

LECTIO DIVINA

WITH THE SPIRITUAL MASTERS

*The Gospel of Matthew
with St. John Chrysostom*

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Compiled and adapted by
TAN Books

TAN Books
Gastonia, North Carolina

Lectio Divina with the Spiritual Masters: The Gospel of Matthew with St. John Chrysostom © 2025 TAN Books

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“The Holy Scriptures lead us to God and open
the path to the knowledge of God.”

—St. John Chrysostom,
Conversations on the Gospel of John, 59:2



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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 twelfth 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 US 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 need be. 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, you 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—PRAY 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 would make 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 second and third 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 MATTHEW

Saint Matthew is one of the twelve apostles of Jesus. Little is known about Matthew beyond his identity as the son of Alpheus and his work as a tax collector, a profession despised in first-century Judea. According to the Gospel, Jesus called Matthew directly from his collection booth in Capernaum with the words “Follow me.” With that simple invitation, Matthew rose and became a disciple of Christ.

The Gospel of Matthew stands as the first book of the New Testament, not necessarily because it was written first, but because of the high regard early Christians held for it. Rich in teaching and deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, it is the most frequently quoted Gospel in the early noncanonical writings. Though modern scholars now agree that Matthew’s Gospel was composed after the Gospel of Mark, the Church has long honored Matthew’s structured and theological presentation of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection.

Tradition holds that Matthew wrote his account in Aramaic between AD 41 and 50, likely addressing a Jewish-Christian audience. He sought to persuade his fellow Jews that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, not in the militant, nationalistic sense many expected, but as the spiritual King whose kingdom was breaking into the world through humility, suffering, and resurrection.

After the death and resurrection of Christ, Matthew is said to have preached in lands as far as Parthia, Persia, and Ethiopia, though the details of his later life and death remain uncertain.

Matthew’s Gospel opens with a genealogy, linking Jesus to Abraham and David (Matt. 1:1–17), affirming His rightful place in Israel’s story as both the fulfillment of God’s covenant and the promised Messiah. The birth narrative presents Him as conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and announced as “Emmanuel”—God with us (Matt. 1:23). This theme of fulfillment weaves through the entire Gospel. Even the infant Jesus recapitulates Israel’s history: fleeing to Egypt, returning from exile, and suffering rejection, just as Israel had.

Jesus’s ministry, introduced through the preaching of Saint John the Baptist and His baptism (Matt. 3), begins in Galilee (Matt. 4). From the start, He proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven and calls for repentance (Matt. 4:17). His words are matched by deeds: healing the sick, casting out demons, and forgiving sins. These acts of mercy are not merely signs of divine power, but revelations of the kingdom already present among them.

Central to Matthew’s structure are five major discourses, each followed by the phrase “When Jesus finished these words,” evoking the five books of Moses and presenting Jesus as the new and greater lawgiver. The first and most famous is the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), where Jesus proclaims the Beatitudes and calls for a righteousness that surpasses the scribes and Pharisees. He fulfills the law not by abolishing it, but by revealing its deepest intentions: mercy, integrity, faith, and love. He reinterprets commandments from the heart, anger is akin to murder, lust to adultery, and insists that true discipleship means doing the will of the Father.

Following this is the missionary discourse (Matt. 10), where Jesus sends the Twelve to preach to Israel, giving them authority to heal and cast out demons. Though their mission begins narrowly, it anticipates the broader mission to the Gentiles after the resurrection. Jesus warns of coming persecution, suggesting that discipleship always involves the cross.

The third discourse, the parable discourse (Matt. 13), responds to growing opposition. As Jesus faces rejection from religious leaders and His own people, He turns to parables, veiling the truth from the hard-hearted while revealing it to the humble. These parables, such as the sower, the wheat and weeds, and the net, show the mixed nature of the kingdom: both righteous and wicked are present until the final judgment.

Matthew then turns to the life of the Church. In the church order discourse (Matt. 18), Jesus teaches about humility, care for the “little ones,” forgiveness, and fraternal correction. His followers must protect each other’s faith, seek out the lost, and forgive not just seven times, but seventy times seven.

