

Sunday Gospel Readings with *Lectio Divina*

Year B: Year of Mark

“The Roman Catholic Bishops of Scotland wish to encourage the use of this *lectio divina* resource. This ancient way of prayer, which has the word of God at its heart, is presented in an attractive and up to date way in this resource: bringing from the storeroom of the tradition of Christian prayer things both old and new.”

Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Scotland


“I am delighted to welcome this publication of *Sunday Gospel Readings with lectio divina*. It will be welcomed by many, especially those preparing for Sunday Mass.”

Most Reverend Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Birmingham



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

2 Timothy 3:16-17
Good News Bible





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Sunday Gospel Readings with Lectio Divina Year B: Mark



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Year B: Year of Mark

Advent 2008 – Christ the King 2009

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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AN INTRODUCTION TO 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.



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.*

HEALING TOUCH

Mark 7:31-37

³¹ Jesus then left the neighbourhood of Tyre and went on through Sidon to Lake Galilee, going by way of the territory of the Ten Towns. ³² Some people brought him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and they begged Jesus to place his hands on him. ³³ So Jesus took him off alone, away from the crowd, put his fingers in the man's ears, spat, and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴ Then Jesus looked up to heaven, gave a deep groan, and said to the man, "Ephphatha," which means, "Open up!"

³⁵ At once the man was able to hear, his speech impediment was removed, and he began to talk without any trouble. ³⁶ Then Jesus ordered the people not to speak of it to anyone; but the more he ordered them not to, the more they spoke. ³⁷ And all who heard were completely amazed. "How well he does everything!" they exclaimed. "He even causes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak!"

Other Readings: Isaiah 35:4-7; Psalm 146: 7-10; James 2:1-5



LECTIO:

Jesus solved two problems for this man when he healed him. The man who could not hear or speak was set free to do both. So a man who lived in a totally silent, isolated world, could now participate fully in his community.

His log jam of silence was blown apart by Jesus commanding him to 'open up'. Mark uses the Aramaic word Jesus spoke to give the healing. But it wasn't the choice of a language or a word that enabled the miracle to take place, it was Jesus' divine healing power.

The evangelists make it plain Jesus does not perform miracles by rite, magic or demonic power, but solely by the power of God. God's power at work in Jesus makes healing, forgiveness and deliverance a reality.

Mark is the only gospel writer to record this healing of someone who was both deaf and dumb. It is not clear where this miracle took place but, given the region Jesus was travelling through, it is possible the man was not a Jew. Jesus healed him just the same because the people who interceded for him showed faith. He and his divine power are there to serve and save all men irrespective of nationality or cultural background.

The people are thrilled. They can't contain their joy or approval and they tell everyone about the miracle, despite Jesus' orders!

MEDITATIO:

- What do you think the man thought as Jesus prepared to heal him? Why do you think Jesus took the man away from the crowd?
- Consider the role played by this man's friends. What can we learn from this? Why did Jesus direct the man's friends not to speak about this miracle?
- What are the outcomes from this miracle?

ORATIO:

Psalm 146 is a beautiful prayer extolling God's promises and faithfulness. It is full of hope and expectation listing miracle after miracle. If you can, join in and give thanks for God's miraculous intervention in your own life. Sometimes the answer to a real need seems a long time coming from God. The psalmist reminds us in verse 6 'he keeps his promises'. Don't lose hope, trust in God.

CONTEMPLATIO:

God heals where and when he chooses. Our first reading from Isaiah 35:4-7 offers the encouragement that God will rescue and heal his people. Two of the healings mentioned are fulfilled by Jesus in this single miracle we've read about today.

James 2:1-5 reminds us that God does not judge people by their outward appearance and neither should we. We should love and serve everyone equally and not be influenced by anyone's status.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Mark 8:27-35

²⁷ Then Jesus and his disciples went away to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Tell me, who do people say I am?”

²⁸ “Some say that you are John the Baptist,” they answered; “others say that you are Elijah, while others say that you are one of the prophets.” ²⁹ “What about you?” he asked them. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

³⁰ Then Jesus ordered them, “Do not tell anyone about me.”

³¹ Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: “The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. He will be put to death, but three days later he will rise to life.” ³² He made this very clear to them. So Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But Jesus turned round, looked at his disciples, and rebuked Peter. “Get away from me, Satan,” he said. “Your thoughts don’t come from God but from human nature!”

