



Sunday Gospel Readings with *Lectio Divina*

Year A: Year of Matthew

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



“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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Sunday Gospel Readings with Lectio Divina Year A: Matthew

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.

ORATIO:

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.*

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶The eleven disciples went to the hill in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him, even though some of them doubted. ¹⁸Jesus drew near and said to them, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age."

Other Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47:1-2, 5-8; Ephesians 1:17-23

LECTIO:

These are the final words of the Gospel of Matthew. They complement the narrative in Matthew 10, when Jesus sends the twelve disciples out, as a training exercise, on their first short mission.

The two texts in chapters 10 and 28 are best read together in order to get to grips with what the early disciples understood when Jesus sent them out with their great commission. In the first commission the disciples' mission is limited to 'the lost sheep of the people of Israel' and they are specifically told not to visit Gentile territory or Samaritan towns. But after the resurrection the restrictions are removed and Jesus instructs his disciples to share the good news with all peoples everywhere.

This encounter has all the characteristics of a resurrection narrative: a meeting in a chosen place between Jesus and his chosen disciples; and a mixed reaction as some doubted they were seeing the Lord while others worshipped. In this account there is no mention of Jesus proving he is real and not a ghost; the focus is on the task ahead for the disciples.

Jesus states that he has been given 'all authority in heaven and earth' and the implication is clear that his is a God-given authority. Based on this authority, he tells the disciples to go 'to all peoples everywhere'.

His commission involved evangelising all people of the world and 'making them my disciples'. Discipleship is entered into through baptism in the name of the Trinity – 'the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'. Believers become members of

a church, though this word is not used. Then begins the process of teaching these new disciples to understand and live the teachings Jesus gave in the years before his passion and death.

At this point, Jesus does not give the disciples a list of instructions on how to carry out the commission, but as we read in Acts 1 the Holy Spirit is poured out to enable the disciples to fulfil the mission.

The Gospel ends with a promise: Jesus will be with them until the end of time. Jesus doesn't spell out how, he simply gives the assurance. His promise, like his message, is for us today and it is eternal.

MEDITATIO:

- What do you understand by the great commission?
- Who do you see around you taking part in the great commission?
- How do you play your part in achieving the commission?
- How does Jesus fulfil his promise to be with us today?

ORATIO:

Go deeper into the power and wonder of the great commission by prayerfully reading Acts 1:1-11. Ask God to speak to you about someone with whom you can share Jesus' words. Remember Jesus promises to be with us and has sent the Holy Spirit to help us.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Read Ephesians 1:17-23 slowly several times and soak up these amazing verses. Verse 17 echoes what we read last week in John 14:17 about the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing God to us so that we know him.

Take a few moments to reflect on the authority that has been given to Jesus and let this strengthen your faith:

'Christ rules there above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers, and lords; he has a title superior to all titles of authority in this world and in the next. God put all things under Christ's feet and gave him to the church as supreme Lord over all things.' Ephesians 1:21-22

GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

John 20:19-23

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.”

*Other Readings: Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-31, 34;
1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13*



LECTIO:

Though the Feast we are celebrating is Pentecost Sunday, which occurs about fifty days after Easter Sunday, our Gospel reading today focuses on an encounter with the Holy Spirit on the very day Jesus rose from the dead.

It is the third day after Jesus’ death. The disciples are afraid of the Jewish authorities so they keep a very low profile, hiding away behind locked doors.

The rest of our text tells what the risen Jesus says and does next. He greets them all by saying, ‘Peace be with you’, a normal greeting among the Jews. He says nothing about his ordeal or the fact that the disciples abandoned him after his arrest.

Then he shows them his hands and side, still bearing the visible signs of his crucifixion; his resurrected body still bore the marks of his suffering. Jesus probably intended to show that he was real – changed and yet the same. The signs of his suffering made it plain he was not a ghost; he lived and stood among them.

Then comes the commission, or mission (verse 21), which is almost a continuation of his own mission from the Father. Surprisingly, we discover the disciples are despatched to bring forgiveness of sins rather than to preach. Although reconciliation with God through repentance and forgiveness is of course the very essence of the Gospel.

Christian churches interpret verse 21 differently but for the Catholic Church this is the basis of the Church’s authority to forgive sins after they have been confessed. Jesus gives no description of how the Church is to organise the dispensation of

forgiveness. Nor is there any indication of the rite the Church was to set up. Jesus only says if the Church forgives the sins of men and women then so will God. And if the Church denies this pardon, then God will not forgive the sins either.

Through its long history, the Catholic Church has administered this sacrament in various ways. But at all times it is God’s gift given to an individual in need of forgiveness administered through the Church.

But before giving this commission Jesus breathes on the disciples and says ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’. So this authority should only be exercised through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.



