

# LENTEN LECTIO DIVINA

FOR FAMILIES



PRAYING WITH SACRED SCRIPTURE

KIM CAMERON-SMITH

# Using This Guide

This guide provides one guided lectio divina for Ash Wednesday and each week of Lent. Each meditation includes a script for you to follow as you lead your children through lectio, but feel free to go “off script”! In particular, if you think the “Going Deeper” sections are too much for your little kids, leave them out.

I also include beautiful sacred art to contemplate with your children, along with background for the artwork and questions you can ask your kids.

God bless you and your family as you begin your Lenten journey together!

Pax et bonum,

*Kim Cameron-Smith*

Catholic author and podcaster



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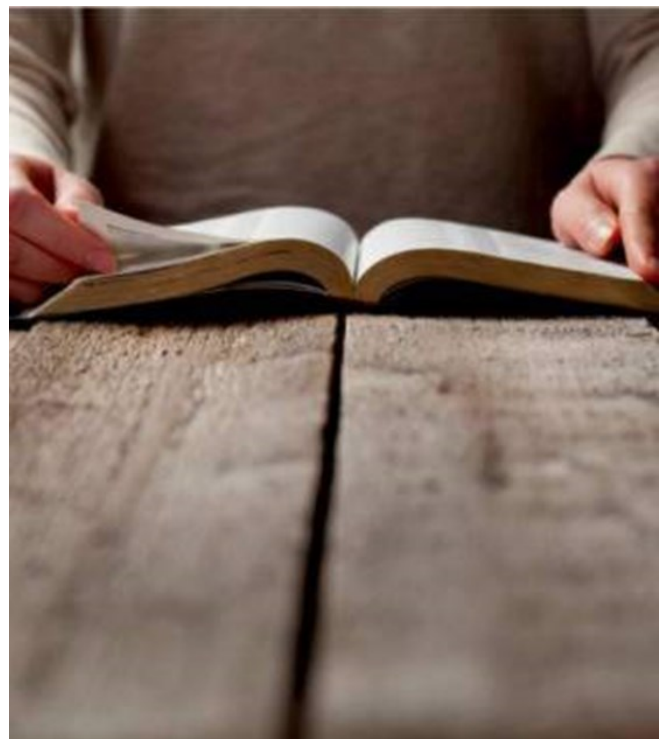
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# Introduction to Lectio Divina

Lectio divina (divine reading) is an old monastic form of meditation on a passage of scripture. As we read the Word of God, we contemplate not only its meaning, but we discern what God is saying to us. As we become more comfortable with lectio, scripture becomes a lens for understanding our daily experiences. We begin to notice the Divine in the ordinary. We are transformed.

Lectio divina is a great way to prepare your family spiritually for Lent. Explain to your children that God wants to be our friend, and friends sit together and chat. He communicates with us in many ways, including through the Traditions of our Church and through Sacred Scripture. During Lent, we can use lectio divina to listen to God talk to us in scripture. God will teach us, guide us, and lead us into a deeper understanding of ourselves, each other, and our purpose in the world.

**Invite:** Light a candle as you begin your family lectio divina. Don't expect perfection and mature piety in your children. Small children benefit from snuggles and encouragement during lectio. If praying together is new in your home, you might encounter complaints and resistance from your big kids. With warmth and firmness, require them to join the family for prayer time. You don't want them to miss it! In particular, the final movement of lectio is important for older children. In this stage, we sit in stillness and silence, allowing the Divine to fill the quiet space in the room.



# The Big Picture

## Basic Steps in Lectio Divina



### Lectio (read)

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A parent or child reads the scripture while the rest of the family listens.

You can use the reading provided in the reflections, or alternatively you can find the same verses in a children's bible.

### Meditatio (meditate)

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A parent or child reads the scripture again.

What words or sections of the passage stand out to you? Does anything in the passage challenge you or comfort you?

### Oratio (pray)

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Pray together as a family. Thank God for any insights you've gained during the meditation.

Offer up any intentions for friends or loved ones who came to mind during the meditation.

### Contemplatio (contemplate)

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Now, sit silently for a minute or two.

In our noisy world, our children aren't used to sitting in silence, waiting for God to speak or for the Holy Spirit to inspire them.