³⁴ Then Jesus called the crowd and his disciples to him. “If anyone wants to come with me,” he told them, “he must forget self, carry his cross, and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Other Readings: Isaiah 50:5-9; Psalm 116:1-6, 8-9; James 2:14-18



LECTIO:

Wild rumours are flying around about Jesus’ real identity. He asks the disciples who people think he is. Most people liken Jesus to Old Testament prophets, particularly Elijah. Others think he might even be John the Baptist.

Jesus then asks the disciples who they think he is. Peter says he is the Messiah, even though he doesn’t fully understand this. At this point Jesus only wants the disciples to know his true identity, so he commands them not to tell anyone else.

Jesus then gives them an insight into how his mission on earth will end. He tells them clearly that he will suffer and die but three days later will rise from the dead. This doesn’t fit with Peter’s idea of a Messiah so he tells Jesus off!

Jesus firmly rejects Peter’s suggestion and makes it clear that Satan is using Peter. This is human thinking not God’s. Peter clearly has a lot more to learn about Jesus.

Jesus then explains to the crowd just what it means to be one of his disciples. He uses the image of carrying a cross. This would have created a vivid and fearful picture in the minds of his listeners. Many would have seen a condemned man

staggering beaten and bleeding through the streets to face this humiliating and painful death.

Jesus’ words are an alert for the first disciples. If you want to follow me be prepared; it will involve suffering. Some disciples did experience physical crucifixion. Some today still give their lives for the sake of the gospel. For the rest of us, being prepared to lay down our lives to submit completely to God’s will is a daily challenge for every disciple.



MEDITATIO:

- Consider who you believe Jesus is. How complete is your understanding? Can we, like Peter, sometimes be guilty of thinking we know better than Jesus?
- Consider why you follow Jesus. Does it help to remember these reasons when following him involves sacrifice or suffering in some way?
- Jesus speaks of ‘carrying your cross daily’ and ‘losing your life for Jesus and the gospel’. What does this mean for you? Remember Jesus sends us the Holy Spirit to help us live the Christian life.



ORATIO:

Psalm 116 is a great shout of joy for deliverance. The psalmist says ‘I kept on believing’ even though he was crushed and afraid (verses 10-11). Think about your relationship with God; can you use these verses to praise him now?



CONTEMPLATIO:

Isaiah 50:5-9 is often referred to as one of the Servant Songs and is generally understood as prophecy about the suffering of Christ. (See also Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12.) Jesus would have been well aware of these words and doesn’t allow the suffering ahead to stop him obeying God.

James 2:14-18 makes it clear that real faith in Jesus will always show itself not only in words but also in our actions. Faith will spill over into self-sacrificing and practical love for others.

A NEW WAY

Mark 9:30-37

³⁰ Jesus and his disciples left that place and went on through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where he was, ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples: “The Son of Man will be handed over to those who will kill him. Three days later, however, he will rise to life.”

³² But they did not understand what this teaching meant, and they were afraid to ask him.

³³ They came to Capernaum, and after going indoors Jesus asked his disciples, “What were you arguing about on the road?”

³⁴ But they would not answer him, because on the road they had been arguing among themselves about who was the greatest. ³⁵ Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all.” ³⁶ Then he took a child and made him stand in front of them. He put his arms round him and said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not only me but also the one who sent me.”

Other Readings: Wisdom of Solomon 2:12, 17-20; Psalm 54:1-4, 6; James 3:16 - 4:3

LECTIO:

In today’s reading Jesus repeats the teaching to his disciples about his death and resurrection that we read about last week (Mark 8:31-33). It was so important that Jesus made sure they were alone and wouldn’t be interrupted.

Mark reveals the disciples were puzzled and afraid to ask Jesus about the subject.

Perhaps they were afraid they might get a similar rebuke to Peter if they said the wrong thing (Mark 8:33) so decided to keep quiet. Or maybe they just couldn’t handle the implications of what Jesus was saying.

The disciples’ discussion about who is the greatest may have been prompted by wondering who would be their leader if Jesus died. Of course Jesus picked this up straight away. The disciples were too ashamed to confess what they had discussed. Jesus doesn’t wait for them to explain. He simply shows them. But not in a way they would have expected.

Importance within Jesus’ community is achieved through service to others not by imposing power. At that time children had no power and little value. But in

Jesus’ view whoever welcomed a ‘valueless’ person welcomed him and the Father who sent him. Jesus’ view of life and the world’s way can never mix; they are like oil and water.