MEDITATIO:

- Picture the scene, the disciples hidden away from the prying eyes of the world. They are scared. Fear hangs in the air and suddenly there is Jesus standing in the room. Think about what this encounter must have meant for the disciples.
- Consider the parallel between Jesus breathing on the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit and God breathing life into man at Creation (Genesis 2:7).
- How do you feel about Jesus giving the Church the authority to forgive sins?



ORATIO:

Ask the Holy Spirit to shine his loving light into your heart and to guide you as you seek forgiveness for your sins, perhaps in confession. These words from 1 John 1:9 offer encouragement:

‘But if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right, he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing’.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you live a life that is pleasing to God.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Read Acts 2:1-11 and try to imagine the scene when the Holy Spirit came in power on the disciples and thousands were added to the church in one day.

Then read 1 Corinthians 12 and consider the work of the Holy Spirit in your life today.

FOR GOD SO LOVED

John 3:16-18

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. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its saviour.

¹⁸ Those who believe in the Son are not judged; but those who do not believe have already been judged, because they have not believed in God's only Son.

Other Readings: Exodus 34:4-6, 8-9; Daniel 3:52-56; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13



LECTIO:

These few verses are among the best known in the Bible. For some these words have opened the doorway into life as a Christian believer.

As we take a closer look at them it is actually not at all clear who is speaking here, and the Greek text can be interpreted in different ways. It could be Jesus himself continuing his conversation with Nicodemus (verses 1-13) or it could be the gospel writer adding his own comments.

The two preceding verses help to deepen our appreciation of this text. They refer to the Son of Man being lifted up so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. ('Lift up' has two meanings, referring both to the cross and to Jesus' ascension to heaven.) A direct reference is made to the account in Numbers 21:6-9 where the Israelites sinned and were punished by poisonous snakes. Moses intercedes for them and God instructs him to make a snake and put it on a pole. Those who looked on the bronze snake were healed and their lives saved. The symbol of the snake on a pole remains a symbol of healing in some countries today and is used by various medical organisations. The parallel is clear: all human beings are smitten with a deadly disease but there is a cure – believing in Jesus and his victory over sin on the cross.

These verses give us a wonderful insight into God the Father and the Son. God is not indifferent to the plight of people as some believe. He loves us and demonstrated his love through his Son's birth on earth and death on the cross. This is repeated in 2 Peter 3:9, '...he wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost.' (CEV).

Jesus' primary purpose is to bring salvation rather than judgement; nevertheless, we will be judged by our response to him. Believing and following Jesus causes us to live in the light. But those who choose to remain in darkness have to bear the consequences.

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MEDITATIO:

- How do these verses speak to you?
- Take some time to reflect on God's love for you personally and indeed for everyone. How do you respond to this?
- How might you explain these verses to someone who is interested in becoming a Christian?



ORATIO:

'The Lord God came down in a cloud and stood beside Moses there on the mountain. God spoke his holy name, "the Lord." Then he passed in front of Moses and called out, "I am the Lord God. I am merciful and very patient with my people. I show great love, and I can be trusted. I keep my promises to my people forever, but I also punish anyone who sins...' Exodus 34:5-7 (Contemporary English Version)

Respond to God in worship and thanksgiving. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any sin you need to confess. Intercede for those who need to receive God's love and forgiveness.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Reflect on the following verses from 1 John 4:10-14. What do you think about them?

'This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.

Dear friends, if this is how God loved us, then we should love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in union with us, and his love is made perfect in us.

We are sure that we live in union with God and that he lives in union with us, because he has given us his Spirit. And we have seen and tell others that the Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.'

LIVING BREAD

John 6:51-58

⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live for ever. The bread that I will give him is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live.”

⁵² This started an angry argument among them. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” they asked.

⁵³ Jesus said to them, “I am telling you the truth: if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in yourselves. ⁵⁴ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them to life on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is the real food; my blood is the real drink. ⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them. ⁵⁷ The living Father sent me, and because of him I live also. In the same way whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This, then, is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the bread that your ancestors ate. They later died, but those who eat this bread will live for ever.”

*Other Readings: Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16; Psalm 147:12-15, 19-20;
1 Corinthians 10:16-17*



LECTIO:

John chapter 6 opens with Jesus miraculously providing physical bread (and fish) for over 5,000 people. In the synagogue the next day Jesus teaches extensively on the living bread sent by God to give eternal life.

Today’s Gospel reading comes at the end of this teaching and focuses on the ‘Eucharist’. Strictly speaking, the term ‘Eucharist’ means ‘giving thanks’ and it refers to the ceremony held on the Lord’s Day (Sunday) when the consecrated bread and wine is received. Catholics believe that when the words of blessing or consecration are pronounced over the bread and wine they become the body and blood of Christ. Other Christians understand it differently, seeing this as a symbol of remembrance of the Last Supper.

