



ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER

ENCOUNTER

THE RISEN JESUS

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

JOHN 20:21

Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed!

Brothers and Sisters,

A very blessed Easter! Look inside the tomb with Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John, and recognize that the greatest news the world has ever heard is astonishingly true: He is not there! He is risen, as he said! Let your hearts be gripped with this incredible proclamation: he has conquered sin and death. Our Lord has descended into the very hell of all that would seek to enslave us and has triumphantly risen from those places, bringing us life and life abundantly.

We are witnesses of a reality that should cause us to tremble in awe and wonder; Christ has risen, and he wants to extend the grace of this resurrection to all. *“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life.”* (1 Cor 15:20, 22)

I write you this letter to introduce the *Encounter the Risen Jesus* resource. Over the past eighteen months, as I have prayed on our desire to set up the archdiocese for a time of apostolic mission, I have been convicted that Jesus’ remarks to the apostles at the Last Supper in John 14-17 are foundational Scripture passages for how we think about mission. I created this resource as a way of praying with these chapters, and a few others, because I want all the faithful to allow the Word of God to shape our minds and hearts. This guide is intended to help with that by inviting all to focus twenty minutes of prayer every day for a week on each of these chapters, with additional reflections on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24), the gift of the Eucharist (John 6), and the Ascension/Pentecost (Acts 1-2).

This resource becomes even more timely as I and the bishops of Colorado have prayerfully discerned that Pentecost, May 23, is the right time to restore the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days for the faithful who lack a serious reason which would prevent them from attending in person. Providentially, just as we are being led back to this invitation from God to encounter him at least weekly in the Mass, my prayer had also been moved to specifically highlight the essential role the Eucharist plays in the life and mission of the Church in this guide. Let us also pray for those who may have become distanced from the Church during this pandemic, and how the Holy Spirit might use us to help bring them home.

Many of you already joined me in our three invitations this Lent: to encounter the lens of the Gospel, to pray and fast for renewal in the Archdiocese of Denver, and to form our consciences, and I thank you for your participation. I consider this resource to be the follow-up, “part two” of my pastoral note, *Our Apostolic Moment* (archden.org/our-apostolic-moment), that issued those invitations. As I wrote there, I believe the critical question in front of us right now is, “How do we build an archdiocesan culture that is set up for and focused on a time of apostolic mission?” I sense deeply that the whole people of God in northern Colorado are being sent on mission to compellingly proclaim the death

INTRODUCTION FROM ARCHBISHOP AQUILA

and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Mission is a calling in every baptized Catholic's life; none of us are excused from this preeminent priority of the Church. It is why she exists. Before strategic deliberations or practical considerations, mission is first about a spiritual conversion, a new way of seeing. Without the new vision this fresh encounter brings, no going out will be possible.

Mission begins first with our encounter with God, an intimate relationship and friendship with Jesus Christ. From this relationship springs a profound realization that the deepest truth of who we are, our very identity, is that we are first beloved sons and daughters of the Father. From this place of awareness of our own "beloved-ness," we are then capable of joyfully going on mission.

Some have used a helpful acronym to remember this truth: R.I.M. - Relationship, Identity, Mission. This progression is the driving vision behind this guide. It is meant to assist you in coming to a more intimate relationship with Christ this Easter season so that you are confirmed in your identity in the Father and are prepared to go on mission to engage the minds and hearts of every soul that resides in northern Colorado.

Here is how I would like you to use your guide and what I invite you to this Easter season. As your archbishop, I ask that you take **twenty minutes** each day, either during your regular prayer time or at an additional time, and open your hearts to what God is saying to you in Scripture. If you have not been in the habit of taking a daily time for personal prayer, this would be an excellent opportunity to begin! You may join me in doing this by focusing on passages of the New Testament that I believe contain wisdom that God wants to speak to our local Church at this time.

To assist us, we will be utilizing the ancient method of *lectio divina*, which offers a simple structure for praying with Scripture. Lectio will help each of us hear the Lord address us personally through praying with the Word of God.

