

LECTIO DIVINA
WITH THE SPIRITUAL MASTERS

The Gospel of John with St. Augustine

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Compiled and adapted by
Rev. Peter A. Heasley, SThD

TAN Books
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Lectio Divina with the Spiritual Masters: The Gospel of John with St. Augustine © 2025
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“Make knowledge of the Scriptures your love . . . Live with them, meditate on them, make them the sole object of your knowledge and inquiries.”

—St. Jerome



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PUBLISHER'S INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS LECTIO DIVINA?

Lectio Divina, which translates from Latin as “divine reading,” is a traditional spiritual practice in Catholicism involving the contemplative reading of scripture. It dates back to the early Christian monastics and was formalized in the 12th century by a Carthusian monk named Guigo II. The process is designed to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God’s Word.

“Lectio divina is a great river that carries all the riches accumulated over the course of Church history by the fervent readers of God’s Word. ‘Lectio divina’ is never solely our own reading. It feeds on the interpretation of those who have preceded us . . .if we persevere in ‘lectio divina’ and silent listening to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches, our effort will be rewarded by unheard-of jewels and riches.”

—Cardinal Robert Sarah

WHO IS A SPIRITUAL MASTER?

The Spiritual Masters are those saints who have given the Church spiritual guidance applicable to all generations. The sanctity we are striving for is found in their writings and in their witness as faithful, holy Catholics. We sit at their feet, desiring to know more of this inner life of the Trinity that began at our Baptism. We want to grow in holiness and become saints.

WHAT IS LECTIO DIVINA WITH THE SPIRITUAL MASTERS?

In the book of Acts, there is the story of the eunuch who encounters Philip. Philip asks the question, “Do you know what you are reading?” The eunuch responds, “How can I unless someone explains it to me?” Many times, Catholics have a similar experience when reading Sacred Scripture alone or trying to do Lectio Divina. Even faithful Catholics go through dry periods of prayer, where it can even be difficult to bring themselves to intentional prayer time.

Fruitful times of prayer and fruitful Lectio Divina usually depend upon knowledge of Scripture and the strength of imaginative prayer. If these two things are lacking in prayer, we may draw very little consolation or direction from the Holy Spirit.

TAN Books has created a structured approach to the books of the Bible with enriching commentary from the spiritual masters, meditations to draw the reader into the story, and relevant prompts based on the text and the wisdom of the saint to draw the reader up and lead them to contemplation. We want Catholics to pray the Scriptures and practice Lectio Divina with the saints whose spiritual guidance is necessary for our sanctity and growth in holiness.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

THE STEPS OF LECTIO DIVINA WITH THE SPIRITUAL MASTERS

1. LECTIO—READ WITH THE SPIRITUAL MASTERS

The first step is **reading**. Read the passage of Scripture carefully, more than once if needed. You will notice **words in bold** throughout the text. This is to catch your attention because the Spiritual Master will comment on these particular passages. Next, read the **Reading with** _____ section, which is the commentary on that section of Scripture by the Spiritual Master. The Spiritual Master will guide your prayer of Scripture with insights that will spiritually benefit you in your call to holiness.

2. MEDITATIO—MEDITATE WITH THE SPIRITUAL MASTERS

The second step is **meditation**. Building on the Scripture passage and commentary, use your imagination to enter into the Biblical scene in order to prayerfully consider the setting, the people, and the divine action. The *meditatio* section will give your mind material for meditation on both the story of salvation and the Truths of the Catholic Faith. It is through this meditation that you enter the text and discover its further meaning for you.

3. ORATIO—PRAY WITH THE SPIRITUAL MASTERS

The next step is **prayer**. This is your response to the text and meditation. Through prayerful engagement with your needs and intentions, the needs and intentions of others, and the text, offer your prayers to the Trinity through the intercession of Our Lady and the Spiritual Master. The questions in this section seek to guide the reader to deeper devotion, a strengthened will, and an enlightened intellect.

4. CONTEMPLATIO—CONTEMPLATE

Contemplation is a simple gaze of the mind toward Christ and the things of God. Aided by God's grace, you are raised above meditation to a place of resting with God in Truth. Contemplation is:

The enjoyable admiration of perceived truth.

—St. Augustine

Elevation of the mind resting on God.

—St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Simple intuition of divine truth that produces love.

—St. Thomas Aquinas

. . . nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.