Catholics describe the change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ as ‘transubstantiation’. It is a ‘mystery of faith’. The Gospel accounts do not enter into these theological discussions. It was St Thomas Aquinas who first gave the interpretation used by the Catholic Church.

The overall teaching in John 6:25-59 remains more general. Jesus declares, ‘I am the bread of life’ (verses 35 & 48). Jesus contrasts the manna that God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness – which met their physical needs – with faith in the Son of Man, which meets their spiritual need for salvation. Jesus refers several times to ‘coming down from heaven’ (verses 38, 41, 51, 58) to show his message has its origin with God, who lives in heaven.

Verse 40 sums up God’s heart in this teaching: ‘For what my Father wants is that all who see the Son and believe in him should have eternal life.’



MEDITATIO:

- Reflect on the significance of Jesus describing himself as the bread of life.
- Is Jesus *your* bread of life? What practical difference does this make to you?
- How important is celebrating the Eucharist or Holy Communion in your Christian life?



ORATIO:

Humbly come before God in prayer. Give thanks to God for sending his Son as ‘the bread of life’ so that we can live in fellowship with the Trinity and, through faith in Jesus, inherit eternal life. Marvel at this wonderful gift.



CONTEMPLATIO:

‘While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. “Take and eat it,” he said; “this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and gave it to them. “Drink it, all of you,” he said; “this is my blood, which seals God’s covenant, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’ Matthew 26:26-28

Take time each day this week to give thanks that Jesus’ death paid the price so you can receive forgiveness.

YOKED WITH JESUS

Matthew 11:25-30

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "Father, Lord of heaven and earth! I thank you because you have shown to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned.

²⁶ Yes, Father, this was how you wanted it to happen.

²⁷ "My Father has given me all things. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ "Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. ³⁰ For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light."

Other Readings: Zechariah 9:9-10; Psalm 145:1-2, 8-11, 13-14; Romans 8:9, 11-13



LECTIO:

Short as it is, this passage contains three separate parts: verses 25-26, 27 and 28-30. No one knows for sure but it is likely that Matthew brought these words of Jesus together in one place to highlight a single idea. He wanted us to see Jesus' deep relationship with God the Father and with believers.

The first part (verses 25-26) is Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving to his Father, 'Lord of heaven and earth'. The phrase 'heaven and earth' is used to encapsulate the whole of creation. So God's lordship is absolute and extends throughout the whole universe.

This description of God serves Jesus' purpose very neatly. It comes soon after he has spoken about the sceptics who refuse to believe in him or his ministry (verses 20-24). He says they cannot lift themselves up to heaven. In other words, people can only enter heaven by believing in him.

Belief in God is a gift revealed by God himself. It is not based on our education or our ability to learn. Unlearned people can believe in God while people the world considers wise or clever can be completely ignorant about God.

The next verse expresses the unique relationship between God the Father and God the Son, Jesus. Each knows the other completely. The Father has given all things to Jesus. In the first section it was the Father who revealed things. In this section it is Jesus who is revealing the Father. Jesus declares that knowledge of the Father depends entirely on the Son. Jesus chooses who shares this knowledge; it is

his gift to give. And no one can pretend to have this knowledge without Jesus' help to understand or know the Father.

In the third section (verses 28-30) Jesus invites all who 'are tired from carrying heavy loads' to come to him because he offers rest. He invites them to put on his yoke.

The yoke represents the teaching a teacher gives to his students. Physical yokes were of course used to ensure that two animals worked together under the direction of the master. The image conveys that Jesus is in charge and his disciples need to follow his instructions. But Jesus promises he will lead us gently and humbly and the load will be light.

MEDITATIO:

- Which things strike you most from these verses?
- Have you accepted the 'yoke' of following Jesus? Do you find this yoke easy and light?
- Have you found rest in following Jesus?
- What examples can you think of that demonstrate the gentleness and humility of Jesus?
- Consider the awesome power of God – Lord of heaven and earth. How do you respond to this?

ORATIO:

Use the words of Psalm 145 to thank and praise God for his compassion, mercy and faithfulness.

You may have gained insight into the Father through your meditation. But perhaps you can also see an area where you would like to understand more. Ask God to help you understand and give you the grace to draw closer to him.

CONTEMPLATIO:

'But you do not live as your human nature tells you to; instead you live as the Spirit tells you to...' Romans 8:9

If we follow Jesus he gives us the Holy Spirit to help us live in obedience to Jesus' yoke. Meditate further on Matthew 11:27-30. Let the words sink into your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you and guide you.

BEARING FRUIT

*Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

¹ That same day Jesus left the house and went to the lakeside, where he sat down to teach. ² The crowd that gathered round him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it, while the crowd stood on the shore. ³ He used parables to tell them many things.