I am recommending only one chapter a week because I want you to pace yourselves. The repetition of praying with only one chapter each day will give space for us to really "chew" on each passage, pondering the insights contained therein and letting them change our minds and hearts. Lectio divina is not so much about "getting somewhere." It is about being quiet to go deeper into the heart of Christ; it is a way of listening closely to the still, small voice of God present in Scripture.

Thank you for journeying with me on this Easter season through this *Encounter the Risen Jesus*. I will be praying that he reveals himself to you in a new and life-changing way.

God bless you this Easter season,
Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila



WHAT IS LECTIO DIVINA AND HOW TO DO IT?

Many Catholics struggle to focus when they pray, especially with not getting much out of using Scripture when they do. With the recommendation to the faithful that all pray with one chapter of Scripture a week through the Easter season to encounter Christ more fully, I want to provide a guide for how to pray with Scripture utilizing what is known as *lectio divina*.

Lectio divina is an ancient method for praying with Scripture that allows this experience to become more than merely analyzing the text like a scholar. Instead, with practice, praying with the Bible in this way can become more about hearing God's voice present in his Word, like a son or daughter. It is one of the most ancient forms of prayer and meditation in the Church's tradition, often appearing in early Church fathers and other theologians' writings.

We generally credit a twelfth-century Carthusian monk named Guido for the traditional division of the practice of *lectio divina* into four steps: *lectio* (read), *meditatio* (meditate, or think), *oratio* (pray), and *contemplatio* (contemplate). Over the twenty minutes a day that we will be praying with a particular passage of Scripture, these four steps will be a way of organizing our time to allow the word of God to impact us fully. While *lectio divina* is more art than science, a brief primer on the method is found below.

Before step one, as you sit down to pray, begin by inviting the Holy Spirit into your prayer time. Pray for the grace to listen with your heart to the Word. Remember that He is present to us always, and we turn our attention to him to focus on our relationship when we pray. Prayer is not just about encountering our own thoughts or quieting our minds but is about coming face to face with the three Persons in the one God who knows us and loves us personally. After we have done this first step, we can turn to the four stages of *lectio divina*:

- 1. *Lectio (read):*** Read the chapter, slowly (sometimes reading it aloud is helpful.)

2. ***Meditatio (meditate):*** Reread the chapter and pay close attention to the words. Note a word, phrase, or sentence that stood out to you. Think deeply into the passage for why these words stand out to you. Some also benefit from a visual type of meditation that places them in the story, asking questions like, “What am I seeing, thinking, or who am I in this scene?”
3. ***Oratio (pray):*** Turn your thoughts specifically to the Father, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit. Ask him how he is speaking in this passage to you personally. Converse naturally with him, sharing your thoughts and paying attention to how he moves your mind and heart as well.
4. ***Contemplatio (contemplate):*** Sit peacefully, turning your mind and will toward the God who knows you, soaking the mystery of his immense love. Be led into silence to simply be with God.

As Jeremiah the prophet said, “When I encountered your words, I devoured them; your words were my joy, the happiness of my heart.” These four steps will help us to encounter God’s words so that they can, indeed, become a source of joy.

A whole chapter of the Gospels is more than would be typically used as a Scripture passage for your time of *lectio divina*. With that in mind, I would like to propose a simple structure to the week for you to use throughout this journey of *Encountering the Risen Christ*.

Day one, each week, we can read the whole chapter all the way through, noticing which verses the Lord brings to our attention. Often, as we pray with Scripture, a particular word or sentence will “pop-out” off the page as if the Holy Spirit is suggesting that we notice and ponder those words more deeply. As this happens for you on the first day, begin to note these words, highlight them, and take time throughout the rest of your prayer time to ask: Lord, what is it you are saying to me by having me notice these particular words. How can I receive these as your words into my life? Is Jesus speaking these words to you today? Converse with Jesus.

From there, for the rest of the week, you may choose to reread the whole passage or may want to focus your prayer time on a particular sentence or two, again practicing listening by letting these words sit with you. You may also want to go back to the key points from previous prayer times and let those verses continue to shape your prayer time throughout the week.