The disciples’ views had to be shaken up to adopt Jesus’ teaching. Jesus and his Father will be encountered in and through the people society rejects. If the disciples do not change they will still be thinking like the world and not like God. Once again Jesus is saying ‘my way is not and never will be the world’s way’.

MEDITATIO:

- Were the disciples right to be afraid of asking Jesus to explain his teaching? Do you feel able to ask Jesus about things you don’t understand?
- Why did Jesus use a child to illustrate his teaching about being a disciple? What can we learn from this? What additional insights can we gain from Mark 10:13-16?
- Consider the importance Jesus places in our attitudes to serving others. How do you make this a practical part of your life?

ORATIO:

Prayerfully read through Psalm 54. Can you join the psalmist in expressing your reliance on God? Throughout this week repeat verse 4 ‘But God is my helper. The Lord is my defender.’ To which specific situations in your life can these truths be applied?

CONTEMPLATIO:

The Scriptures today compare the way godly people behave with the world’s behaviour. Wisdom of Solomon 2:12, 17-20 shows how the wicked hate the just. They make life difficult for the just because they are a constant reminder of their own failure to do what God wants.

James 3:16 - 4:3 warns us against being jealous or selfish. These ungodly attitudes bring disharmony and all sorts of evil. We need to live by godly wisdom which will bear good fruit.

KEEP FAITH IN JESUS

Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

³⁸ John said to him, “Teacher, we saw a man who was driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he doesn’t belong to our group.”

³⁹ “Do not try to stop him,” Jesus told them, “because no one who performs a miracle in my name will be able soon afterwards to say evil things about me. ⁴⁰ For whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ I assure you that anyone who gives you a drink of water because you belong to me will certainly receive his reward.

⁴² “If anyone should cause one of these little ones to lose his faith in me, it would be better for that person to have a large millstone tied round his neck and be thrown into the sea. ⁴³ So if your hand makes you lose your faith, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a hand than to keep both hands and go off to hell, to the fire that never goes out.

⁴⁵ And if your foot makes you lose your faith, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a foot than to keep both feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye makes you lose your faith, take it out! It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to keep both eyes and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁸ There ‘the worms that eat them never die, and the fire that burns them is never put out.’

Other Readings: Numbers 11:25-29; Psalm 19:7, 9, 11-13; James 5:1-6



LECTIO:

Jesus surprises his disciples yet again. Apparently someone was casting out demons in Jesus’ name. The disciples tell him to stop because he is not one of their group.

Jesus surprises them by telling them not to stop him. The reason Jesus gives is very practical. Someone performing miracles in his name could hardly turn round later and speak against Jesus’ ministry. We’re not really given many details so do not know why this person was not more closely connected with Jesus’ disciples. However Jesus makes it clear that kindness shown to one of his disciples because they are following him will certainly be rewarded.

Jesus then turns his attention to the seriousness of sin. He gives a strong warning to those who cause the young to lose their faith in Jesus (verse 42).

Jesus sums his teachings up by saying don’t allow anyone or anything to cause you to lose faith in him. He emphasises the importance of this by repeating it no fewer than three times. It’s a matter of life or death, heaven or hell. We must keep our lives clearly focused on Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

MEDITATIO:

- What reasons do you think the disciples might have had for stopping the man casting out demons in Jesus’ name?
- What does this passage teach us about how we should deal with temptation and sin? Do we take it as seriously as God does?
- What can we learn about our responsibility to others, especially to children concerning their faith in Jesus?

ORATIO:

As we read and reflect on Holy Scripture it changes us. The Holy Spirit helps in this transition. These verses from Psalm 19 help us to focus on obeying God and keeping free from sin. As you ponder this psalm allow time for the Holy Spirit to open up areas that need to change. If we confess our sins God promises ‘he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing’ (1 John 1:9).

CONTEMPLATIO:

In Numbers 11:25-29 we learn that Joshua reacted in a similar way to the disciples when someone did something he didn’t consider was right. Moses, like Jesus, took the opposite view. We know from previous readings that God is more concerned with our heart attitude.

James 5:1-6 is a warning to people who put their trust in their earthly wealth and who exploit other people. God will judge them. Selfish and loveless actions by Christians may well cause others to lose faith in Jesus and the church. Our personal behaviour must reflect Jesus; thoughtless words and actions can have a significant impact on others.

JESUS' TEACHING ON MARRIAGE

Mark 10:2-16

²Some Pharisees came to him and tried to trap him. "Tell us," they asked, "does our Law allow a man to divorce his wife?"

³Jesus answered with a question, "What law did Moses give you?"