# Evangelizing with Beauty

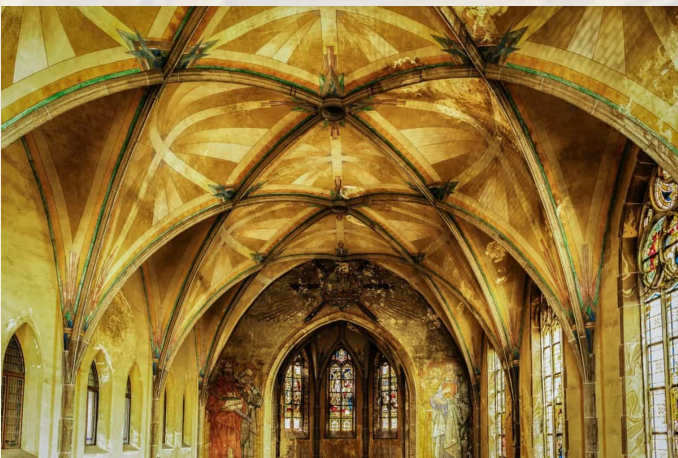
*“Beauty  
will save the  
world.”*

-Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*

Beauty is a powerful evangelizer, especially for children, whose sensitivity to beauty is on-line long before their ability to understand complex theological doctrine or moral arguments. An encounter with real beauty — especially one that surprises them — can awaken in our children a hunger for something more than this world can offer. As C.S. Lewis puts it, “Elegant splendor reawakens our spirit’s aching need for the infinite, a hunger for more than matter can provide.”

When beauty moves our children to wonder and awe, it plants in their hearts questions about the nature of reality, what it means to be a human, and the origin of beauty itself.

We are fortunate to have the Church’s immense treasury of art, music, sculpture, and architecture on which to draw. I’ll share a few of these treasures with you over these next weeks of Lent. Don’t feel pressured to give your children a history lesson about these works of art. You don’t need to be a scholar to introduce your children to great art. Simply contemplate beauty with your children — living with it, wondering about it together.



# Lenten Lectio Divina

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ASH WEDNESDAY

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## Opening Prayer (from the Collect for Ash Wednesday)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grant, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting this campaign of Christian service, so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils, we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### 1. Read

**Parent or child:** Read the following Scripture aloud.

Jesus said to his disciples: “Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will

repay you.

“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.” -Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

### 2. Meditate

**Parent:** Let’s reflect on what God is saying to us in this passage. God’s Word is living and active. He wants to guide us and help us become more holy as we begin this journey together through Lent. Close your eyes and listen to the passage again. What is Jesus saying to you through this his word?

*After the second reading, allow time for sharing:*

- Did anything catch your attention?
- Did any parts stand out to you? Can you relate to anything in the passage?
- What is the big point Jesus is making?

### Explain to your children:

In the passage we heard, Jesus talks to his disciples about almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Do these three things sound familiar to you?

These are the “three pillars of Lent.” These three pillars help us prepare for Easter! During Lent, we meet Jesus in **prayer**; we serve others through **almsgiving**; we practice self-control through **fasting**. We aren’t doing these things because God wants us to suffer. He wants to change us; he wants to convert our hearts so we become more like Jesus.

### Going deeper:

Jesus is talking about certain people who do pray, give alms, and fast. If these people are doing these good things, what’s the problem? What lesson is Jesus trying to teach us? (*The problem is the motivation for the acts. They wanted admiration. They were showing off.*)

As we begin Lent, what can our family do to pray, give alms, and fast? (*If you already have a family plan for the three pillars, review with your kids what you’re doing. If you don’t have a plan, come up with ideas together for how you can increase your family’s prayer, almsgiving, and fasting.*)

How can we offer our prayers, alms, and fasting without showing off or looking for admiration from people? (*Ideas: Try to avoid complaining. Make offerings quietly without bragging about it. Don’t post announcements about our sacrifices on social media.*)

This week, let’s try to share our joy with others without expecting anything in return. Let’s begin our Lenten journey full of gratitude for the gifts of faith, hope, and love!

## 3. Pray

Merciful God, as the holy season of Lent begins, may our hearts turn toward you. Remind us throughout this season of your call to conversion and your unending love for us. May our prayers be open to your guidance; may our fasting be humble; may our almsgiving be generous. [*Allow time for personal petitions.*]

## 4. Contemplate

**Parent:** Now let’s sit quietly in God’s company for a few minutes. Ask God to reveal any fears you have that might keep you from practicing the three pillars of Lent. (*Sit for thirty seconds to five minutes, depending on your children’s maturity.*) Allow time for sharing.