—St. Teresa of Ávila

“When we pray, we speak to God; but when we read, God speaks to us.”

—St. Jerome

THE DOUAY-RHEIMS TRANSLATION

The Douay-Rheims Bible is a scrupulously faithful translation into English of the Latin Vulgate Bible, which Saint Jerome (342–420 AD) translated into Latin *from the original languages*. The Vulgate quickly became the Bible universally used in the Latin Rite.

Saint Jerome, who was one of the four great Western Fathers of the Church, was a man raised up by God to translate the Holy Bible into the common Latin tongue of his day. He knew Latin and Greek perfectly; he also knew Hebrew and Aramaic nearly as well. He was 1500 years closer to the original languages than any scholar today, which makes him a much better judge of the exact meaning of any Greek or Hebrew word in the Scriptures. Besides being a towering linguistic genius, he was also a great saint, and he had access to ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the 2nd and 3rd centuries *which have since perished and are no longer available to scholars today*. St. Jerome's translation, moreover, was a careful, word-for-word rendering of the original texts into Latin.

The Latin Vulgate Bible, from St. Jerome, has been read and honored by the Western Church for *fifteen hundred years!* It was declared by the Council of Trent to be the official Latin version of the canonical Scriptures. Hear what the Sacred Council decreed: "Moreover, the same Holy Council . . . ordains and declares that the old Latin Vulgate Edition, which, in use for so many hundred years, had been approved by the Church, be in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions held as authentic, and that no one dare or presume under any pretext whatsoever to reject it." (Fourth Session, April 8, 1546). As Pope Pius XII stated in his 1943 encyclical letter *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, this means the Vulgate is "free from any error whatsoever in matters of faith and morals." And the Douay-Rheims Bible is *a faithful, word-for-word translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible of St. Jerome*.

The Latin Vulgate New Testament was translated into English by members of the English College, Douai, in 1582, predating the King James Version (commissioned 1604, first published 1611). The Old Testament portion that makes up the Douay-Rheims Bible was translated into two volumes in 1609 and 1610 in Reims, France. Thus, the *Douay-Rheims Bible*.

INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL OF SAINT JOHN

Saint John the Evangelist is one of the twelve apostles. In the gospel that bears his name, he calls himself only the “Beloved Disciple” or the “disciple whom Jesus loved”, and especially so when he demonstrates affective love for Our Lord: when leaning at his breast at the Last Supper (John 13:23); by standing at the foot of the Cross with Mary (John 19:26); when, at the good news of Mary Magdalene, he races with Peter to the empty tomb (John 20:2); when he tells Peter he recognizes Jesus on the shore of Galilee after the resurrection (John 21:7); when Peter, himself in intimate conversation with Jesus on the shore of Galilee, asks about John’s fate (John 21:20). The author of the fourth gospel identifies himself as this very disciple in its second to last verse (John 21:24).

John is brother to James the Greater, and Jesus calls the brothers the “Sons of Thunder” no doubt due to their passionate temperament (Mark 3:17). The one who leans his head at the breast of Jesus is no wilting lily: with his brother, James, he leaves their father immediately at the calling of Jesus to become fishers of men (Matt. 4:21–22); John zealously tries to forbid a non-follower from performing exorcisms in Jesus’s name (Luke 9:49–50); James and John want to call down fire from heaven against a Samaritan town that does not receive Jesus (Luke 9:51–56); at their mother’s instigation, they declare boldly to Jesus that they can drink the chalice of his suffering (Matt. 20:20–28). With Peter and James, John is a witness to the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–13) and to the raising of Jairus’s daughter (Mark 5:35–43); Jesus also draws these three men closer to himself during his agony in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36–46). After Pentecost, John and Peter cure a lame man, are thrown into prison, and speak boldly to the Jewish authorities (Acts 3–4). For good reason does Saint Paul recognize John as one of the three “Pillars of the Church” (Gal. 2:9).

While Peter establishes the Church in Antioch and Rome, and Paul proclaims the Gospel in Asia, Greece, Spain, and Rome, John builds up the Christian community in Judea and Ephesus. In Ephesus, he takes care of the Blessed Virgin Mary until her assumption into heaven, just as Jesus commands him to do (John 19:26–27). From Ephesus, John writes his gospel and three short letters (1–3 John). These letters speak about moral problems and the coming antichrist. John is no doubt also confronting the rise of Gnosticism, a series of heresies built upon claims of secret knowledge (*gnosis*) that Jesus has left concerning himself, and to which only initiates have access. In response to this, John reminds us of Jesus’s words: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). John’s sojourn in Ephesus is not peaceful—the Roman authorities try to execute the Son of Thunder by plunging him in boiling oil. When this fails, they exile him to the island of Patmos, where he writes the book of Revelation.

