's power we cry out to God, Father! My Father!' Romans 8:15

Consider what an incredible privilege it is to be able to call Almighty God our Father and what it means to be his children.

REVEALING THE TRUTH

John 16:12-15

¹² "I have much more to tell you, but now it would be too much for you to bear. ¹³ When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears, and will tell you of things to come. ¹⁴ He will give me glory, because he will take what I say and tell it to you. ¹⁵ All that my Father has is mine; that is why I said that the Spirit will take what I give him and tell it to you.

Other Readings: Proverbs 8:22-31; Psalm 8:3-8; Romans 5:1-5



LECTIO:

We are very much in the heart of Jesus' teachings during the Last Supper. Jesus has so much to say to prepare his faithful band of disciples for the traumatic events that lay immediately ahead of them.

The Holy Spirit continues to be in the spotlight. Here Jesus teaches that the role of the Holy Spirit is to 'reveal the truth about God', to 'lead you into all the truth' and 'tell you of things to come' (verse 13).

Jesus could have explained more to his disciples at this point about what is going to happen but he knows that they would not be able to take any more in. So he chooses instead to give them glimpses of the work of the Holy Spirit. After Jesus' resurrection the Holy Spirit will help the disciples understand what they need to know in order to live in relationship with God and give them the power they need to do so (Acts 1:8).

Jesus explains more about the relationship between the Holy Spirit, the Father and himself. The Holy Spirit helps us understand and see the truth about God and guides us. In this way he brings glory to the Father and the Son. The three members of the Holy Trinity are one in complete unity.



MEDITATIO:

- Think about the phrase 'the truth about God'. What does this mean to you?
- Do we still need the Holy Spirit to work in our lives today? What does this passage teach us about how the Holy Spirit can help us?
- How would you feel if you gave someone a gift which they largely ignored? Can we sometimes be guilty of ignoring or taking for granted this precious gift from God?
- What can we learn about the inner life of the Holy Trinity from today's reading?



ORATIO:

'... for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us.' Romans 5:5

Thank God for his love for you and for giving you the gift of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to help you appreciate this love more deeply and be willing to share his love with people around you.

Have you experienced a special time in prayer or reading the Scriptures when the Holy Spirit reveals something new to you? Ask God to do that this week.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Have you ever looked at the vastness of the sky, the sea or a landscape and felt very small in comparison?

Spend some time now marvelling with the Psalmist at why the creator of the whole universe should care for you and me.

'When I look at the sky, which you have made,
at the moon and the stars, which you set in their places –
what are human beings, that you care for them;
mere mortals, that you care for them?

Yet you made them inferior only to yourself;
you crowned them with glory and honour.
You appointed them rulers over everything you made;
you placed them over all creation.' Psalm 8:3-6