



*Light and  
Love in the  
darkness*

## CELEBRATING AT HOME LECTIO DIVINA FOR ASCENSION SUNDAY

*Called, chosen, sent  
to be God's heart  
in the world (Mt 28:16-20)*

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 ASCENSION SUNDAY

### Prayer

Father, Christ your Son is already pleading for us, but through your Word, which is life for us, you also grant us the grace of opening our hearts to you in deep, intense, true and enlightened prayer. Send us the Consoler, the Spirit of truth, not only that he may dwell beside us, but that he may always dwell within our hearts. He is the fire of love that unites you with Jesus, the kiss that you exchange always. Grant that, through your Word, we too may enter into this love and live by it. Touch our spirit, our mind and all our being that we may welcome the commandments, hidden in these few verses; that we may keep them, that is, live them fully and in truth in your presence and that of our brothers and sisters. Amen.

### A key to the reading

The text reports the last words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. This is like a testament, his last wish for the community, that which is uppermost in his mind. In our reading, let us try to pay attention to the following: What does Jesus insist on most in his final words?

#### A division of chapter 14 to help with the reading

Mt 28:16 – Geographical indication: return to Galilee

Mt 28:17 – Jesus' apparition and the reaction of the disciples

Mt 28:18-20a – Jesus' final instructions

Mt 28:20b – The great promise, source of all hope.

### Read (Matthew 28:16-20)

16 Meanwhile the eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them.

17 When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated.

18-20a Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.

20b And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'

### Reflect

A few questions to help in our meditation

- What struck you and touched your heart most?
- Identify the chronological and geographical information in this text.
- How do the disciples react? What is the content of Jesus' words to the disciples?
- What is this "all power in heaven and on earth" given to Jesus?
- What does it mean, "to become a disciple" of Jesus?
- In this context, what does the baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" mean?
- What do the words "I am with you always, even to the end of time" remind us of in the OT?

### Comment

#### The context of Matthew's Gospel

Matthew's Gospel, written about the year 85, is addressed to a community of converted Jews who lived in Syria-Palestine. They were going through a deep identity crisis concerning their past. When they accepted Jesus as the awaited Messiah, they continued to go to the synagogue and to observe the law and the ancient traditions. Moreover, they had a certain affinity with the Pharisees, and after the revolution of the Jews in Palestine against the Romans (65 to 72), they and the Pharisees were the only two groups to have survived the Roman oppression.

From the 80s, these Jewish brothers, Pharisees and Christians, only survivors, began to fight among themselves as to who had inherited the promises of the Old Testament. Each claimed to be the inheritors. Gradually, tension grew between them and they began to excommunicate each other. The Christians could no longer attend the synagogue and were cut off from their past. Each group began to regroup: the Pharisees in the synagogue, the Christians in church. This added to the identity problem of the community of Jewish Christians because it raised serious questions in need of urgent solutions. "Who has inherited the promises of the Old Testament, those of the synagogue or those of

the church? On whose side is God? Who are really the people of God?

Now, Matthew writes his Gospel to help these communities overcome their crisis and to find an answer to their problems. His Gospel is, first of all, a Gospel of revelation showing how Jesus is the true Messiah, the new Moses, the culmination of the whole of the history of the Old Testament and its promises. It is also the Gospel of consolation for those who felt excluded and persecuted by their Jewish brothers. Matthew wants to console and help them to overcome the trauma of the split. It is the Gospel of the new practice because it shows the way to achieve a new justice, greater than that of the Pharisees. It is the Gospel of openness and shows that the Good News of God that Jesus brought cannot be hidden, but must be placed on a candlestick so that it may enlighten the life of all peoples.

#### **Commentary on the text of Matthew 28: 16-20**

*Matthew 28:16* Returning to Galilee

It was in Galilee that it all began (Mt 4:12). It was there that the disciples first heard the call (Mt 4:15) and it was there that Jesus promised to reunite them again after the resurrection (Mt 26:31). In Luke, Jesus forbids them to leave Jerusalem (Acts 1:4). In Matthew they are commanded to leave Jerusalem and go back to Galilee (Mt 28: 7.10). Each evangelist has his own way of presenting the person of Jesus and his plans. For Luke, after the resurrection of Jesus, the proclamation of the Good News has to begin in Jerusalem in order to reach to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). For Matthew, the proclamation begins in Galilee of the pagans (Mt 4:15) in order to prefigure the passage from the Jews to the pagans.