John’s legacy continues strongly in the early Church. He takes in as disciples Saints Ignatius of Antioch and Saint Polycarp; the latter, in turn, teaches Saint Irenaeus. John, perhaps because he stands boldly at the foot of the Cross, is the only apostle

not to die a martyr's death. John, most likely the youngest of the apostles, dies around the year 100 AD, in his early nineties. In the antiphons for Lauds on John's feast day (December 27), we celebrate John as a virgin—the only male saint for whom the Church does this.¹ When we read John's gospel, we should understand its author as a man in whom intense zeal is yoked to chaste affection for our Lord Jesus and our Lady Mary. This powerful combination drives the engine of John's contemplation of the Word made Flesh, because it is the very character of Jesus Christ.

John's gospel is an act of contemplation of the character of Christ. Jesus speaks boldly, performs signs, and extends a hand of tender mercy. Action and contemplation come together in Christ Jesus. John models it for us in the very structure of the gospel: the first part, consisting of chapters 1–12, features a series of miraculous signs paired to meditative discourses; the second part, consisting of chapters 13–21, tells of Jesus's passion, death, and resurrection, while our Lord reveals the deep mystery of the Trinity at work. When we read John's gospel, we are reading the character of the Beloved Disciple, who, through a life of active contemplation, becomes like his Lord in every way possible.

—Rev. Peter A. Heasley, SThD

¹ Antiphon 1: “John, the apostle and evangelist, a virgin chosen by the Lord, was loved by the Lord above the others” (*Joánnnes, apóstolus et evangelista, virgo est eléctus a Dómino, atque inter céteros magis diléctus*); Antiphon 2: “To the virgin John, Christ, dying on the cross, entrusted his virgin mother” (*Iste est Ioánnnes, cui Christus in cruce Matrem Vírginem vírgini commendávit*). This fact of John's virtue may help explain the special place of the one hundred forty-four thousand male virgins mentioned in Revelation 14:1–5.

INTRODUCTION TO SAINT AUGUSTINE

Augustine of Hippo was born on November 13, 354 AD, as Aurelius Augustinus to a father, Patricius, and a mother, Monica, Roman citizens of Berber origin. He is North African, born in Thagaste (modern Algeria) and ascends the ranks of late Roman society through a career as a teacher of rhetoric in Carthage (modern Tunisia), Rome, and Milan (by then the capital of the Roman Empire). In Milan, Saint Ambrose becomes a spiritual father to Augustine; Augustine converts to Christianity, organizes a community life for himself and his friends, and after the death of his mother, Monica, returns to Africa. There, he is ordained a priest and then bishop of the city of Hippo (modern Algeria), which he shepherds until he dies on August 28, 430 AD.

In this brief summary of the saint's life, we may be tempted to take his path to holiness as a given. Instead, we should see the work of grace. Augustine, one of the thirty-seven Doctors of the Church, is called the *Doctor gratiae*, the "Doctor of Grace." His more than sixty known works and six to ten thousand sermons treat matters as far ranging as Scripture, music, free will, and the Trinity, and at the core of his teaching is the doctrine of grace. Man is free to attain to the things of God only by God's gift of grace. Augustine knows this truth with agonizing clarity in his own life; in his most famous work, the *Confessions*, he lays bare a pre-conversion life of sexual dissolution and an ambition for fame that leads him, despite his Christian mother's pleas, to adopt the Near Eastern cult of Manichaeism as his religion. From the age of seventeen, he dwells in open concubinage with a woman, and they raise a son, Adeodatus. Augustine abandons her for the sake of a promising marriage with a younger woman but converts, with his son, to Christianity at the prompting of God's grace. Augustine recognizes the free gift of faith that God has given him despite his sinfulness, a gift prepared through many years of unhappy careerism, which nevertheless leads him to Ambrose's embrace, and through the many tears of his sainted mother, Monica.