⁴Their answer was, "Moses gave permission for a man to write a divorce notice and send his wife away."

⁵Jesus said to them, "Moses wrote this law for you because you are so hard to teach. ⁶But in the beginning, at the time of creation, 'God made them male and female,' as the scripture says. ⁷'And for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, ⁸and the two will become one.' So they are no longer two, but one. ⁹No human being then must separate what God has joined together."

¹⁰When they went back into the house, the disciples asked Jesus about this matter. ¹¹He said to them, "A man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against his wife. ¹²In the same way, a woman who divorces her husband and marries another man commits adultery."

¹³Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples scolded the people. ¹⁴When Jesus noticed this, he was angry and said to his disciples, "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." ¹⁶Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them.

Other Readings: Genesis 2:18-24; Psalm 128; Hebrews 2:9-11



LECTIO:

This is a well known text in the New Testament and it can also be found in Matthew 19:1-15 and Luke 16:18.

The Pharisees ask Jesus a question about divorce. They want to trap him by drawing him into a controversy over the law of Moses. Jesus immediately asks them what Moses teaches about the subject, making them answer their own question. They quote from Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which permitted a man to divorce his wife if he disliked something about her. There is one condition. He can't change his mind later, marrying her a second time is not an option.

Jesus takes us back to God's original plan and in doing so points to a higher standard. He makes it clear that when a man and woman come together in marriage, in God's eyes they become one and nobody should separate them. So ideally people should not get divorced. It was only permitted under the law of Moses because people 'are so hard to teach'.

On this occasion the disciples do ask Jesus more about the subject. Here Jesus goes further than Moses by saying that if someone who is divorced remarries they are committing adultery. So now Jesus rules out remarriage completely. God sends us the Holy Spirit to help us live as he intended.

Almost in the same breath Jesus highlights the faith found in a child's heart. Simple faith is required to live in the Kingdom of God, the very same faith that is needed to accept his teaching on marriage.

MEDITATIO:

- What do you think about Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage? Do you agree or does it seem too hard for every circumstance?
- What questions would you like to ask Jesus about this subject? How do you think Jesus might respond?

ORATIO:

Psalm 128 lists the blessings of obeying God. With God at the heart of family relationships, blessings can follow for each member of the family.

Jot down some of the blessings you see in your family and give thanks to God for these. On the days when trials and challenges come, look at your list and remind yourself of God's faithfulness.

CONTEMPLATIO:

This week's readings revolve around relationships. In Genesis 2:18-24 God reveals his care by creating a special companion for man, sometimes described as a 'helpmate'. Jesus quotes directly from verse 24 in our gospel reading today.

In Hebrews 2:9-11 we read of Jesus, the perfect leader, who accepted suffering to purify us from our sins and open the way into the Kingdom of God.

TRUE RICHES

Mark 10:17-30

¹⁷ As Jesus was starting on his way again, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?”

¹⁸ “Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked him. “No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not accuse anyone falsely; do not cheat; respect your father and your mother.’”

²⁰ “Teacher,” the man said, “ever since I was young, I have obeyed all these commandments.”

²¹ Jesus looked straight at him with love and said, “You need only one thing. Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me.” ²² When the man heard this, gloom spread over his face, and he went away sad, because he was very rich.

²³ Jesus looked round at his disciples and said to them, “How hard it will be for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God!”

²⁴ The disciples were shocked at these words, but Jesus went on to say, “My children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.”

²⁶ At this the disciples were completely amazed and asked one another, “Who, then, can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus looked straight at them and answered, “This is impossible for human beings, but not for God; everything is possible for God.”

²⁸ Then Peter spoke up, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”

²⁹ “Yes,” Jesus said to them, “and I tell you that anyone who leaves home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and for the gospel,

³⁰ will receive much more in this present age. He will receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – and persecutions as well; and in the age to come he will receive eternal life.

Other Readings: Wisdom of Solomon 7:7-11; Psalm 90:12-17; Hebrews 4:12-13



LECTIO:

The man in today’s reading raises a profound question when he asks Jesus what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus questions him to check his sincerity.

We learn that he has obeyed all God’s commandments since he was young. Jesus then poses the real question: can you give up all of your wealth for me? Jesus knew this man was very rich and his question reveals this fact to everyone. The man is unwilling to obey Jesus’ demand for him to give up this wealth. The man turns away sadly from Jesus and his invitation to become one of his followers.