The disciples had to go to the mountain that Jesus pointed out to them. The mountain reminds us of Mount Sinai, where the first Covenant took place and where Moses received the tablets of the Law of God (Ex 19 to 24; 34:1-35). It also reminds us of the mountain of God, where the prophet Elijah took refuge in order to find again the meaning of his mission (1Kings 19:1-18). It also reminds us of the mountain of the Transfiguration, where Moses and Elijah, that is, the Law and the Prophets, appear with Jesus, thus confirming that he is the promised Messiah (Mt 17:1-8).

*Matthew 28:17* Some doubted

The first Christians had great difficulty in believing in the resurrection. The evangelists insist in saying that they doubted a lot and did not believe

in the resurrection of Jesus (Mk 16:11.13.14; Lk 24:11.21.25.36.41; Jn 20:25). Faith in the resurrection was a slow and difficult process, but ended by being the greatest certainty of Christians (1Cor 15:3-34).

*Matthew 28:18* All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me:

The passive form of the verb shows that Jesus received his authority from the Father. What is this authority? In the Apocalypse, the Lamb (the risen Jesus) received from the hand of God the book with seven seals (Ap 5:7) and became the Lord of history, he who must assume the responsibility for the execution of God's project as described in the sealed book, and as such is adored by all creatures (Ap 12:11-14). By his authority and power he conquers the Dragon, the power of evil (Ap 12:1-9). And captures the Beast and the false prophet, symbols of the Roman Empire (Ap 19:20). In the Creed at Mass we say that Jesus ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, thus becoming the judge of the living and the dead.

*Matthew 28:19-20a* Jesus' last words: three commands to the disciples:

Vested with supreme authority, Jesus passes on three orders to the disciples and to all of us: (i) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations; (ii) baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; (iii) teach them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you.

*i) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations:* To be a disciple is not the same as being a student. A disciple is in relation to the master. A student is in relation to the teacher. The disciple lives with the master 24 hours a day; the student receives lessons from the teacher for a few hours then goes back home. The disciple presupposes a community. The student presupposes being present in a classroom for lessons. The state of discipleship in those days was marked by the expression to follow the master. In the Carmelite Rule we read: To live in obedience to Jesus Christ. For the first Christians, to follow Jesus meant three connected things:

- To imitate the example of the Master: Jesus was the model to imitate and to be repeated in the life of the disciple (Jn 13:13-15). Living together every day meant a constant meeting. In this School of Jesus only one subject was taught: the Kingdom! This Kingdom could be seen in the life and practice of Jesus.
- Sharing in the fate of the Master: Those who followed Jesus, had to commit themselves to "stay with him in temptations" (Lk 22:28), and in

persecution (Jn 15:20; Mt 10:24-25) and had to be willing to take up the cross and die with him (Mk 8:34-35; Jn 11:36).

- To possess in oneself the life of Jesus: After Easter, a third dimension was added: “I live now not I but Christ lives in me”. The first Christians sought to identify themselves with Jesus. This is the mystical dimension in the following of Jesus, fruit of the Spirit’s action.

*ii) Baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit:* The Trinity is the source, the end and the way. Those baptised in the name of the Father, revealed in Jesus, commit themselves to live as brothers and sisters in fraternity. And if God is Father, we are all brothers and sisters. Those baptised in the name of the Son, Jesus, commit themselves to imitate Jesus and to follow him even unto the cross in order to rise with him. And the power that Jesus received from the Father is a creative power that conquers death. Those baptised in the Holy Spirit, given by Jesus on the day of Pentecost, commit themselves to interiorising fraternity and the following of Jesus, allowing themselves to be led by the Spirit alive in the community.

*iii) Teaching them to observe all my commands:* For us Christians, Jesus is the New Law of God, proclaimed from on high in the mountain. Jesus is the chosen of the Father as the new Moses, whose word is law for us. “Hear him” (Mt 17:15). The Spirit sent by him will remind us of all the things he taught us (Jn 14:26; 16:13). The observance of the new Law of love is balanced by the gratuitous presence of Jesus in our midst, till the end of time.