End with the Our Father and the Sign of the Cross.



# Visio Divina

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SACRED SEEING

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# Art to Contemplate

## Two Paintings by Tintoretto



St. Roch in the Hospital (1549)



Apotheosis of St. Roch (1564)

For this week, let's ponder two paintings by the Italian artist Tintoretto. Both paintings focus on St. Roch (1295-1327), who courageously entered plague-stricken cities to tend to the sick. He cured many people by the sign of the cross. He eventually died of the plague. After his death, reported miraculous healings were attributed to his intercessions.

On the following page, you'll find full-page copies of both paintings. Allow your children to live with the paintings before you identify the figures for them. You might like to display one or both of them on a screen throughout the day or print them out and post them in a central location in your home.

Ponder the paintings together. Can your kids tell what's happening in the paintings? What emotions do the two paintings evoke?

St. Roch is in the center of the first painting ("St. Roch in the Hospital"). He wears black religious habit, and his face is framed by a halo. His back is to us as he

leans down to care for the sick. The people look to him, reach to him; he offers them hope when all seems hopeless. He is Christ to these suffering souls.

The second painting (“Apotheosis of St. Roch”) is part of a famous ceiling decoration. “Apotheosis” refers to the way holy men and women transition to heaven upon their deaths; they are taken up in glory because of their beautiful and holy cooperation with God. When we cooperate wholly with grace, we grow in holiness, becoming more like Jesus each day. St. Roch is dressed in red as he is received into heaven after his death. He is shown healthy, muscular, triumphant. Look at God the Father’s open arms! Ask your children what they imagine our heavenly Father might be saying to St. Roch.

During Lent, may we follow the example of St. Roch, who never tired of loving courageously, entering the darkness and chaos of suffering to bring Christ’s love to others. May we offer hope to others who suffer emotionally, physically, financially, or spiritually. We probably won’t be called to enter a plague-ridden city to minister to the sick, but if we pay attention, God will provide opportunities for us to be Christ to others each day, offering what we have, even if it’s a smile, a word of encouragement, or a small act of kindness.





# Lenten Lectio Divina

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FIRST WEEK OF LENT

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## Opening Prayer (from the Collect for Thursday, First Week of Lent)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Bestow on us, we pray, O Lord, a spirit of always pondering on what is right and of hastening to carry it out, and, since without you we cannot exist, may we be enabled to live according to your will. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### 1. Read

**Parent or child:** Read the following Scripture aloud.

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan.

He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent, and believe in the gospel." -Mark 1:12-15

### 2. Meditate

**Parent:** Here, Jesus went into the desert for forty days. Forty days! He wasn't in a fancy hotel. It was like camping, but with no food, water, or even a tent to sleep in. Jesus was alone in the desert. God wants to tell you something in this scripture passage. Close your eyes and listen to the passage again. What is God saying to you through his word?

*After the second reading, allow time for sharing:*

- Which words caught your attention?
- Did anything seem strange or scary?
- Did the reading remind you of anything going on in your own life? A struggle or fear?
- Why do you think Jesus went into the desert?

#### **Explain to your children:**

Jesus went to the desert after he was baptized. Those forty days were like a silent retreat for Jesus; he went there to be with his Father, alone in prayer. He was preparing for his ministry. But Satan wouldn't leave him alone. He was a pest. He tempted Jesus in many different ways, but it only made Jesus better prepared

for his work.

How does this relate to us? What liturgical season did we just begin? How does this story about Jesus and the temptation in the desert help us understand ourselves as we walk through the Lent? (*Your children might mention that we give things up—we fast like Jesus did, and we are in a kind of desert for forty days, too. We are having a long retreat like Jesus.*)

Jesus fasted in the desert. Why do we fast during Lent? What is the purpose? (*The things we give up during Lent are a way for us to discipline our desires so nothing comes in between us and God. Sometimes we have habits that hurt us and others. So we try to surrender these things during Lent. Sometimes these are very good things, but we have a disordered attachment to them, or we surrender them to avoid a disordered attachment.*)

### Going deeper:

We may be tempted during Lent to give up on God. We may think, hey, this whole prayer, fasting, and almsgiving thing—yuck, I don't like it. We may be tempted to return to our old habits and close our eyes to the holy work God is doing in our hearts during Lent. God will send an angel to help us, too, if we trust him.