Jesus uses this incident to teach his disciples. He tells them how hard it is for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God. The disciples are shocked. From the Old Testament, riches were generally seen as a sign of God’s blessing. This threw the Kingdom of God into a whole new light.

Jesus then reinforces his point. In many manuscripts the last part of verse 24 reads ‘how hard it is for those who trust in riches’. Jesus then uses a comparison with something that is impossible, to bring the disciples to the point he wants them to reach: we can’t save ourselves, only God can save us.

MEDITATIO:

- Why were the disciples shocked by Jesus’ words to the rich man?
- What was Jesus asking of this man?
- What does this reading have to say about the cost of following Jesus?
- Does this passage teach us that living a good moral life is not enough? What is needed for us to receive eternal life?

ORATIO:

Psalm 90:12-17 helps us to keep our focus on God. The psalmist asks openly for God’s help and blessing and so can we. However we must ensure we keep our faith and trust in God himself, not the blessings we receive. God is always with us both in the good times and in hard times.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The Wisdom of Solomon 7:7-11 reminds us that God’s wisdom is more valuable than earthly riches.

Hebrews 4:12-13 underlines the power of God’s word to judge our thoughts. How might we apply this to Jesus’ teaching about riches?

A SERVING ATTITUDE

Mark 10:35-45

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus. “Teacher,” they said, “there is something we want you to do for us.”

³⁶ “What is it?” Jesus asked them.

³⁷ They answered, “When you sit on your throne in your glorious Kingdom, we want you to let us sit with you, one at your right and one at your left.”

³⁸ Jesus said to them, “You don’t know what you are asking for. Can you drink the cup of suffering that I must drink? Can you be baptized in the way I must be baptized?”

³⁹ “We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink the cup I must drink and be baptized in the way I must be baptized. ⁴⁰ But I do not have the right to choose who will sit at my right and my left. It is God who will give these places to those for whom he has prepared them.”

⁴¹ When the other ten disciples heard about it, they became angry with James and John. ⁴² So Jesus called them all together to him and said, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the heathen have power over them, and the leaders have complete authority. ⁴³ This, however, is not the way it is among you. If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; ⁴⁴ and if one of you wants to be first, he must be the slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people.”

Other Readings: Isaiah 53:10-11; Psalm 33:4-5, 18-20, 22; Hebrews 4:14-16



LECTIO:

As a good teacher Jesus uses every opportunity to teach on discipleship. John and James’ question opens up the subject of power and leadership. The two disciples ask for the significant positions, either side of Jesus’ throne, when his Kingdom is established.

It was a foolish request to make and showed their immature thinking. Jesus took the question very seriously because it revealed a wrong attitude to power that has no place in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus asks if they are ready to endure the suffering he now faces. Instantly, they say yes. Jesus uses two images to express the suffering he faces. The first is a cup and the second is baptism. Jesus confirms they will indeed experience the same type of suffering as him but this doesn’t mean they can have their request. Only God the Father decides who will sit next to Jesus.

The others are outraged and jealousy erupts. So Jesus talks to the entire group. He explains that in the Kingdom power does not mean dominating others. Power is to be expressed as service to the community or individual. Our actions should help people to meet Jesus so he can redeem them.

Those with power in a Christian community need wisdom and spiritual maturity to ensure they use their power to serve those they are responsible for. Christians with authority in any area of life – family, work, society – should follow Jesus’ example by having a serving attitude.



MEDITATIO:

- What motivated the brothers to ask Jesus for the best places? And why were the other disciples so jealous?
- What do you think about Jesus’ teaching on serving? What is your attitude to serving others? Does it come naturally or do you find it hard to put into practice?
- What do we need to sacrifice in order to serve others?



ORATIO:

Ask God to give you a serving attitude towards others like Jesus.

Prayerfully read through Psalm 33. Choose one or two verses each day to meditate on and bring them to God in prayer.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Isaiah 53:10-11 is a poem about God’s servant, Jesus the Messiah, and the suffering he will endure so our sins can be forgiven.

Hebrews 4:14-16 offers us a tremendous promise. Because of Jesus we can dare to approach God’s throne and receive grace and mercy ‘just when we need it’.

PERSISTENT FAITH

Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶ They came to Jericho, and as Jesus was leaving with his disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus son of Timaeus was sitting by the road.

⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus! Son of David! Take pity on me!"

⁴⁸ Many of the people scolded him and told him to be quiet. But he shouted even more loudly, "Son of David, take pity on me!"