*Matthew 28:20b* I am with you always, even to the end of time:

When Moses was sent to free the people from Egypt, he received a guarantee from God, the only guarantee that offers complete certainty: “Go, I shall be with you!” (Ex 3:12). It is the same certainty promised to the prophets and other persons sent by God to undertake an important mission in God’s plan (Jer 1:8; Jud 6:16). Mary received the same guarantee when the angel said to her, “The Lord is with you” (Lk 1:28). The person of Jesus is the living expression of this guarantee, because his name is Emmanuel, God with us (Mt 1:23). He will be with his disciples, with all of us, even to the end of time. Here we see Jesus’ authority. He controls history and time. He is the first and the last (Ap 1:17). Before the first, nothing existed and after the last, nothing is. This guarantee sustains people, nourishes their faith, sustains hope and generates love and the gift of oneself.

### **Highlighting the words of Jesus: The universal mission of the community.**

Abraham was called to be the source of blessings not only for his descendants, but for all families on earth (Gen 12:3). The slave people were called not only to restore the tribe of Jacob, but also to be light to the nations (Is 49:6; 42:6). The prophet Amos said that God not only freed Israel from Egypt, but also the Philistines from Kaftor and the Aramaians from Quir (Am 9:7). God, then, looks after and is concerned for the Israelites as well as for the Philistines and the Aramaians who were the greatest enemies of the people of Israel! The prophet Elijah thought he was the only defender of God (Kings 19:10.14), but he had to be told that apart from himself there were seven thousand others! (1 Kings 19:18) The prophet Jonah wanted Yahweh to be only the God of Israel, but had to admit that he is the God of all nations, even the inhabitants of Niniveh, the bitterest enemies of Israel (Jo 4:1-11). In the New Testament, John, the disciple, wanted Jesus only for the little group, for the community, but Jesus corrected him and said, He who is not against me is for me! (Mk 9:38-40).

At the end of the first century after Christ, the difficulties and persecutions could have driven the Christian communities into losing the missionary impetus and to close in on themselves, as if they were the only ones defending the values of the Kingdom. But Matthew’s Gospel, faithful to this long tradition of openness to all nations, tells the communities that they cannot close in on themselves. They cannot claim for themselves a monopoly on the action of God in the world. God is not the community’s property; rather the community is Yahweh’s property (Ex 19:5). In the midst of humanity that struggles against and resists oppression, the communities must be salt and yeast (Mt 5:13; 13:33). They must proclaim aloud to the whole world, among all nations, the Good News that Jesus brought us. God is present in our midst, the same God who, in Exodus, commits himself to free those who call on his name! (Ex 3:7-12). This is our mission. If this salt loses its savour, what will it be good for? “It is of no use for the earth or for the fertiliser” (Lk 14:35)

### **Psalm**

Hallelujah!

Praise God in his holy sanctuary;  
give praise in the mighty dome of heaven.  
Give praise for his mighty deeds,  
praise him for his great majesty.

Give praise with blasts upon the horn,  
praise him with harp and lyre.

Give praise with tambourines and dance,  
praise him with flutes and strings.

Give praise with crashing cymbals,  
praise him with sounding cymbals.  
Let everything that has breath  
give praise to the Lord!  
Hallelujah!

## Prayer

Lord, you fill me with your love; I abound with joy and deep peace. Through your Word, you have loved me much during this meeting. You have given yourself to me fully; you have neglected nothing in me, my person, my whole life history. Lord, I am because you are; you are with me, within me. Today you have given me a new birth from above, you have renewed me; I know, I see, I feel your own life in me. This is a real Pasch, a true passing from death to life. Thank you, Lord, for your inexpressible love, which covers me, overpowers me and yet relieves and uplifts me!

Lord, I leave behind here my empty, useless, incapable jar and run into the city to call my friends, those whom you love, to tell them: Come you too that you may know Love! Lord, one final thing: let me never betray you. If Love is not freely given, shared, then it fades into the distance, disappears, becomes sick and lonely. Please help me that I may be love.

Lectio Divina for every day of each month can be found on our website at [www.carmelites.org.au/lectiodivina](http://www.carmelites.org.au/lectiodivina).

It is available in PDF format and for your iPhone and iPad and your Kindle device.