Have you ever been tempted to do something you know you shouldn't do? (*Allow time for answers.*) Guess what? Temptation is not a sin! Everyone experiences temptations. These are tests. During Lent, we exercise our virtue muscles so we will be extra strong against temptations.

Jesus understands how hard it is. He experienced temptation, too! He got hungry like you. He felt pain, joy, and sorrow like you. When he was a little boy, he even liked to play with his friends, and he had chores to do. Do you think he ever wanted to play with his friends instead of doing chores? Yes. That's why he understands us. You can talk to Jesus about your fears and struggles during Lent.

And you can talk to me, too. I'll always be here if you

have questions, if you are struggling with temptations, or if you feel like your Lenten sacrifices are too much for you.

## 3. Pray

Heavenly Father, we turn our hearts toward you. This Lent, meet us in the desert, showing us where you want to heal us and our relationships. Help us to drink in your love and mercy. We lay before you the hardened, selfish parts of our lives that prevent your nourishing, refreshing words from soaking in. We thirst. We thirst for you, Lord. [*Allow time for personal petitions.*]

## 4. Contemplate

**Parent:** Now let's sit quietly in God's company for a few minutes. What does God want to say to you about your Lenten desert retreat? (*Sit for thirty seconds to five minutes, depending on your children's maturity.*) Allow time for sharing.

End with the Our Father and the Sign of the Cross.



# Visio Divina

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SACRED SEEING

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# Art to Contemplate

“Confession” by Boris Klementiev (1997)



Before showing your children this painting, ask them what they know about the sacrament of Confession. (*When we have sinned, we are cut off from God and we lose the life of grace. Through the sacrament of Confession, we are restored to communion with God and the Body of Christ.*)

Lent is a retreat in a spiritual desert. We look at the places in our lives that aren't working; we let go of things that we love more than God. We surrender ourselves to God so that he can make us more virtuous, more holy, more like him. We go to Confession during Lent to confess serious (mortal) sins that cut us off from the life of grace. We even confess venial sins. Venial sins can wear down our ability to resist temptation. Some of your kids may be too young for Confession. Allow them to see you go to Confession. Explain what you do beforehand (examination of conscience), what happens in the confessional, and share your joy afterward!

In this beautiful Orthodox-inspired painting by Boris Klementiev, a young woman bows her head as she receives absolution during Confession. Ask your children what they think is happening in the painting. What might the young lady be doing? The figures in the background are icons. Why might the artist place icons of our Blessed Mother and other saints in the background? What's happening? (*The young woman is reentering communion with God and the saints as she is absolved of sin. What was broken is now healed.*) Allow your children to enjoy the painting without looking for perfect answers.



# Lenten Lectio Divina

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SECOND WEEK OF LENT

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## Opening Prayer (from the Collect for the Second Sunday of Lent)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

O God, who have commanded us to listen to your beloved Son, be pleased, we pray, to nourish us inwardly by your word, that, with spiritual sight made pure, we may rejoice to behold your glory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### 1. Read

**Parent or child:** Read the following Scripture aloud.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses,

and one for Elijah.” He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; from the cloud came a voice, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.

As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant. -Mark 9:2-10

### 2. Meditate

**Parent:** This passage is about the Transfiguration. Jesus takes his three closest apostles up a mountain to pray. His three friends get a big surprise: Jesus becomes dazzling white and two men from the Old Testament appear with him. Close your eyes and listen to the passage again. Imagine yourself standing with the apostles.

*After the second reading, allow time for sharing:*

What happened in this passage? (*Allow your children to share anything they recall.*) What did you feel when you imagined yourself standing with the apostles during the Transfiguration? (*Allow time for sharing. Ask follow up*

*questions about impressions and feelings your children share.)*

Who appears with Jesus? (*Moses and Elijah*) It's very interesting that Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus at his Transfiguration. Moses was very important in the early history of Israel. He received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai. He brought the **law** to the Jewish people. Elijah was one of the most important Jewish **prophets**. Jesus stands with these two men because he is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. All of Jewish history was preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ!

