



*Light and
Love in the
darkness*

CELEBRATING AT HOME LECTIO DIVINA FOR CHRIST THE KING

Being the living presence of God
(Mt 25:31-46)

This resource is presented by the Carmelites of Australia & Timor-Leste at a time when we cannot gather together as we usually do to celebrate the Eucharist. We are conscious that Christ is present not only in the Blessed Sacrament but also in the words of the Gospel and in our own hearts. Even when we are on our own we remain part of the Body of Christ.

In the room you decide to use for Lectio Divina you could have a lighted candle and the Bible. These symbols help keep us mindful of the sacredness of our time of prayer.

Lectio Divina has four main stages. The first stage is *lectio* (reading) where we read the Word of God, slowly and reflectively so that it sinks into us.

The second stage is *meditatio* (reflection) where we think about the text we have chosen and ruminate upon it so that we take from it what God wants to give us.

The third stage is *oratio* (response) where we leave our thinking aside and simply let our hearts speak to God. This response is inspired by our reflection on the Word of God.

The final stage of Lectio Divina is *contemplatio* (rest) where we let go not only of our own ideas, plans and meditations but also of our holy words and thoughts. We simply rest in the Word of God. We listen at the deepest level of our being to God who speaks within us. As we listen, we are gradually transformed from within. This transformation will have a profound effect on the way we actually live our daily lives.

As you use this prayer know that the Carmelites will be remembering in our prayer you and all the members of our family at this time.

CELEBRATING AT HOME

LECTIO DIVINA FOR CHRIST THE KING

Prayer

Spirit of truth, sent by Jesus to guide us to the whole truth, enlighten our minds so that we may understand the Scriptures. You who overshadowed Mary and made her fruitful ground where the Word of God could germinate, purify our hearts from all obstacles to the Word. Help us to learn like her to listen with good and pure hearts to the Word that God speaks to us in life and in Scripture, so that we may observe the Word and produce good fruit through our perseverance.

A key to the reading

Our text is part of a long eschatological discourse (Mt 24:1-25, 46) given by Jesus on the Mount of Olives to His disciples privately (Mt 24:3). The discourse begins with the proclamation of the destruction of Jerusalem in order to speak of the end of the world. The two events become confused as though they were one. This part of the discourse ends with the coming of the Son of man with great power and glory. He will send His angels to gather His elect (Mt 24:30-31). Here the chronological flow of the events proclaimed is interrupted by the insertion of some parables on the need to watch so as not to be caught by surprise at the coming of the Son of man (Mt 24:24-25,30). The eschatological discourse comes to its literary and theological peak in our text. This text ties up with (Mt 24:30-31) and speaks once more of the coming of the Son of man accompanied by His angels. The gathering of the elect here takes the form of a final judgment.

Read (Matthew 25:31-46)

Jesus said to his disciples, 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All the nations will be assembled before him and he will separate men one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, 'Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me.' Then the virtuous will say to him in reply, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed

you or see you thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?' And the King will answer, 'I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.'

Then he will say to those on his left hand, "Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you never gave me food, I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink, I was a stranger and you never made me welcome, lacking clothes and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you never visited me." Then it will be their turn to ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or lacking clothes, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?" Then he will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me." And they will go away to eternal punishment, and the upright to eternal life.

Reflect

Spend a few moments in quiet reflection

Comment

The Son of Man

The Son of man is a Semitic expression that simply means a human being (see for instance the parallelism between "man" and "son of man" in Psalm 8:5).