As a Christian layman, priest, and bishop, Augustine lives in community according to a monastic rule that he himself draws up (and which still serves Augustinian communities today). The strength of spiritual brotherhood lifts him during a priestly career filled with strife: the Visigoths sack Rome in 410 AD, prompting Augustine to write *City of God*; the Vandals lay siege to Hippo in 430 AD, when Augustine dies. All the while, heresy and schism threaten the Church from within. So much of Augustine's homilies, including those on John, are directed against the Donatists, a North African sect that claims one must be re-baptized to rejoin the ranks of the Christian faithful after apostasy. Augustine, truly the Doctor of Grace, teaches the power of "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins," as we profess in our Creed.

With John the Evangelist, we read a man whose intense zeal, joined to tender affection for our Lord, lifts him to the heights of contemplation during a life of Gospel toil and exile; with Augustine's commentary on John's gospel, we read a man who recognizes the power of God's grace to restore him from a life of sexual dissolution and vain ambition and to raise him, likewise, to the heights of contemplation during a life of service to a Church facing the end of civilization as he knows it. Wherever we are on the spectrum of saintly virtue, we can trust that the grace by which Jesus calls

John, and Ambrose begets Augustine, can be ours, for our time, by a prayerful and meditative reading, a *lectio divina*, of these two spiritual fathers together.

Rev. Peter A. Heasley, SThD
Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord, 2025

“The Scriptures are shallow enough for a babe to come and drink
without fear of drowning and deep enough for theologians to swim in
without ever reaching the bottom.”

—St. Jerome



PRAYER BEFORE READING SCRIPTURE

PRAYER FOR KNOWLEDGE OF SCRIPTURE

Lord God, let us keep your Scriptures in mind
and meditate on them day and night,
persevering in prayer, always on watch.
We beg you, Lord, to give us real knowledge of what we read,
and to show us not only how to understand it,
but how to put it into practice,
and to obtain spiritual gifts
enlightened by the teaching of the Holy Spirit,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
whose power and glory will endure throughout all ages.

Amen.

—Origen (c. 185–254)

PRAYER BEFORE MEDITATION

My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here; that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence; I beg your pardon for my sins, and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, Saint Joseph my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me. Amen.

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts and minds of your faithful servants and inflame them with the fire of your Divine love.

LET US PRAY

O God, who by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of your faithful servants, grant us in the same Spirit to discern what is right and enjoy his comfort for ever. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns one God with you and the same Spirit, world without end. Amen.



LECTIO: JOHN 1:1-5

SUBJECT: THE BEGINNING OF CONTEMPLATION

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² The same was in the beginning with God. ³ **All things were made by him:** and without him was made nothing that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

READING WITH ST. AUGUSTINE

Saint Augustine's method in preparing a homily is to engage in a dialogue with his inner self, where the Holy Spirit dwells. He continues this method in his preaching, during which he asks his congregation to search with him. A common motif in Augustine's commentaries is the prompt, "Ask your heart" (*Interroga cor tuum*) (Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1-40*).

Augustine calls Saint John a "mountain" for having reached the heights of contemplation and having understood what he sees above all created things, God within Himself: This mountain "had soared above all the peaks of the earth, soared beyond all the plains of the air, soared beyond the dizzy heights of the stars, soared beyond all the choirs and legions of angels. For, unless he soared above and beyond all these created things, he would never reach the one *through whom all things were made* (John 1:3). You can only have a sense of all that he surpassed if you notice where he ended up" (*Homilies 1.5*).

Augustine invites us, whom God has made through His Word, to meditate with him as creatures: "The one through whom the angel was made is the one through whom the maggot too was made; but the angel's proper place is heaven, the maggot's proper place is earth. The one who created things also arranged them. If he had put a maggot in the sky, you would find fault, if he had wanted angels to be born of rotting meat, you would find fault—and yet that is just about what God does, and he is not to be faulted. For, all human beings born of flesh, what are they but maggots? And from maggots he makes angels." (*Homilies 1.13*).

MEDITATIO

John’s Gospel begins not with earthly events but with eternity: “In the beginning was the Word.” It lifts us immediately to contemplation, calling us beyond what we see and touch to the mystery of God. Augustine, in his homilies, begins slowly, savoring each word, just as we must. To meditate on John’s opening verses is to step into the vastness of God’s light while still walking in the shadows of this world.