“Once there was a man who went out to sow corn. ⁴ As he scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some of it fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. The seeds soon sprouted, because the soil wasn’t deep. ⁶ But when the sun came up, it burnt the young plants; and because the roots had not grown deep enough, the plants soon dried up. ⁷ Some of the seed fell among thorn bushes, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ But some seeds fell in good soil, and the plants produced corn; some produced a hundred grains, others sixty, and others thirty.”

⁹ And Jesus concluded, “Listen, then, if you have ears!”

¹⁸ “Listen, then, and learn what the parable of the sower means. ¹⁹ Those who hear the message about the Kingdom but do not understand it are like the seeds that fell along the path. The Evil One comes and snatches away what was sown in them. ²⁰ The seeds that fell on rocky ground stand for those who receive the message gladly as soon as they hear it. ²¹ But it does not sink deep into them, and they don’t last long. So when trouble or persecution comes because of the message, they give up at once. ²² The seeds that fell among thorn bushes stand for those who hear the message; but the worries about this life and the love for riches choke the message, and they don’t bear fruit. ²³ And the seeds sown in the good soil stand for those who hear the message and understand it: they bear fruit, some as much as a hundred, others sixty, and others thirty.”

**This is a shortened form of today’s reading. The full reading is Matthew 13:1-23.*

Other Readings: Isaiah 55:10-11; Psalm 65:9-13; Romans 8:18-23



LECTIO:

Jesus frequently used parables, or simple short stories, to teach very profound truths about God. He based his parables around ordinary human experiences and used items familiar to most people. His parables normally had a simple plot and a single message.

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In our text, Jesus paints a vivid word picture of the sower and the seeds. Each situation described in this parable has a specific meaning. The parable is about how various people receive the word of God and the harvest that results.

Jesus likens people to four different soil types. Three out of the four groups of people Jesus identifies don’t allow God’s word to produce the fruit that God intends. The reasons vary but the ultimate result is the same. Although they receive the message, they don’t let it take root in them.

Only one group of people, ‘the good soil’, is fruitful. Different people produce various amounts of fruit but this group are all fruitful.

The responsibility of the sower is to sow the seed. The sower doesn’t know what the potential harvest will be; only God knows that.



MEDITATIO:

- How do you respond to God’s word? Which of the four soil types do you feel describes you best? How do you feel about this?
- ‘The seeds that fell in good soil stand for those who hear the message and retain it in a good and obedient heart, and they persist until they bear fruit.’ (Luke 8:15). Does Luke’s description of the ‘good soil’ help us understand this passage better? What can we learn from this verse?
- Consider how you might bear more fruit in your life.



ORATIO:

Reflect on the scripture and respond to God humbly in prayer. Ask God to give you boldness and show you specific opportunities to share your faith.



CONTEMPLATIO:

The ministry of your priest or pastor comes to you at their great personal cost. How has their ministry influenced you? What have you ignored or rejected that may be reducing the fruit you might bear? What can change in your attitude to their ministry over the coming weeks and months?

THE FINAL HARVEST

*Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: “The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ One night, when everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶ When the plants grew and the ears of corn began to form, then the weeds showed up. ²⁷ The man’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, it was good seed you sowed in your field; where did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸ ‘It was some enemy who did this,’ he answered. ‘Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?’ they asked him. ²⁹ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because as you gather the weeds you might pull up some of the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let the wheat and the weeds both grow together until harvest. Then I will tell the harvest workers to pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them, and then to gather in the wheat and put it in my barn.’”

³⁶ When Jesus had left the crowd and gone indoors, his disciples came to him and said, “Tell us what the parable about the weeds in the field means.”

³⁷ Jesus answered, “The man who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world; the good seed is the people who belong to the Kingdom; the weeds are the people who belong to the Evil One; ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed the weeds is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvest workers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are gathered up and burnt in the fire, so the same thing will happen at the end of the age: ⁴¹ the Son of Man will send out his angels to gather up out of his Kingdom all those who cause people to sin and all others who do evil things, ⁴² and they will throw them into the fiery furnace, where they will cry and grind their teeth. ⁴³ Then God’s people will shine like the sun in their Father’s Kingdom. Listen, then, if you have ears!

**This is a shortened form of today’s reading. The full reading is Matthew 13:24-43.*

Other Readings: Wisdom 12:13, 16-19; Psalm 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16; Romans 8:26-27



LECTIO:

Jesus’ interpretation of this parable is important. The seeds here are not the ‘word of God’ as they were in the last parable about the sower (Matthew 13:1-9). Here Jesus is discussing the Church community, God’s people in the world, although outwardly the two parables appear similar.

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Those people who try to live as Jesus directs, he calls ‘the people who belong to the kingdom’. Hidden in their midst are ‘people who belong to the Evil One’. In other words, people who are not obeying God but whose lives are being directed the Devil.

