



*Light and
Love in the
darkness*

CELEBRATING AT HOME LECTIO DIVINA FOR 23RD SUNDAY

*A family formed by forgiveness
(Mt 18:15-20)*

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 23RD SUNDAY

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

Matthew's Gospel organises the words of Jesus into five great Sermons or Discourses. This shows that at the end of the first century, the time of the final edition of Matthew's Gospel, the Christian communities had already taken on concrete forms of catechesis.

The five Discourses were five great markers showing the way on the journey. They offered concrete criteria to teach people and help them solve problems. The Sermon on the Community (Mt 18:1-35), for instance, gives instructions as to how the members of the community should live together so that the community may be a revelation of the Kingdom of God.

On this 23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time we shall read and meditate on the second part of the Sermon on the Community and we shall see closely two aspects: fraternal correction, that is how to proceed in case of conflict among the members of the community (18:15-18), and prayer in common: how to take care of those who have left the community (18:19-20).

Read (Matthew 18:15-20)

Jesus said to his disciples 'If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: whatever the misdemeanour, the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain the charge. But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a gentile or a tax collector.

'In truth I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

'In truth I tell you once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them.'

Reflect

Spend a few moments in quiet reflection

Comment

Matthew 18:15-16: Correcting the brother and sister and rebuilding unity. Jesus gives simple and concrete norms to tell us how to proceed in case of conflict in the community. If a brother or sister sins, that is, behaves contrary to the life of the community, you must not denounce him/her publicly before the community. First you must speak to him/her alone. Try to find out why he/she acted in that way. If you get no result, then call two or three members of the community to see whether you can get some result. Matthew writes his Gospel in around the 80's or 90's, almost at the end of the first century, for the community of converted Jews coming from Galilee and Syria. If he recalls so insistently these words of Jesus, it is because, in fact, in those communities there were great divisions concerning the acceptance of Jesus Messiah. Many families were divided and persecuted by their own parents who did not accept Jesus as Messiah (Mt 10:21.35-36).

Matthew 18:17: What to do if someone won't listen to the community Traditionally, we have understood the words, 'if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a gentile or a tax collector, to mean that the person should be expelled or excommunicated from the community.

Jesus, however, was notorious for sharing meals with tax collectors and sinners and he called one of them, Matthew, into his inner circle of disciples. At the end of the Gospel, Jesus instructs the disciples not to reject the pagans but to invite them to become children of God. Excommunication doesn't seem to fit either with the sentiments in the Lord's prayer about forgiveness.

The parable of the Lost Sheep immediately before this passage seems to indicate that the church, following Jesus' example, should never give up on any of the sheep, especially the lost ones. It has a responsibility to try to win them back.

Matthew 18:18: Decisions made on earth are accepted in heaven The next verse about 'binding and loosing' extends to the community the power of authoritative decision-making given to Peter and the disciple-leaders in the Gospel of two Sundays ago. It is not about the power to forgive sins. This decision-making follows community discussion and discernment about what is to be done to win back a brother or sister who has become lost.

Matthew 18:19: Prayer in common for the brother or sister who has left the community

If members of the community pray and discern together about how to win back the lost one, their prayer will be heard, even if only two pray.

Matthew 18:20: Jesus' presence within the community Jesus reminds them that whenever members of the community gather in his name he is present with them.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also practise the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.