



*Light and
Love in the
darkness*

CELEBRATING AT HOME LECTIO DIVINA 3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Rejoice! The Lord is near
(John 1:6-8, 19-28)

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 3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Prayer

Father in heaven, our hearts desire the warmth of your love and our minds are searching for the light of your Word. Increase our longing for Christ our Saviour and give us the strength to grow in love, that the dawn of his coming may find us rejoicing in his presence and welcoming the light of his truth. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A key to the reading

The liturgy of the third Sunday in Advent presents the figure of John the Baptist and describes his place in God's plan. Thus, it helps us to find our place and prepares us for Christmas. John the Baptist was a great man, a prophet who had many disciples. Jesus described him as the greatest among those born of woman. Nevertheless, according to Jesus, the least in the kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist (Mt 11:11). John knew this as well. He was praised by others but did not praise himself. When Jesus began to proclaim the kingdom of God, John gave way to him. His disciples, however, did not have this spirit of generosity. They were envious. John helped them to overcome their resentment. It is not easy to cede one's place of leadership to others and collaborate with them for the sake of the mission.

Gospel Reading – John 1:6-8, 19-28

A man came, sent by God.
His name was John.
He came as a witness,
as a witness to speak for the light,
so that everyone might believe through him.
He was not the light,
only a witness to speak for the light.

This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" he not only declared, but declared quite openly, "I am not the Christ." "Well then," they asked "are you Elijah?" "I am not." He said. "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We must take back

an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?" So he said, "I am, as Isaiah prophesied:

a voice that cries in the wilderness:
make a straight way for the Lord."

Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him: "Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the Prophet?" John replied, "I baptise with water; but there stands among you - unknown to you - the one who is coming after me, and I am not fit to undo the straps of his sandals." This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

Reflect

Spend a few moments in quiet reflection

Commentary

The context of John the Baptist's appearance in the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John was written towards the end of the first century. In those days, wherever there were communities of Jews in Palestine and in Asia Minor, there were those also who had come in contact with John the Baptist or who had been baptized by him (Acts 19:3). Outwardly, John's movement was very similar to that of Jesus. Both proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God (Mt 3:1-2) and both demanded conversion (Mt 4:17). There must have been some rivalry among the followers of John and those of Jesus. Thus John's answer concerning Jesus was not just for those sent by the priests and Pharisees in John's time, but also for the Christian communities of the end of the first century. In fact, the four Gospels are careful to quote John the Baptist's words when he says that he is not the Messiah (Mt 3:3,11, Mk 1:2,7, Lk 3:4,16, Jn 1:10-23,30, 3:28-30).

John 1:6-8: John's place in God's plan: to give witness to the light.

The prologue of the fourth Gospel says that the living Word of God is present in all things and shines like the light in the darkness for each

person. Darkness tries to snuff out the light, but fails to do so (Jn 1:15). No one can hide it because we cannot live without God for long. The search for God is born again and again in the heart of mankind. John the Baptist came to help people discover the luminous presence of the Word of God in life. His witness was so important that many people thought he was the Christ (Messiah)! (Acts 19:3, Jn 1:20). Thus, the prologue explains “John was not the light! He came to bear witness to the light!”

John 1:19-21: John's negative witness concerning himself: he is not the one others think he is.

The Jews wanted to learn who this John was who baptized people in the desert and drew people to himself. Therefore, they sent emissaries to ask “who are you?” John's reply is strange. Rather than say who he is, he tells them who he is not: “I am not the Messiah!” He then adds two other negative replies: he is not Elijah nor is he the Prophet. Both figures play a part in the messianic hope. In messianic times, Elijah would return to lead the hearts of fathers back to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. In other words, he would have returned to restore human solidarity (Mt 3:23-24, Si 48:10). The Prophet would bring the work started by Moses to a conclusion. He was seen by the people as the long awaited Messiah (Dt 18:15). John rejects these messianic titles because he is not the Messiah. In this dialogue between John and the Pharisees and the priests, we see the catechesis of the communities of the end of the first century. The questions put by the priests and Pharisees on the meaning of John the Baptist in God's plan are the questions of the communities. Thus, Jesus' replies as written by the Evangelist, are also addressed to the communities.

John 1:22-24: John's positive witness: he is only one who prepares the way. “Why do you baptize if you are not the Christ nor Elijah nor the Prophet?” Those sent by the priests and Pharisees wanted a clear answer because they had to render an account to those who had sent them to interrogate John. It

was not sufficient for them to know what John was not. They wanted to know who he was and what he meant in God's plan. John's reply is a phrase taken from the prophet Isaiah which is quoted in the four Gospels: “I am a voice crying in the desert. Prepare the way of the Lord” (Mt 3:3; Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4; Jn 1:23). In this use of the Old Testament, we see the mysticism that animated the reading of the Sacred Scripture by the first Christians. They found these words expressed their experience of God in Jesus (cf 2Tim 3:15-17).

John 1:25-28: The meaning of John's baptism and person.

In Christian communities at the end of the first century, there were those who knew only of John's baptism (Acts 18:25; 19:3). When they met other Christians who had received the baptism of Jesus, they wanted to know what John's baptism meant. In those days, there were many kinds of baptisms. Baptism was a form whereby a person committed him/herself to a particular message. Those who accepted the message were invited to confirm their decision by means of a baptism (ablution, purification or bath). For instance, through the baptism of John a person would bind him/herself to the message proclaimed by John. Through the baptism of Jesus, one bound oneself to the message of Jesus that gave him/her the gift of the Spirit (Acts 10:44-48; 19:5-6). There is among you one whom you do not know. This statement of John refers to Jesus who is present among the multitude. When John was writing his Gospel, Jesus continued to be present in the communities and among the people, above all in the poor with whom he identified. Today, He is in our midst in many ways. Very often, we do not recognize him.

Closing Prayer

We give you thanks, O God our Father, for your son Jesus who came to raise us up and set us on the right way. You awaken in our hearts a thirst for prayer and loving service, you prepare us for the dawn of the new day of glory. Amen.