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

So they called the blind man. "Cheer up!" they said. "Get up, he is calling you."

⁵⁰ He threw off his cloak, jumped up, and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

"Teacher," the blind man answered, "I want to see again."

⁵² "Go," Jesus told him, "your faith has made you well."

At once he was able to see and followed Jesus on the road.

Other Readings: Jeremiah 31:7-9; Psalm 126; Hebrews 5:1-6



LECTIO:

Sometimes a noisy child can disturb Sunday worship. People nearby may give the parents a look or say something to get them to stop the disruption.

Bartimaeus discovers that Jesus is near and he wants to get his attention. Because he is blind he cannot see exactly where Jesus is, so he shouts out. The crowd are intent on hearing Jesus so they tell him to be quiet. Bartimaeus will not be silenced. In fact he shouts even louder because he wants to be healed. Perhaps there were others who needed healing in the crowd, but only he took action.

It is interesting to note exactly what Bartimaeus shouts out. Firstly he refers to Jesus as the 'Son of David'. This is in fact a title for the Messiah. So perhaps Bartimaeus believes that Jesus was far more than an ordinary teacher. Perhaps it was this title that attracted Jesus' attention. Secondly he initially asks for 'mercy' rather than for healing.



MEDITATIO:

- What do you think about the people who tried to silence Bartimaeus? Compare this to the way Jesus responded to him. Does this teach us anything about how we should treat those in need?
- How would you describe Bartimaeus's faith? What do you think he believed about who Jesus was and what Jesus could do? What can we learn from this?
- Is it significant that Bartimaeus asked for mercy rather than healing first? What does it reveal about his attitude? Can we learn from this when we approach God?



ORATIO:

The joy in Psalm 126 can almost be touched it is so strong. The first three verses look back to a time of great joy in the past when God saved them. The last three verses are in anticipation of God doing the same again.

Perhaps you too have experienced the joy of 'deliverance' from sorrow or pain? Or maybe you are right now calling out to God for 'deliverance'? Whatever point you are at thank God for his faithfulness and mercy. Ask God to strengthen your faith and help you, like Bartimaeus, not to give up.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Today's two other readings continue the theme of God's intervention. In Jeremiah 31:7-9 God promises to rescue his people, including the lame and the blind.

In Hebrews 5:1-6 Jesus appears as the perfect High Priest who understands the needs of his people and intervenes on our behalf so our sins can be forgiven.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Mark 12:28-34

²⁸ A teacher of the Law was there who heard the discussion. He saw that Jesus had given the Sadducees a good answer, so he came to him with a question: "Which commandment is the most important of all?"

²⁹ Jesus replied, "The most important one is this: 'Listen, Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second most important commandment is this: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' There is no other commandment more important than these two."

³² The teacher of the Law said to Jesus, "Well done, Teacher! It is true, as you say, that only the Lord is God and that there is no other god but he. ³³ And to love God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, is more important than to offer animals and other sacrifices to God."

³⁴ Jesus noticed how wise his answer was, and so he told him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God."

After this nobody dared to ask Jesus any more questions.

Other Readings: Deuteronomy 6:2-6; Psalm 18:1-3, 46, 50; Hebrews 7:23-28



LECTIO:

A teacher of the law, who is impressed by the answers Jesus has been giving, asks him what the greatest commandment is. Jesus replies from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 also known as Shema Israel.

Jesus follows the accepted method of Jewish teachers by choosing the most important commandment to sum up all the teaching from the Books of Law: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. In other words this one verse is the foundation and purpose of everything said in these books and everything in them should be interpreted with this in mind. The words used to express the first commandment vary slightly from those recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and you can look up the difference.

Jesus then links the first commandment to a second: loving your neighbour as yourself. This is a reference to a commandment in Leviticus 19:18.

Jesus makes it clear that love must be at the centre of the greatest commandment. Firstly love for God and secondly love for your neighbour. By linking the two together Jesus implies the two must go hand in hand. True religion cannot neglect the social aspect of man's life.

Jesus sets no limits on our love for God and our love for our neighbours must be at least equal to our love for ourselves. Jesus sets a very high standard: we should love our neighbour without expecting to receive or gain anything (Luke 10:25-37).

The questioner agrees with Jesus' answer and makes the perceptive comment that obeying these commandments is our highest priority, more important than the animal sacrifices which were such a central feature of worship at that time.

MEDITATIO:

- Consider what it means practically to obey these two commandments. What are the implications? How can you love God completely? How can you love your neighbour as yourself?
- Which is more important to you: observing religious practices or obeying these commandments? What does this passage have to say about what our priorities should be?