### **Going deeper:**

What did the voice from the cloud say during the Transfiguration? (*"This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."*) The Father speaks to us here, reminding us that Jesus is the Son of God. He's not just a nice guy or another prophet in a line of prophets. He is God in the flesh. The Father wants us to listen to Jesus because he loves us. He isn't trying to be bossy or mean. We don't always see ourselves the way God sees us; he knows how beautiful we could be if we allowed ourselves to be transformed by him. Lent is all about this transformation. Through God's grace, we can be transfigured and transformed into the best version of ourselves. Isn't that great news?!

What does it mean to listen to somebody? (*To pay attention to their words, advice, or directions. Parents ask their children frequently to listen!*) If our ears are closed to God, we can't hear his messages of encouragement during times of trial or testing. In our last *lectio divina*, we read about the temptation of Jesus in the desert. Angels ministered to him, bringing him messages of encouragement. God wants to do the same for us, but we must be ready to listen.

Are there certain things that help you hear God a little better? Where do you feel close to God? (*Allow time for responses.*) Why do you think it's hard sometimes to listen to God? (*Allow time for responses.*)

We all have fears that prevent us from responding to

what God is saying. We want to pretend like we didn't hear him! During Lent, you can offer to God any fears or concerns you have about listening to him. You can share those fears with me, too. I'm here to help you.

## 3. Pray

Lord Jesus, we want to listen to you, but sometimes we close our ears to your voice or our lives are too noisy to notice you. During Lent, reveal to us those habits or temptations that prevent us from hearing your messages of encouragement, love, and mercy. Transform us, Lord. [*Allow time for personal petitions.*]

## 4. Contemplate

**Parent:** Now let's sit quietly in God's company for a few minutes. (*Sit for thirty seconds to five minutes, depending on your children's maturity.*)

End with the Our Father and the Sign of the Cross.

# Visio Divina

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SACRED SEEING

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# Art to Contemplate

“The Transfiguration” by Raphael (1520)



This magnificent painting was Raphael’s last work before he died on Good Friday in 1520.

What is happening here? We find two different New Testament scenes. The Transfiguration of Jesus fills the upper part of the painting while story of the possessed boy fills the lower space.

In the Transfiguration scene, Jesus raises his hands toward the Father in Heaven while Elijah (left) and Moses (right) gaze upon Jesus. Jesus is suspended in light and billowing clouds. At the feet of Christ are his apostles, from left to right, James, Peter, and John. The apostles shield their eyes from the brilliance of their Lord.

In the bottom scene, the nine disciples who didn’t climb the mountain with Jesus are seen on the left. They are attempting to heal the possessed boy, but it isn’t working. Matthew is in blue, consulting his

books; the boy’s father looks frantic. The scene seems chaotic.

Why would the artist put two seemingly unconnected stories in the same painting? The two scenes are occurring at the same time in the gospels: During the Transfiguration on the mountain, the nine disciples left behind are trying to heal the boy. In the painting, people point to the boy; they seem to be entreating the disciples to help. But a few of the disciples point to Christ. They know Christ is the answer. In the gospels, after Christ comes down the mountain, the father begs Jesus to heal his son, and he does. In desperate situations, we must pray and trust in Christ.

Let your children ponder the painting for a few days. Can they identify the upper scene? What do they think of the colors used for the upper part of the painting compared to the lower part?





# Lenten Lectio Divina

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THIRD WEEK OF LENT

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## Opening Prayer (Adapted from the Collect, Monday of the Third Week of Lent)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

May your unfailing compassion, O Lord, cleanse and protect our family, and, since without you we cannot stand secure, may we be always governed by your grace. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### 1. Read

**Parent or child:** Read the following Scripture aloud.

Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money changers seated there.

He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, “Take these out of here, and stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.”

His disciples recalled the words of Scripture, *Zeal for your house will consume me.*

At this the Jews answered and said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?”

Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”

The Jews said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken.

While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all, and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well. –John 2:13-25

### 2. Meditate

**Parent:** The event in this passage is called “the cleansing of the temple.” What was Jesus cleaning up? (*Allow time for answers.*) At first glance, it might seem that Jesus

went overboard, doesn't it? He was angry with the money changers because they were defiling God's temple. He had righteous anger.