It will be our greatest happiness in heaven to contemplate God in Himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Contemplation should not intimidate us on earth. Contemplation is to move beyond our imagination, beyond created things, as John does. It is a gift, one received more perfectly with greater practice, and we practice contemplation with trust, silence, and detachment.

The Son of God is the Father’s contemplation of Himself. The Word made Flesh draws the light of this contemplation down to us (“He that seeth me seeth the Father also”; John 14:9). There is no fault in starting with the flesh and the imagination, then, in what we call meditation. Meditation is the reflection on spiritual things through words and images. To read Scripture prayerfully is to meditate. We may lose focus at times or be distracted; we should accept disturbances peacefully. Our prayer may feel dry and uninspired; we should continue, confident that God gives all prayer as a gift in the times and ways we need it. He will never disappoint us. Our desire to raise our hearts and minds to Him pleases God and prepares a place in heaven for us.

ORATIO

1. Let me look at the blank page. An empty canvas is daunting for every artist and writer. Before any part of creation is made—heaven, angels, earth, humans—God simply is. I gaze upon the blank page the way I imagine God sees the emptiness of creation before He speaks it into existence, with similar love for whatever I will write on the pages of this book that God has for everything He has made.

2. Let me speak with the Holy Spirit, Who dwells in me as His temple. I ask to rest upon Him the way the Father and the Son rest in each other’s gaze. I listen to the conversation that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are having within my heart. I now ask Them what brings light.



LECTIO: JOHN 1:6-18

SUBJECT: PRAYING WITH HUMILITY

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ This man came for a witness, to give testimony of the light, that all men might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but was to give testimony of the light. ⁹ That was the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

¹¹ He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

¹² But as many as received him, he gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in his name. ¹³ Who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John beareth witness of him, and crieth out, saying: This was he of whom I spoke: He that shall come after me, is preferred before me: because he was before me.

¹⁶ And of his fulness we all have received, and grace for grace.

¹⁷ For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

READING WITH ST. AUGUSTINE

Jesus says that among those born of women, none is greater than John the Baptist (see Matt. 11:11). Augustine builds upon this: “Because Jesus was a man in such a way that God was hidden in him, a great man [John] was sent ahead of him; by [John’s] witness, [Jesus] would be found to be more than a man.” John, as the perfection of all prophets, makes his followers see what can only be found in Jesus, the fulfillment of all prophecy (*Homilies 2.5*).

Augustine acknowledges a conundrum: If the world is made by the Word, how do His own in the world not receive Him? And he answers by defining the world in John 1:10 as those who love the world before God (see *Homilies 2.11*).

Augustine: “You were blinded by dust, you are healed by dust; so flesh blinded you; flesh heals you. The soul, you see, had

become fleshly-minded by giving its consent to fleshly-minded inclinations, and that is how the eye of the heart had been blinded” (*Homilies* 2.16).

MEDITATIO

John’s Gospel first lifts us to contemplation, but now he brings us back to the world—the world of sin, longing, and redemption. We are introduced to John the Baptist, not in grandeur, but in humility. His greatness lies not in his own merits, but in his mission: to point to Christ, the Light. John’s superiority to earlier prophets is to point to the Flesh of Jesus and see in it, with God-given faith, the Son of God. The great John points to Christ with an act of humility, “He that shall come after me, is preferred before me” (John 1:15).

John the Baptist is our model, as sinners, for receiving Christ. We are in the world, and we love the world to some degree. Humility is to love another more than ourselves, and we receive the creative Word when we act with humility.

We do not have to become angels to receive Christ. His Flesh is medicine for our flesh. Moses sees God through cloud and fire and radiates fire (see Ex. 34:30). When we meditate on the Word made Flesh, we become more perfect humans, in body, soul, and spirit. We should not be afraid of our sins when we pray and meditate. The immaculate Word of God is not afraid of taking on our nature and paying the price for our sins. He inspires us, as He has inspired the prophets of old, for the sake of making Himself known among us and from within us—not as a reward for past behavior. Not even John, with all his perfections, is justified in this way. It is an act of humility to let Christ dwell within us, and this humility purges us of sin and love for the world.

ORATIO

1. It is time to acknowledge, honestly and without fear, my sins and the limits of my love. Let me list the things I want from this world: success, love, comfort, acknowledgment, satisfaction, and so on.

2. Despite these worldly loves, God has drawn me to this moment of meditation. He wants to shape my heart and mind to receive His