The servants want to root out the weeds immediately but the master tells them to wait until harvest time. Similarly, in the church we should avoid judging each other. Judgement belongs to ‘the Son of Man’; he is the only one who knows one seed from another.

In the meantime, the good seeds have until harvest time to grow and flourish even though the ‘weeds’ may hinder the harvest. Jesus refuses to intervene until harvest time; that is the end days.

There’s a warning here for those who are churchgoers but not actually following Jesus. Each of us is to be alert and live our lives in obedience to Jesus. Everyone will have to give an account for their lives on judgement day.



MEDITATIO:

- What relevance does this parable have to your spiritual life?
- What can you learn from Jesus’ teaching here?
- What is your response?



ORATIO:

‘In the same way the Spirit also comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express.’ Romans 8:26

We all need God’s help to follow him and this verse encourages us that the Holy Spirit is interceding for us. Respond to God in prayer. You may wish to pray, ‘Lord give me the grace to hear your voice calling me to a deeper life of faith’.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Read Psalm 86 and meditate on the greatness and mercy of God.

KINGDOM TREASURE

Matthew 13:44-52

⁴⁴“The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man happens to find a treasure hidden in a field. He covers it up again, and is so happy that he goes and sells everything he has, and then goes back and buys that field.

⁴⁵“Also, the Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man is looking for fine pearls, ⁴⁶and when he finds one that is unusually fine, he goes and sells everything he has, and buys that pearl.

⁴⁷“Also, the Kingdom of heaven is like this. Some fishermen throw their net out in the lake and catch all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸When the net is full, they pull it to shore and sit down to divide the fish: the good ones go into their buckets, the worthless ones are thrown away. ⁴⁹It will be like this at the end of the age: the angels will go out and gather up the evil people from among the good ⁵⁰and will throw them into the fiery furnace, where they will cry and grind their teeth.

⁵¹“Do you understand these things?” Jesus asked them.

“Yes,” they answered.

⁵²So he replied, “This means, then, that every teacher of the Law who becomes a disciple in the Kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who takes new and old things out of his storeroom.”

*Other Readings: 1 Kings 3:5, 7-12; Psalm 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-130;
Romans 8:28-30*



LECTIO:

Matthew 13 concludes with three more parables about the kingdom of heaven. The first two underline the value of following Jesus. It is so important and precious it is worth giving up everything else or ‘selling all’ to enter Jesus’ new way of life.

As the parables suggest sometimes those who are not looking find the treasure; on other occasions those who have searched long and hard for their life’s dream eventually find it.

The third parable tells us that our decision about following Jesus has serious consequences. God decides who has lived in obedience to the gospel and who has not. God alone is able to differentiate between individuals.

As Christians we face daily challenges to choose to live in obedience to Jesus. Sometimes we will fail but then we can seek God’s forgiveness. We can be confident that, while it will certainly not always be easy, living God’s way will always be worth the sacrifice.

Jesus ends this passage by referring to ‘new and old things’. Jesus insists that he hasn’t come to replace the Law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets but to fulfil them (Matthew 5:17). So the old treasures of the Law are given fresh meaning in the kingdom of heaven.



MEDITATIO:

- Who or what are the most precious treasures in your life? Where does Jesus appear on this list?
- What difficult decisions have you had to make to be a faithful Christian?
- What have you surrendered in order to follow Jesus?
- How much value do you place on your relationship with Jesus?



ORATIO:

Read the verses selected from Psalm 119. Can you echo these as a prayer?

In our reading from 1 Kings 3, Solomon asks God for wisdom. Take time to lay some of the challenges you face before God. Ask for his help and wisdom in dealing with them.



CONTEMPLATIO:

‘We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose. And so those whom God set apart, he called; and those he called, he put right with himself, and he shared his glory with them.’ Romans 8: 28, 30

We face choices every day. What helps you to make these decisions? What part do the Bible and prayer play in your decision-making? How do you decide what God is saying to you personally? Let these words from Romans encourage you in the coming week.

YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING

Matthew 14:13-21

¹³ When Jesus heard the news about John, he left there in a boat and went to a lonely place by himself. The people heard about it, so they left their towns and followed him by land. ¹⁴ Jesus got out of the boat, and when he saw the large crowd, his heart was filled with pity for them, and he healed those who were ill.

¹⁵ That evening his disciples came to him and said, "It is already very late, and this is a lonely place. Send the people away and let them go to the villages to buy food for themselves."

¹⁶ "They don't have to leave," answered Jesus. "You yourselves give them something to eat!"

¹⁷ "All we have here are five loaves and two fish," they replied.