You see, many Jewish people had to travel from far off places to offer sacrifices in the Temple. There were no planes, trains, or buses. They walked the whole way! They needed special animals to offer in the Temple for sacrifice. Instead of traveling all that way with these animals, they purchased the animals when they arrived in Jerusalem. This makes sense. So, some merchants started selling the animals near the Temple. Eventually they were selling them *inside* the Temple. This was wrong. Even more, these merchants would charge really high fees for exchanging the pilgrims' money for the kind of money they needed to buy the sacrifices. So these merchants were taking advantage of the poor people who had no choice but to buy the animals in Jerusalem.

Let's listen to the passage again. Imagine yourself in the scene as Jesus comes in to "clean house"!

*After the second reading, allow time for sharing:*

Did you notice anything new during the second reading? (*Allow your children to share anything they recall.*) What did you feel when you imagined yourself watching Jesus rebuke the money changers? (*Allow time for sharing. Ask follow up questions about feelings and insights that your children share.*)

### **Going deeper:**

Most of the money changers probably started out with good intentions. They saw a way to meet a need — they had animals and the pilgrims needed animals. But they became greedy. They began looking for ways to take more for themselves, even when it hurt others. And the Temple authorities were making money, too, because they rented spaces to these merchants. They were using their positions to make money.

We are all susceptible to this kind of greed. We begin doing something for the right reasons, but then we

begin thinking mostly of ourselves. During Lent, we may decide to do a project for the poor, but we begin imagining how our friends will admire us or how our sacrifice is better or more special than our friends' sacrifices! In so many subtle ways, our pride or greed can creep in, defiling our relationship with God.

## **3. Pray**

Lord Jesus, we want to be loving, generous, and selfless, but sometimes our greed and pride creep in. We wave our arms around wanting to be noticed for the good things we do. We start off wanting to do something good for you for the right reasons, but then our minds start turning, thinking of ways we can gain more pleasure, money, admiration, or recognition. Cleanse our hearts, Lord. We want to do the right thing for the right reasons, for your glory and not ours. [*Allow time for personal petitions.*]

## **4. Contemplate**

**Parent:** Now let's sit quietly in God's company for a few minutes. (*Sit for thirty seconds to five minutes, depending on your children's maturity.*)

End with the Our Father and the Sign of the Cross.

# Visio Divina

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SACRED SEEING

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# Art to Contemplate

“Expulsion of the Money Changers” by Giotto (1306)



In this fresco by the early-Renaissance master Giotto, we see Jesus take an energetic stance against the money changers, who retreat in surprise. Jesus is tossing out the money changers because they were taking advantage of people inside the Temple walls. They were also turning a holy place into a marketplace. The outer Temple was where Gentiles were welcome; they could go no further than this area. It was called “The Courtyard of the Gentiles.” Out of greed, many Jewish authorities permitted a market to operate in this courtyard. On the right, you can see the Jewish authorities, who were concerned about Jesus’s

popularity and message.

Ask your children to look at the figures and creatures in the fresco. Ask them what they think is happening. What emotions they do see in the faces of the people? What might the authorities on the far right be saying to each other? What is happening on the left of the painting? The disciples are looking on, comforting a small child, who clings tightly to the robe of a disciple. Perhaps your children can identify with this child. Look at the animals racing for the nearest exit! Giotto was known for his charming depictions of animals.

Ultimately, Jesus would become the living sacrifice and the new temple. He would suffer, die, and rise again for all, including Gentiles. His Church is one, holy, and catholic—inviting all, uniting all in his body.



# Lenten Lectio Divina

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FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

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## Opening Prayer (from the Collect, Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

May your unfailing compassion, O Lord, cleanse and protect your Church, and, since without you she cannot stand secure, may she be always governed by your grace. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### 1. Read

**Parent or child:** Read the following Scripture aloud.

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved

through him.

Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed.

But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

-John 3:14-21

### 2. Meditate

**Parent:** What stood out to you in this gospel passage? (*Allow time for sharing. This is a complex passage with a lot going on.*) This passage is part of a conversation Jesus has with Nicodemus, a wealthy pharisee. The pharisees were important Jewish authorities. You'll remember that in last week's reading, the Jewish authorities were very worried about Jesus's actions and teachings. Nicodemus is different. He believes Jesus is from God. He

has come to talk to Jesus in secret under the cover of darkness because he did not want to be seen with Jesus. So, Nicodemus comes in darkness because he is in spiritual darkness; he is seeking the light. Close your eyes while I read the passage again. Pay attention to references to darkness and light.