ORATIO:

Ask God to help you love him and others more fully.

Psalm 18 in its entirety lists many of the attributes of God and many promises. As you pray through this psalm look out for what these verses reveal about God's character. What can you discover and build into your faith life?

CONTEMPLATIO:

To amplify what we hear in the Gospel the first reading Deuteronomy 6:2-6 gives the original text to which Jesus refers.

Hebrews 7:23-28 explains why Jesus is our perfect High Priest. No further sacrifices are necessary. Jesus has dealt with our sin once and for all through the sacrifice of his own life, through his perfect obedience to the Father's will.

GOD'S VALUES

Mark 12:38-44

³⁸ As he taught them, he said, "Watch out for the teachers of the Law, who like to walk around in their long robes and be greeted with respect in the market place, ³⁹ who choose the reserved seats in the synagogues and the best places at feasts. ⁴⁰ They take advantage of widows and rob them of their homes, and then make a show of saying long prayers. Their punishment will be all the worse!"

⁴¹ As Jesus sat near the temple treasury, he watched the people as they dropped in their money. Many rich men dropped in a lot of money; ⁴² then a poor widow came along and dropped in two little copper coins, worth about a penny. ⁴³ He called his disciples together and said to them, "I tell you that this poor widow put more in the offering box than all the others. ⁴⁴ For the others put in what they had to spare of their riches; but she, poor as she is, put in all she had – she gave all she had to live on."

Other Readings: 1 Kings 17:10-16; Psalm 146:7-10; Hebrews 9:24-28



LECTIO:

In today's reading Jesus contrasts the behaviour of the religious teachers and the wealthy with a humble widow.

Jesus is watching people dropping their money into the Temple treasury. Many rich people make their gifts but it is the offering of a poor widow that Jesus notices. In monetary terms her gift is tiny, insignificant in comparison to the money given by the wealthy. But in God's eyes her gift is more valuable than anyone else's.

Jesus explained why her gift was so precious to God. The wealthy gave from their surplus; they still had plenty left over to meet their own needs. The widow put in all she had. There was nothing left, nothing for food or anything else. Her gift involved a far greater sacrifice than the gifts given by the rich people.

Mark uses the widow's story to highlight the behaviour of religious teachers. Religious law guided every aspect of Jewish life. These teachers had a lot of power as they taught ordinary people how to live according to the scriptures, especially concerning legal issues from Leviticus and Deuteronomy. They were full of their own importance and abused their power. Jesus highlights their hypocrisy by describing in a single sentence how they took advantage of widows, robbed them of their inheritance while giving the appearance of piety by saying long prayers.

MEDITATIO:

- What do the actions of the widow and the religious teachers reveal about their attitude towards God? What is the role of faith, love and humility here? What can we learn from this?
- What does this passage teach us about our attitude to giving and God's attitude to our gifts?
- What does this passage teach us about judging by outward appearances?
- How do we guard against becoming hypocrites ourselves, saying we believe something when our actions contradict our words?

ORATIO:

Psalm 146 is essentially about who we put our trust in. The only firm foundation is to put our faith in God. God is concerned for the weak and vulnerable in society and we should play a practical part in helping them.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Another widow features in our first reading 1 Kings 17:10-16. She took good care of Elijah in a time of utter poverty in Palestine. Like the widow in the Gospel she put God first. God provided for the prophet and both the widow and her son.

Hebrews 9:24-28 continues the theme of Christ the High Priest who enters 'the tent', or heaven, offering himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. He gave everything and won everything for us. So we must be generous in our self-giving as he was.

COME, LORD JESUS!

Mark 13:24-32

²⁴“In the days after that time of trouble the sun will grow dark, the moon will no longer shine, ²⁵the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers in space will be driven from their courses. ²⁶Then the Son of Man will appear, coming in the clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷He will send the angels out to the four corners of the earth to gather God’s chosen people from one end of the world to the other.

²⁸“Let the fig tree teach you a lesson. When its branches become green and tender and it starts putting out leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹In the same way, when you see these things happening, you will know that the time is near, ready to begin. ³⁰Remember that all these things will happen before the people now living have all died. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³²“No one knows, however, when that day or hour will come – neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son; only the Father knows.

Other Readings: Daniel 12:1-3; Psalm 16:5, 8-11; Hebrews 10:11-14, 18



LECTIO:

When Jesus lived on earth many Jews believed the end of human history had already been decided by God. In today’s reading Jesus provides a little more detail.