¹⁸ "Then bring them here to me," Jesus said. ¹⁹ He ordered the people to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, and gave thanks to God. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ Everyone ate and had enough. Then the disciples took up twelve baskets full of what was left over. ²¹ The number of men who ate was about 5,000, not counting the women and children.

Other Readings: Isaiah 55:1-3; Psalm 145:8-9, 15-18; Romans 8:35, 37-39



LECTIO:

Our text today comes immediately after the martyrdom of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12). Herod makes a rash promise at his birthday party which gives his lover, Herodias, the opportunity to silence John once and for all. John had been imprisoned for openly denouncing the adulterous relationship between Herod and his brother's wife. (Jewish Law expressly forbade a man to marry his brother's wife while the brother was still living, Leviticus 18:16, 20:21.)

The death of his cousin John saddened Jesus deeply. Quite understandably, he wants to be alone for a while so he takes a boat to a remote place across the lake. But the crowds can't leave him alone. They follow him to receive more healing miracles and hear his powerful teaching.

Matthew highlights Jesus' grief and his compassion for the people who search so hard for him. He looks into the hearts of the crowds and he doesn't ignore them (verse 14).

Later in the evening the disciples realise that people will be getting hungry, but in this remote place there is nowhere for them to buy food. So they suggest Jesus sends them off to the nearest villages. Jesus' reply must have stunned them, 'You yourselves give them something to eat!'

What is Jesus thinking? They don't even have enough food for themselves. How can they possibly feed all these people? It's impossible.

Jesus takes the loaves and fishes, gives thanks to God, breaks the bread and then the miracle takes place – the food just keeps on coming. Enough to feed 5,000 men plus women and children, and with twelve baskets left over!

Only this miracle is recorded by all four gospel writers. Matthew certainly intends us to see the parallel with God providing his people with manna in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses – but now one greater than Moses is here.

2 MEDITATIO:

- Imagine that you were an eyewitness to this miracle, firstly as one of the crowd, then as one of the disciples. What impact would it have had on you? How would you have reacted?
- What lessons can we learn from this miracle today? Are we compassionate? Should we be more open to the possibility of God intervening in situations miraculously to demonstrate his glory?
- Have you experienced a situation where you didn't have the ability or resources to meet a need but God intervened?

3 ORATIO:

Psalm 145:8-18 reminds us of God's compassion and enduring love. It also tells us that God is close to those who call to him from their hearts. What is the prayer of your heart? For what do you hunger? Take time to offer this hunger to God. And let the words of the psalm bring you comfort as you pray.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

'You yourselves give them something to eat!'

Open your heart to God and spend some time meditating on what this phrase might mean for you. God may reveal something very specific over the coming days or weeks.

WHY DOUBT?

Matthew 14:22-33

²² Then Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people away. ²³ After sending the people away, he went up a hill by himself to pray. When evening came, Jesus was there alone; ²⁴ and by this time the boat was far out in the lake, tossed about by the waves, because the wind was blowing against it.

²⁵ Between three and six o'clock in the morning Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the water. ²⁶ When they saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. "It's a ghost!" they said, and screamed with fear.

²⁷ Jesus spoke to them at once. "Courage!" he said. "It is I. Don't be afraid!"

²⁸ Then Peter spoke up. "Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you."

²⁹ "Come!" answered Jesus. So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he was afraid and started to sink down in the water. "Save me, Lord!" he cried.

³¹ At once Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him and said, "How little faith you have! Why did you doubt?"

³² They both got into the boat, and the wind died down. ³³ Then the disciples in the boat worshipped Jesus. "Truly you are the Son of God!" they exclaimed.

Other Readings: 1 Kings 19:9, 11-13; Psalm 85:8-13; Romans 9:1-5



LECTIO:

At last Jesus is able to spend some time alone with his Father. Chapter 14 opened with the account of his cousin John the Baptist's murder. Jesus tried to be alone then but the crowds followed him. Jesus took pity on the people, taught them long into the evening, healed the sick and miraculously provided food for over 5,000 people.

Then he sends the disciples ahead of him in the boat across the lake and sends the people back home. Now he can grieve for John and pray to his Father. Prayer was the foundation of his life and ministry so he always made time for fellowship with his Father.

But the main theme of this passage is faith. Earlier that day the disciples had seen Jesus heal people and supernaturally transform five loaves and two fish into enough food for over 5,000 people with plenty to spare! Now Jesus comes walking

on the water towards their boat. They can't believe their eyes. They are terrified and think they must be seeing a ghost. Jesus reassures them that it really is him so they don't need to be afraid.

As usual, Peter plunges in and literally takes a huge step of faith. Here again he probably speaks without thinking and asks Jesus to let him walk on water too. Jesus calls him. Peter steps out of the boat and starts walking on the water towards Jesus. Then he notices how stormy it is, fear floods in and he begins to sink. Jesus saves him and gently chides him, asking where his faith has gone.