*After the second reading, allow time for sharing:*

Did you notice anything new during the second reading? (*Allow your children to share anything they recall.*) What did Jesus mean when he said “the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light”? (*Allow time for answers. Christ is the light that came into the world but some people did not want to see him.*)

### **Going deeper:**

What does darkness have to do with Lent or our relationship with God? (*Allow time for answers.*)

During Lent, we always go to Confession because we are making a special commitment to shed habits that get in the way of our relationship with God. When we sin, we choose darkness. The darkness clouds our judgment, making it difficult for us to see ourselves, others, and the truth. The Sacrament of Confession allows us to shed a light on the broken parts of us, so that we can be made a whole again. What a gift!

*(Share with your children your family’s plan for going to Confession before Easter. Ask your older children who can go to Confession whether they are nervous about going. Remind them what happens during Confession, and that the priest will help them through it. Ask your younger children who have not made their first Confession what they know about it.)*

## **3. Pray**

God of Light, we ask that you draw us out of darkness. As a family, increase our awareness of ourselves as your servants. May we work for the good of one another, offering words of encouragement and hope rather than discouragement and spite. Our family wants to be a light to others who live in darkness. By

our love for one another, by our acts of kindness and mercy, may others be drawn to your healing light.

*[Allow time for personal petitions.]*

## **4. Contemplate**

**Parent:** Now let’s sit quietly in God’s company for a few minutes. (*Sit for thirty seconds to five minutes, depending on your children’s maturity.*)

End with the Our Father and the Sign of the Cross.

# Visio Divina

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SACRED SEEING

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# Art to Contemplate

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“Christ Instructing Nicodemus” by Jacob Jordaens (17th century)

Jacob Jordaens was a Flemish painter and tapestry designer. He is known for his use of warm and vibrant colors and the strong contrasts of light and shade in his work. His paintings tend to be crowded with figures. All of these attributes can be seen in this week’s painting, “Christ Instructing Nicodemus.”

Here, Jesus speaks to Nicodemus, an important Jewish authority who senses Jesus is from God. Nicodemus is on the right; the apostles are in the background. Nicodemus has come to speak to



Jesus under the cover of darkness, for other Jewish authorities were angered by Jesus’s teaching. Notice how bright Jesus is in the painting compared to Nicodemus. Nicodemus is seeking the light., but he is still a bit in the dark. His face is curious and open to Jesus, but he is doesn’t understand Jesus fully.

Ask your children to study the painting. Who is in this painting? What are they doing? Read John 3:19-21: “And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.” Ask your children to look at the faces of Nicodemus and Jesus. How would they describe their

moods?

In a prominent place in your home, post the full-page copy of the painting (found on the next page). Talk to your children this week about Nicodemus and his searching, curious face. Like Nicodemus, we must turn to Jesus for answers to our hard questions about life. We must gaze upon the light of his face if we want to be wise, holy, and happy.



# Lenten Lectio Divina

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FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

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## Opening Prayer (from the Collect, Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Enlighten, O God of compassion, the hearts of your children, sanctified by penance, and in your kindness grant those you stir to a sense of devotion a gracious hearing when they cry out to you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### 1. Read

**Parent or child:** Read the following Scripture aloud.

The sisters of Lazarus sent word to Jesus, saying, “Master, the one you love is ill.” When Jesus heard this he said, “This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” When Jesus

arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home.

Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise.”

Martha said, “I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.”

Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

She said to him, “Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.”

He became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Sir, come and see.” And Jesus wept.

So the Jews said, “See how he loved him.” But some of them said, “Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?” So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it.

Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the dead man’s sister, said to him, “Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?”

So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me.” And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”

The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, “Untie him and let him go.” Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him. -John 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45

## 2. Meditate

**Parent:** Wow! A lot happened in this passage. What was the one big thing that happened in this episode in Jesus’s life? (*Jesus’s friend Lazarus had died. Jesus and the family of Lazarus were sad. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.*) We often hear the story of the raising of Lazarus during Lent. I wonder why we need to hear it so much. What do you think? (*Allow time for sharing. There’s no right answer.*)

Close your eyes while I read the passage again. Imagine yourself in the story. You might be one of Lazarus’s sisters or maybe you can be one of the disciples.