The final discourse (Matt. 24–25), often called the eschatological discourse, concerns the end times. Jesus foretells the destruction of the temple and His final coming. The timing of this event remains unknown, so He exhorts His disciples to be vigilant and faithful. Through parables like the ten virgins and the talents, Jesus teaches that the true disciple lives in readiness, doing the master’s work until he returns. The last great parable—the judgment of the nations (Matt. 25:31–46)—offers a sobering vision: Christ the King will separate the righteous from the wicked based on how they treated “the least of these.”

The Gospel culminates in the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 26–28). Here Matthew presents Jesus as both the obedient Son and the suffering Righteous One. He fulfills Scripture at every step, goes willingly to the cross, and entrusts Himself to the Father even in agony. His death is not a defeat, but the decisive victory over sin. The earthquake, torn veil, and resurrection of the saints at His death all signal that a new age has begun. His resurrection confirms this, and in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20), the risen Christ sends the apostles to make disciples of all nations, promising, “I am with you always.”

The Gospel of Matthew is deeply ecclesial. While Jesus is the center, the Church is His body, built upon Peter (Matt. 16:18), given authority to bind and loose, and called to continue Jesus’s teaching and mission. Forgiveness, community correction, and sacrificial love are hallmarks of this new people of God.

As for authorship, the traditional claim that the Apostle Matthew wrote this Gospel has long been debated. Modern scholars widely accept that the Gospel draws heavily from Mark, as well as a second shared source known as “Q”—a collection of Jesus’s sayings also used in Luke. Additionally, Matthew includes unique material (often called “M”) that may come from oral tradition or other early Christian sources.

Given the Gospel’s reliance on Mark, and its reference to the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 22:7), it was likely written after AD 70. A plausible setting is Antioch in Syria, a city with a strong Jewish-Christian community that was grappling with the inclusion of Gentiles and the interpretation of Mosaic Law in light of Christ. This background explains Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law

and the prophets, as well as the tension between Jewish tradition and the emerging identity of the Church.

Ultimately, Matthew answers a burning question for his community and for ours: How do we follow Christ in a world between His resurrection and His return? The answer, woven throughout his Gospel, is clear: by doing the will of the Father, living out the teachings of Jesus, and trusting that He is, indeed, “God with us.”

INTRODUCTION TO SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Saint John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople and one of the Church's greatest Fathers, was born in Antioch around AD 347. His father, Secundus, a military officer, died shortly after his birth. His mother, Anthusa, was widowed at the age of twenty. Rather than remarry, she devoted herself to raising her son in the Christian faith, nurturing his intellect and piety.

John was educated under the finest rhetoricians of Antioch, including the pagan orator Libanius. Yet, despite his promise in classical learning, John turned away from worldly acclaim and immersed himself in the study of Scripture and Christian philosophy. Baptized around 367 by Bishop Meletius of Antioch, he quickly advanced in the Church, being tonsured as a reader and studying asceticism under the presbyters Flavian and Diodorus of Tarsus.

When Meletius was exiled in 372, John deepened his spiritual commitment, eventually withdrawing into monastic life. After his mother's death, he lived in the wilderness for several years, including two years in complete silence in a cave. This intense asceticism damaged his health, forcing his return to Antioch.

During this early period, John authored several theological works that reveal his deep love for monasticism and pastoral care. Among them were *Six Discourses on the Priesthood*, a foundational text for Orthodox and Catholic pastoral theology, as well as *Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life* and *A Comparison of the Monk with the Emperor*, in which he exalted the spiritual dignity of the monastic vocation.

In 381, Meletius ordained John as a deacon. During the next five years, he wrote treatises on providence, virginity, widowhood, and Christian apologetics. In 386, he was ordained a priest by Bishop Flavian and began his extraordinary preaching ministry. His eloquence, moral clarity, and depth of scriptural knowledge earned him the title Chrysostom, meaning "Golden-Mouthed."

For twelve years in Antioch, John preached regularly, sometimes daily, offering penetrating insights into Scripture. His homilies on Genesis, the Psalms, the Gospels of Matthew and John, and the Pauline Epistles remain treasures of biblical interpretation. He taught that Scripture must shape not only belief but behavior, and he insisted that true righteousness consisted in doing the will of God in both private life and public witness.