The storm becomes calm. For the disciples this is now a time of worship and they exclaim "Truly you are the Son of God!"



MEDITATIO:

- What lessons about faith can we learn from this passage?
- Have you been in a situation when you called out to God for help? What happened?
- We can so easily start stepping out boldly in faith but then become afraid. How can we try to prevent doubt robbing us of what God wants for us?



ORATIO:

Give thanks that Jesus truly is the Son of God and praise him for his power and compassion.

Opportunities to grow in faith are all around us. Ask Jesus to help you 'step out of the boat' in an area where you feel he is challenging you. Let the love of Jesus fill you and wash away fears from your heart.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Jesus asks Peter a very revealing question, 'Why did you doubt?' Consider the reasons Peter had to doubt. Then consider that Jesus, the Son of God, was right there with him. Reflect on why you have doubts sometimes. If Jesus is with us how should this affect our faith?

PROMISE KEEPER

Luke 1:39-56

³⁹ Soon afterwards Mary got ready and hurried off to a town in the hill country of Judea. ⁴⁰ She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby moved within her. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and said in a loud voice, "You are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ Why should this great thing happen to me, that my Lord's mother comes to visit me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard your greeting, the baby within me jumped with gladness. ⁴⁵ How happy you are to believe that the Lord's message to you will come true!"

⁴⁶ Mary said,

"My heart praises the Lord;

⁴⁷ my soul is glad because of God my Saviour,

⁴⁸ for he has remembered me, his lowly servant!

From now on all people will call me happy,

⁴⁹ because of the great things the Mighty God has done for me.

His name is holy;

⁵⁰ from one generation to another

he shows mercy to those who honour him.

⁵¹ He has stretched out his mighty arm

and scattered the proud with all their plans.

⁵² He has brought down mighty kings from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things,

and sent the rich away with empty hands.

⁵⁴ He has kept the promise he made to our ancestors,

and has come to the help of his servant Israel.

⁵⁵ He has remembered to show mercy to Abraham

and to all his descendants for ever!"

⁵⁶ Mary stayed about three months with Elizabeth and then went back home.

*Other readings: Revelation 11:19, 12:1-6, 10; Psalm 45:9-11, 15;
1 Corinthians 15:20-26*



LECTIO:

The Church has chosen this wonderful song of praise today to honour Jesus' mother Mary. In the preceding verses Mary has been told two remarkable things

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by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26-38). Firstly that Mary herself, although a virgin, will give birth to God's Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, that her cousin Elizabeth, who has never been able to have children and is now very old, is six months' pregnant.

We begin with the meeting between the two expectant mothers. Mary knows that Elizabeth is pregnant, and when she sees her it must have been quite evident, but there is no record of Elizabeth having been told about Mary's news. In Luke's account Elizabeth confirms the angel Gabriel's promise to Mary by referring to her as 'my Lord's mother' under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The two women accept the incarnation as a matter of fact.

The simple faith and willingness of both Mary and Elizabeth to believe and embrace God's special plan for them and their babies shines through this passage. Both are aware that God is involved in their pregnancies and show extraordinary faith.

Mary responds with one of the great songs of praise in the Bible. She begins with personal thanks for 'the great things the Mighty God has done for me' (verse 49). Mary then extols the faithfulness and mercy of God in fulfilling his covenant promise to Abraham. There are echoes of Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and the heartfelt cries of Old Testament messianic prophecies. Centuries of hope will very soon be fulfilled through the Saviour born to God's 'lowly servant'.



MEDITATIO:

- What can we learn from both Mary and Elizabeth's response to God? What lessons can we apply in our own lives?
- What can we learn about faith and humility from this passage?
- What does this passage reveal about the nature and character of God?
- How can you serve Jesus?



ORATIO:

Consider the 'great things' God has done for you. Make Mary's song of praise your own this week. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you from it and then respond to God in prayer. You might like to write your own psalm to magnify God and thank him for all he has done in your life.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Reflect on Jesus your Saviour. What has he saved you from? What has he saved you for?

WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

Matthew 16:13-20

¹³ Jesus went to the territory near the town of Caesarea Philippi, where he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴ “Some say John the Baptist,” they answered. “Others say Elijah, while others say Jeremiah or some other prophet.”

¹⁵ “What about you?” he asked them. “Who do you say I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷ “Good for you, Simon son of John!” answered Jesus. “For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”

²⁰ Then Jesus ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Other Readings: Isaiah 22:19-23; Psalm 138:1-3, 6, 8; Romans 11:33-36

LECTIO:

In Jesus’ day many Jews believed that God had promised to send them a Messiah or anointed king who would set Israel free from oppression and establish God’s kingdom on earth. How this would work out in practice was unclear but a new king would certainly be a threat to Herod, the Roman authorities and ultimately to Caesar.