*After the second reading, allow time for sharing:*

Did you notice anything new this time? Did you notice that Jesus receives word that Lazarus was sick, but he doesn’t come right away? When he finally arrives at the home of Martha and Mary, Lazarus has been dead a few days. His sisters are very upset. Why do you think Jesus waited? (*Allow time for sharing. Jesus wanted to show his disciples the power of God. To teach us that sometimes we*

*have to wait for God’s blessings. He surprises us when we’re least expecting it.*)

### Going deeper:

In the passage Jesus cries out to Lazarus, “Lazarus, come out!” And Lazarus walks out, still wrapped in the burial bands! What would you be thinking if you saw Lazarus walk out of the cave? (*Allow time for answers.*)

In many ways, we can become stuck in a cave, bound up in ourselves. During Lent, Jesus calls us out of our caves. He is saying (*repeat for each of your children’s names*): “\_\_\_\_\_, come out!” He is saying, “Untie them, and set them free.” Jesus wants to set us free from doubt about his love. He wants to set us free from the lies we believe about ourselves—that we are not good enough, smart enough, fast enough. When we trust God, he will surprise us with the unexpected.

## 3. Pray

Merciful God, you are worthy of our complete trust. When we face disappointment this week, may we trust in your compassion and care. When we are filled with doubt and confusion, may we trust in your perfect plan for us. Lead us out of our caves! We trust in your divine will! [*Allow time for personal petitions.*]

## 4. Contemplate

**Parent:** Now let’s sit quietly in God’s company for a few minutes. (*Sit for thirty seconds to five minutes, depending on your children’s maturity.*)

End with the Our Father and the Sign of the Cross.



# Art to Contemplate

“The Raising of Lazarus,” Icon by Anonymous (14th century)

This anonymous Byzantine-style icon is likely dated well before the fall of Constantinople in 1453. We can see Jesus calling Lazarus out of his grave. Notice Mary and Martha at Christ’s feet, desperate and pleading. With his face exposed, Lazarus is alert in his sarcophagus, but the rest of his body is bound in his burial wraps. A man is helping Lazarus remove the wraps while two other men manage to heave the heavy cover of the tomb. I’ve seen similar icons, and they always have these basic elements. The icon reveals Christ’s compassion, power, and divinity.

Put the full-page copy of the icon someplace central in your home. Let your children live with it for a few days. Wonder with them about the icon. Why is Jesus raising his hand? Who is the person wrapped up? What are the two women doing at Jesus’s feet? What do you think they’re feeling?



“JESUS WEPT.”

-JOHN 11:35

Ἡ ΕΡΧΟΜΕΝΗ

ΚΑΤΑΡΤΙΣ



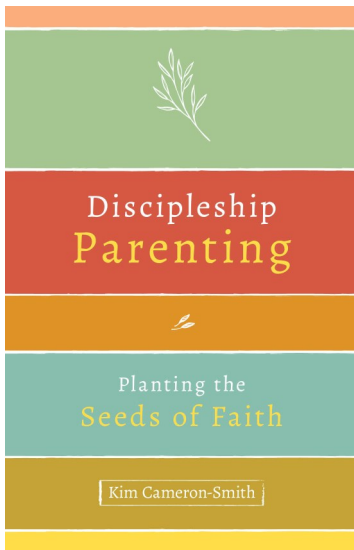
# Learn More!

## Discipleship Parenting: Planting the Seeds of Faith

For more ideas and encouragement for enriching the spiritual life of your home, see my book *Discipleship Parenting Planting the Seeds of Faith* (Our Sunday Visitor)!

As Catholic parents, we have one fundamental mission: to raise children who know and love God. However, the culture often stands in the way of our raising whole and holy children. Sometimes our own failures, wounds, and weaknesses make it difficult to pour ourselves fully into the mission.

In this book, you'll learn how to cultivate nourishing growing conditions in your home so your child's faith can take root and flourish. I also share my perspective as a person who came to parenting with old wounds that still needed healing. I want you to know that you don't have to be perfect to raise emotionally healthy, spiritually vibrant children.



## More Resources!

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