Chrysostom's preaching was not merely theological but practical. He condemned greed, sexual immorality, vanity, and injustice, especially among the wealthy and powerful. At the same time, he labored tirelessly for the poor. Under his leadership, the Antiochian Church fed thousands of widows and virgins daily, as well as the sick, travelers, and orphans.

In 397, following the death of Archbishop Nectarius of Constantinople, John was summoned (largely against his will) and appointed archbishop of the imperial city. Though he preached less frequently due to the demands of his office, his pastoral vision did not waver. He redirected church funds to support hospitals, hospices, and

hostels. He fasted regularly, lived simply, and sought to reform the clergy, insisting that priests must live as models of holiness.

Chrysostom's evangelistic zeal extended beyond the capital. He sent missionaries to Persia, Phoenicia, the Scythians, and the Slavs, and even established a bishopric for the Gothic Church in Crimea. His concern for Church unity led him to reconcile schismatic groups and resist heretical influences, especially Arianism.

He also enhanced the beauty of Christian worship. The Divine Liturgy that bears his name—still used today in the Eastern Orthodox and Byzantine Catholic Churches—is a testament to his spiritual depth and pastoral sensitivity. He introduced antiphonal singing and composed prayers for the healing of the sick.

But his boldness in preaching truth brought powerful enemies. John denounced sin in high places, including the imperial court. He spoke out against Empress Eudoxia for seizing property from a widow, and later, for her vanity and extravagance. Offended, Eudoxia and her allies, many of whom John had rebuked for immorality, convened a council of hostile bishops. This corrupt synod deposed him, and the emperor ordered his exile in 403.

An earthquake in Constantinople that same night was seen by many as divine judgment. Eudoxia, alarmed, quickly recalled the saint. For a short time, he resumed his ministry, giving thanks with the words: "Glory to God for all things." But after renewed accusations, again politically motivated, he was exiled a second time in 404. Soon after, a fire destroyed the great church of Hagia Sophia and much of the Senate building. Eudoxia died the same year, and barbarian invasions followed. Even pagan observers recognized these events as divine punishment for the unjust treatment of the archbishop.

John's second exile led him through harsh climates and constant suffering. From the remote region of Armenia, he continued to guide the Church through letters (245 of which survive today) encouraging bishops, defending the faith, and consoling the afflicted. In 407, while being transferred even farther to the desolate town of Pityus on the Black Sea, he collapsed from illness and exhaustion.

At the shrine of the martyr Basiliscus in Comana, John received a vision of the saint, who told him, "Despair not, brother John; tomorrow we shall be together." After receiving the Holy Eucharist, he died peacefully on September 14, 407, with his final words: "Glory to God for all things."

In 438, his relics were solemnly returned to Constantinople, and his legacy was fully vindicated. His disciple, Saint Isidore of Pelusium, wrote, "The house of David is grown strong, and the house of Saul enfeebled. He is victor over the storms of life, and has entered into heavenly repose."

Although he died on the Feast of the Holy Cross (September 14), Saint John Chrysostom's principal commemoration is observed on January 27, with additional feasts on January 30 (the Synaxis of the Three Hierarchs) and November 13.

A fearless preacher, compassionate pastor, brilliant theologian, and suffering servant, Saint John Chrysostom remains a towering figure in Christian history, whose life and words continue to inspire the faithful to this day.



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
in flame 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: MATTHEW 1:1-17