Jesus chooses a remote town, Caesarea Philippi in the far north-east of Israel, to discuss this revolutionary topic with his disciples. Jesus poses the question indirectly by asking who people say the ‘Son of Man’ is. The people think Jesus is a prophet of some kind, maybe John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah but they are not sure. So Jesus asks the disciples what they think.

Peter answers that Jesus is ‘the Messiah, the Son of the living God’. Jesus commends Peter telling him that the Father has revealed this secret to him. In making this declaration Peter is proclaiming his allegiance to God’s new anointed king. However it is important to note that the title ‘Son of the Living God’ was an Old Testament term that reinforced the term Messiah. When giving his reply Peter wouldn’t have understood ‘Son of God’ in the divine sense or thought of Jesus as being part of the Trinity.

Jesus then declares that Peter will be the foundation stone for his new kingdom people, his church. This new community of people who are willing to declare their allegiance to God’s appointed king starts right here with the disciples.

Jesus declares that death will not be able to overcome the members of this new community. Jesus also gives authority, or the keys of the kingdom of heaven, to the disciples. And finally, he insists they keep this revelation that he is the Messiah a secret for the time being.

MEDITATIO:

- How would the disciples have felt after this revelation? Would it have changed the way they listened to Jesus? The mission had now become far more dangerous – Jesus was surely on a collision course with Herod and the Romans.
- Everyone has to answer Jesus’ question, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ What is your response?
- Jesus chose Peter as the foundation for his Church in spite of his human failings. What can we learn from this?
- What do you think about the Church and the authority God has given it? Are you willing to accept authority? Do you exercise it in a godly way?

ORATIO:

Ask God to give you an ever deeper knowledge and love for Jesus. Ask him to help you play your part in your church community.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Reflect on these verses from Romans 11:33-36:

‘How great are God’s riches! How deep are his wisdom and knowledge! Who can explain his decisions? Who can understand his ways? As the scripture says,

“Who knows the mind of the Lord?

Who is able to give him advice?

Who has ever given him anything,

so that he had to pay it back?”

For all things were created by him, and all things exist through him and for him. To God be the glory for ever! Amen.’

FORGET YOURSELF

Matthew 16:21-27

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to say plainly to his disciples, “I must go to Jerusalem and suffer much from the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. I will be put to death, but three days later I will be raised to life.”

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “God forbid it, Lord!” he said. “That must never happen to you!”

²³ Jesus turned around and said to Peter, “Get away from me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my way, because these thoughts of yours don’t come from God, but from human nature.”

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget self, carry his cross, and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ Will people gain anything if they win the whole world but lose their life? Of course not! There is nothing they can give to regain their life. ²⁷ For the Son of Man is about to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will reward each one according to his deeds.

Other Readings: Jeremiah 20:7-9; Psalm 63:1-5, 7-8; Romans 12:1-2



LECTIO:

Having revealed to the disciples that he is the Messiah, Jesus stuns them by saying he is going to be put to death by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. This is the first of three occasions when Jesus speaks about this to his disciples (see Matthew 17:22-23, 20:17-19).

This makes no sense to the disciples. How could the Messiah, the centuries’ old hope of Jewish deliverance be rejected and put to death by their own leaders? How could God allow it? What would be the point? Why would the Messiah suffer? Suffering in the minds of many Jews was still associated with sin and God’s judgement.

Peter, having just been told he is the rock upon which the church will be built, temporarily becomes shifting sand. He voices his fear and frustration to Jesus, ‘That must never happen to you.’ Jesus replies with a strong rebuke echoing the dismissal he gave directly to Satan when he was tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4:10). The strength of Jesus’ rebuke indicates the seriousness of the temptation being placed before him.

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Jesus may well have compounded the disciples’ confusion by going on to talk about carrying crosses and losing your life to save it. We have the benefit of seeing things after the resurrection so Jesus’ words carry the deep truth about laying down our own lives to live for him.

Jesus offers the disciples two glimmers of hope. First he tells them he will be raised from the dead (verse 21) and then he tells them that he will return in glory with the angels when he will judge people according to their deeds (verse 27).



MEDITATIO:

- The disciples must have been very confused by what Jesus tells them here but they don’t give up. What can we learn from this?
- What do you think Jesus means when he says, ‘whoever loses his life for my sake will find it?’ What does this mean for you in your daily life?



ORATIO:

Give thanks that Jesus was prepared to do the will of his Father, even though this involved suffering and ultimately death.

Humbly come before God. Ask for his grace to help you to obey him day by day and live a life that pleases him rather than choosing your own comfort.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Meditate on these verses from Romans 12:1-2:

‘So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God’s great mercy to us I appeal to you: offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer. Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God – what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect.’