After a period of cosmic upheaval, when the sun and moon will no longer shine and stars fall from the heaven, Jesus will appear in the sky in great power and glory. He will send his angels to gather his people together from all over the world. So for Christians the end of history is the beginning of a new experience of life with Jesus. First century Christians eagerly anticipated Jesus’ return and prayed daily, ‘Come, Lord Jesus’ (Revelation 22:20).

We can live in constant hope. On the one hand we long for Jesus to return so we can be with him forever, and on the other we must continue to live faithfully in the here and now of today. We have the future hope that we will be with him and the promise that he may return at any moment to collect us.

Jesus uses the parable of a fig tree and tells us to watch out for the signs which, like the arrival of summer, will be obvious to those who are looking. However no one knows the exact date when Jesus will return – not even Jesus himself. Only God the Father knows.

In the midst of all this upheaval Jesus offers reassurance, ‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away’.



MEDITATIO:

- What difference does knowing this world will end make to the way we live our lives?
- How does this affect the decisions we make? Should it affect the way we spend our time and money?
- Jesus says heaven and earth will pass away but his words will remain forever. What does this tell us about the importance of his words? How much time do we spend finding out just what God has revealed to us through Holy Scripture?



ORATIO:

‘Come, Lord Jesus’, is a powerful prayer. Try praying it regularly and expect to find opportunities to serve Jesus cropping up in all sorts of people and places. In this way you will play your part in hastening Jesus’ second coming and extending his kingdom on earth.



CONTEMPLATIO:

In Daniel 12:1-3 we read a vision of the end of time. In it those who have learned to do right and taught others to do the same are saved. Daniel also points to Revelation 21:27 and the Lamb’s book of the living, which lists everyone who will be saved.

Hebrews 10:11-14, 18 compares Jesus’ priesthood to that of Jewish priests. Both Jesus’ priesthood and his sacrifice achieve everything for us. This is why the promises sketched out in Daniel and confirmed in Mark are so secure.

KING OF ALL CREATION

John 18:33-37

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.”

Other Readings: Daniel 7:13-14; Psalm 93:1-2, 5; Revelation 1:5-8

LECTIO:

These few verses from the passion narrative in John’s gospel describe the encounter between Jesus and Pilate, the Roman governor of Palestine. The Jewish authorities have finally found something to accuse Jesus of that required the death sentence.

But the Jewish leaders had a problem. Yes, they had decided to kill Jesus. But the Romans had taken away their authority to do this legally. They needed Jesus’ death to be very public so there could be no dispute about it. They wanted to put an end to Jesus and his teaching once and for all.

So somehow they had to get the Romans to execute Jesus. Roman crucifixion was a slow and excruciatingly painful death. It was also humiliating with the victim hanging naked on a cross for all to see.

But Pilate needed a political, not a religious reason to execute Jesus. So he asks Jesus if he is a political agitator. Did he claim to be a king? Jesus merely responds with a question of his own: did Pilate decide this question from his own observation or from hearsay?

Pilate is irritated by Jesus’ comment as it was the Jewish leaders who had handed him over. Jesus ignores Pilate’s second question. He goes back to the question about his kingship to clarify it.

Jesus explains his kingship involves truth, truth that he must preach and teach. Our text finishes at this point. But the conversation continues with Pilate asking what Jesus means by ‘truth’? He never finds out because he doesn’t want to listen and falls into the trap set for him by the Jewish authorities.

MEDITATIO:

- What sort of kingship is Jesus hinting at here? In which kingdom is Jesus king? What does this mean for you personally?
- What is the truth Jesus came into the world to speak about?
- How do you listen to Jesus? How much priority do you give to this in your daily life?

ORATIO:

Psalm 93 pictures God the king in all his majesty and glory. The liturgy applies this psalm to Jesus. Make a list of all God’s kingly attributes. Invite the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh sense of awe and wonder as you read these verses. Use them to worship your amazing king.

CONTEMPLATIO:

To enhance our understanding of Christ’s kingship we have another of Daniel’s visions. We can understand Daniel 7:13-14 to refer to Jesus. It gives us great confidence that Jesus’ authority and kingdom will last forever.

In Revelation 1:5-8 John, the author of the Gospel, tells us more about the kingship of Jesus. What more fitting way to draw this cycle’s lectionary readings to a close than by echoing John’s prayer of praise “To Jesus Christ be the glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”