SUBJECT: THE GENEALOGY OF CHRIST AND VIRGIN BIRTH

¹ **The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham:** ² Abraham begot Isaac. And Isaac begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Judas and his brethren. ³ And Judas begot Phares and Zara of Thamar. And Phares begot Esron. And Esron begot Aram. ⁴ And Aram begot Aminadab. And Aminadab begot Naasson. And Naasson begot Salmon. ⁵ And Salmon begot Booz of Rahab. And Booz begot Obed of Ruth. And Obed begot Jesse. ⁶ And Jesse begot David the king. And David the king begot Solomon, of her that had been the wife of Urias. ⁷ And Solomon begot Roboam. And Roboam begot Abia. And Abia begot Asa. ⁸ And Asa begot Josaphat. And Josaphat begot Joram. And Joram begot Ozias. ⁹ And Ozias begot Joatham. And Joatham begot Achaz. And Achaz begot Ezechias. ¹⁰ And Ezechias begot Manasses. And Manasses begot Amon. And Amon begot Josias. ¹¹ And Josias begot Jechonias and his brethren in the transmigration of Babylon. ¹² And after the transmigration of Babylon, Jechonias begot Salathiel. And Salathiel begot Zorobabel. ¹³ And Zorobabel begot Abiud. And Abiud begot Eliacim. And Eliacim begot Azor. ¹⁴ And Azor begot Sadoc. And Sadoc begot Achim. And Achim begot Eliud. ¹⁵ And Eliud begot Eleazar. And Eleazar begot Mathan. And Mathan begot Jacob. ¹⁶ And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. ¹⁷ **So all the generations, from Abraham to David, are fourteen generations. And from David to the transmigration of Babylon, are fourteen generations: and from the transmigration of Babylon to Christ are fourteen generations.**

READING WITH ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Some orators make embers light up in flame, while others can set water on fire. Saint John Chrysostom arose as an anomaly of nature, a man of “unusual stature,” a man more like an angel than a mortal. His rhetoric is biting and beautiful, a man after Christ’s own Heart. Such a man was given to us by God to ignite that dying flame of faith. Such a man was given to us from eternity to ignite a flame where no flame was warranted. In such a way does St. Chrysostom begin his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew.

Do you think that the introduction to the gospel is devoid of meaning and explanation? St. Chrysostom compares the beginning of the Gospel to the entrance into the vestibule or narthex of a parish: “Stay, seek not to learn all at once, but gently and by little and little. Why it is in the vestibule that thou art standing, by the very porch; why then dost thou hasten towards the inner shrine?” (*Homily 2.2*). What we are about to enter into Sacred Scriptures is entering into the inner Life of God. Preparation is needed before we take on such a sacred task.

After giving us the narrative of all the generations leading up to Christ, St. Matthew divides the generations into three distinct parts. Chrysostom equates these three distinct parts into three distinct waves of error and sin: “he divided the whole genealogy into three parts to shew that not even by the change of their government were they made better, but under Judges, Kings, High Priests, and Priests, held the same evil course. For which cause also he mentions the captivity in Babylon, shewing that neither by this were they corrected. But the going down into Egypt is not mentioned, because they were not still in terror of the Egyptians as they were of the Assyrians or Parthians; and because that was a remote, but this a recent event; and because they had not been carried thither for sin as they had to Babylon” (*Homily 4.1*)

MEDITATIO

Chrysostom leads us through the generations as if we were being led through a reliquary of the forefathers of Christ. Imagine these images being in the narthex of a church, carefully and thoughtfully placed, one after another, to the door of the parish. Imagine seeing these statues, as it were, one after another, gradually leading you deeper and closer to the sacred doors.

At Christ, the doors of the sanctuary open, and a marvelous cathedral lies before your eyes. St. Matthew explains the significance of these ascents into paradise. They are grouped into three distinct categories: the establishment of government, the captivity of Babylon, and waiting for a Messiah in sin. The generations felt as if they were falling into deeper error and sin. The faithful were being backed into a generational and mystical corner. What they did not know is that right behind the corner was a door. And this door was Christ.

ORATIO

1. How often have I omitted gathering my mind before prayers and contemplation, meditating on the sacredness of what I am about to pray?

2. I reflect on the gravity of what God allows me to behold. What God asks is not a grand external show for the wrong purposes, like the Pharisees. No, it starts with an internal disposition of piety and reverence.

3. How can I increase my reverence for the Sacred Scriptures, prayer, and holy places? God, reveal ways to increase my internal piety.