The book of Ezekiel often uses this term with this meaning when God addresses Himself to the prophet as "son of man" (Mt 2:1, 3, 6, 8; 3: 1, 2, 4, 10, 16+) in order to emphasize the distance between God who is transcendent and the prophet who is but a man. However, in Daniel 7:13-14 the expression acquires a special meaning. The prophet sees "coming on the clouds of heaven, one like a son of man" who receives from God "sovereignty, glory and kingship". This text is still talking of a human being, however, who is introduced into the sphere of God. The text has been interpreted both in a personal and a collective sense, but always in a messianic sense. Thus, whether we are dealing with one person or with all of the People of God, the Son of man is the Messiah who gives rise to the Realm of God, an eternal and universal realm. The application of the term "Son of man" to Jesus as it is

used in Daniel 7:13-14 is very common in the Gospels. We also find it in Acts 7:56 and the Apocalypse 1:13 and 14:14. Scholars think that Jesus gave Himself this title. In the Gospel of Matthew this term is attributed to Jesus especially when He speaks of His passion (Mt 17:12, 22; 20:18, 28)), His resurrection as an eschatological event (Mt 17: 19; 26:64) and His glorious return (Mt 24:30 and 25:31, the beginning of our text).

Jesus King, Judge, and Shepherd

Matthew also gives Jesus the title of king (Mt 1:23; 13:41; 16:28; 20:21). The kingship of God is a theme very dear to the Bible. Because Jesus is the Son of God, He rules together with the Father. In our text, the king is Jesus, but He exercises His royal power in close relationship with the Father. The elect are “blessed of my Father” and the realm to which they are invited is the realm prepared for them by God, as the passive form of the verb indicates. This form of the verb, called the divine passive, is often found in the Bible and always has God as its implicit subject. In this text, the realm points to eternal life. In Daniel 7 (see especially verses 22, 26 and 27) and in our text, the royal status of the Son of man is connected with the judgment. The king, especially in ancient times, was always considered the supreme judge. The judgment that Jesus exercises is a universal judgment, a judgment that involves all peoples (see v.32). And yet it is not a collective judgment. It is not the peoples that are judged but individual persons. In the same way, the pastoral symbolism is connected with royal status. In ancient times, the king was often presented as shepherd of his people. The Old Testament also speaks of God, king of Israel, as shepherd (see for instance Psalm 23, Is 40:11; Ez 34) and the New Testament applies the title to Jesus (Mt 9:36; 26:31; Jn 10) as well. The shepherds of the Holy Land, in the time of Jesus, shepherded mixed flocks of sheep and goats. However, at night they were separated because sheep sleep in the open while goats prefer to sleep under shelter. In our text the sheep represent the elect because of their valuation over goats and because of their white colour that often stands for salvation in the Bible.

The Least of My Brethren

Traditionally, this Gospel passage was interpreted to mean that Jesus identified himself with the poor and marginalized. Jesus will judge everyone, and especially those who have not had the chance to know his Gospel, according to the mercy they have shown towards the needy. All have the opportunity to welcome or reject him, if not personally, at least in the person of the needy with whom Jesus identifies himself. Modern exegesis tends to read the text in a more ecclesiastical sense. It is placed next to Matthew 10:40-42 and exegetes

insist that it is not a question of philanthropy but of a response to the Gospel of the Realm that is spread by Jesus’ brethren, even the most insignificant of them, and not only by the leaders of the Church. The nations (the pagans) are therefore invited to welcome the disciples of Jesus who preach the Gospel to them and suffer for its sake, as if they were welcoming Jesus Himself. Christians, on their part, are invited to practice generous hospitality towards their brothers who are itinerant preachers of the Gospel and who suffer persecution (see 2Jn 5-8). In this manner, they would show the authenticity of their commitment as disciples. In the context of Matthew’s Gospel, this latter interpretation is probably more accurate. However, in the context of the whole of the Bible (see for instance Is 58:7; Jer 2:1-9; 1Jn 3:16-19) the first interpretation cannot be set aside entirely.

Final Prayer

Lord God, you have set Jesus, your Son, to be universal king and judge. He will come at the end of time to judge all the nations. He comes to us every day in a thousand ways and asks us to welcome him. We meet him in the Word and in the broken bread. But we also meet him in our broken brothers and sisters, disfigured by hunger, oppression, injustice, sickness and the stigma of our society. Open our hearts that we may welcome him today in our lives so that we may be welcomed by him in the eternity of his realm. We ask this through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