CONTEMPLATIO



LECTIO: MATTHEW 1:18-25

SUBJECT: CHRIST CONCEIVED AND BORN

¹⁸ Now the generation of Christ was in this wise. When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child, of the Holy Ghost. ¹⁹ **Whereupon Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing publicly to expose her, was minded to put her away privately.** ²⁰ **But while he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost.** ²¹ And she shall bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name JESUS. For he shall save his people from their sins. ²² Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying: ²³ *Behold a virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.* ²⁴ And Joseph rising up from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife. ²⁵ And he knew her not till she brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

READING WITH ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

St. Joseph's life is shrouded in mystery. What is known about him are not things that he said. Rather, what is known about him are qualities that often speak louder than words: virtues and actions. The interior life explains one's exterior actions. Joseph was known as a just man. Chrysostom states that St. Joseph exhibited universal justice: "But it should be known, that 'just' here is used to denote one who is in all things virtuous. For there is a particular justice, namely, the being free from covetousness; and another universal virtue, in which sense Scripture generally uses the word justice. Therefore being just, that is, kind, merciful, he was minded to put away privily her who according to the Law was liable not only to dismissal, but to death. But Joseph remitted both, as though living above the Law" (*Homily 4.7*).

Being just, St. Joseph was faced with the stark reality of making a decision. St. Joseph knew of the conception but was equally perplexed by the perfect virtue Our Lady manifested. A sign from God by the appearance of an angel would do two things. First, it

would calm his fear. But it would go far beyond settling his mind at peace: it would add joy.

First, Chrysostom writes: “by saying, Be not afraid, he shews him to be in fear that he had offended God, by having an adulteress; for only as such would he have ever thought of putting her away. . . . Also the account of the Evangelist is beyond suspicion, as he describes Joseph feeling all that a husband was likely to feel. The Virgin also by this was more removed from suspicion, in that her husband had felt jealousy, yet took her home, and kept her with him after her conception. She had not told Joseph the things that the Angel had said to her, because she did not suppose that she should be believed by her husband, especially as he had begun to have suspicions concerning her” (*Homily* 4.11). Chrysostom explains that the fear that St. Joseph is experiencing is the thought of offending God by living with an adulteress.

Second, Chrysostom expounds that fear was changed into joy: Not only does the Angel vindicate the Virgin from all impurity, but shows that the conception was supernatural, not removing his fears only, but adding matter of joy; saying, “That which is born in her is of the Holy Spirit” (see *Homily* 4.10–13).

MEDITATIO

Behold the weather-torn and wisdom-filled face of Joseph, a man who was known for his deep peace. Now, he was in utter perplexity. To his wit, his prudential eyes had rightfully discerned his beautiful wife. She was a completely pure rose, “Halma,” as the Scriptures say, a word not meaning “maiden” as much as “the gaze of men had never touched her” (Jerome *Against Helvidius*). He attempts to sleep at night, but sleep does not come.

Tossing and turning, his mind fumes with two realities that never met each other. On the one hand, he knew Mary to be pure and without stain. Yet at the same time, was there a lingering secret that she had never disclosed to any man? Dare he even think about the possibility, was Mary an . . . adulteress? His mind intensely feared this possibility. If other men knew, what pain would that cause him? Absolutely nothing. Only one thought ascended to the forefront of his mind: by housing an adulteress, would he be offending the Eternal Power? On these thoughts, then, Joseph’s fearful eyes drifted off to the dreamworld.

A heavenly power, a riveting force, seething with flame, juttred into his dream state. It was something of intense light and human form, but unlike any human form. Displacing earth and sky, and all reality between, it was a glimpse at a superior race of creatures: shrouded in mystery and grandeur. Startled by this appearance,

this heavenly being breathed forth the words like arrows into his perplexed heart: “Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name JESUS. For he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:20b–21).

ORATIO

1. Lord, I confess that I have been quick to judge. I’ve formed opinions before hearing the full story. I’ve spoken when I should have stayed silent. Search my heart now and reveal the moments I’ve rushed to gossip or assumed the worst. Forgive me, Lord.

2. Jesus, teach me to listen—not only with my ears, but with a heart formed by Your mercy. When facts are missing or tensions are high, help me interpret all things in charity. Fill the silence not with suspicion, but with trust in Your providence.

3. Holy Spirit, help me to live differently moving forward. Give me the strength to pause before reacting, to ask and understand before assuming. If something troubles me, grant me the courage to seek clarity gently, after patient reflection. And when I hear gossip, remind me to shift the conversation or quietly lift that person in prayer. Make charity my default—just as You are always charitable with me.

CONTEMPLATIO

