

BOOK REVIEW

LIFE OF CHRIST

**Review by Tim Puet***Catholic Times Reporter*

Pope Francis, in his 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, invites people to “a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them.” Throughout his papacy, he has spoken repeatedly about the importance of such an encounter and the relationship which results.

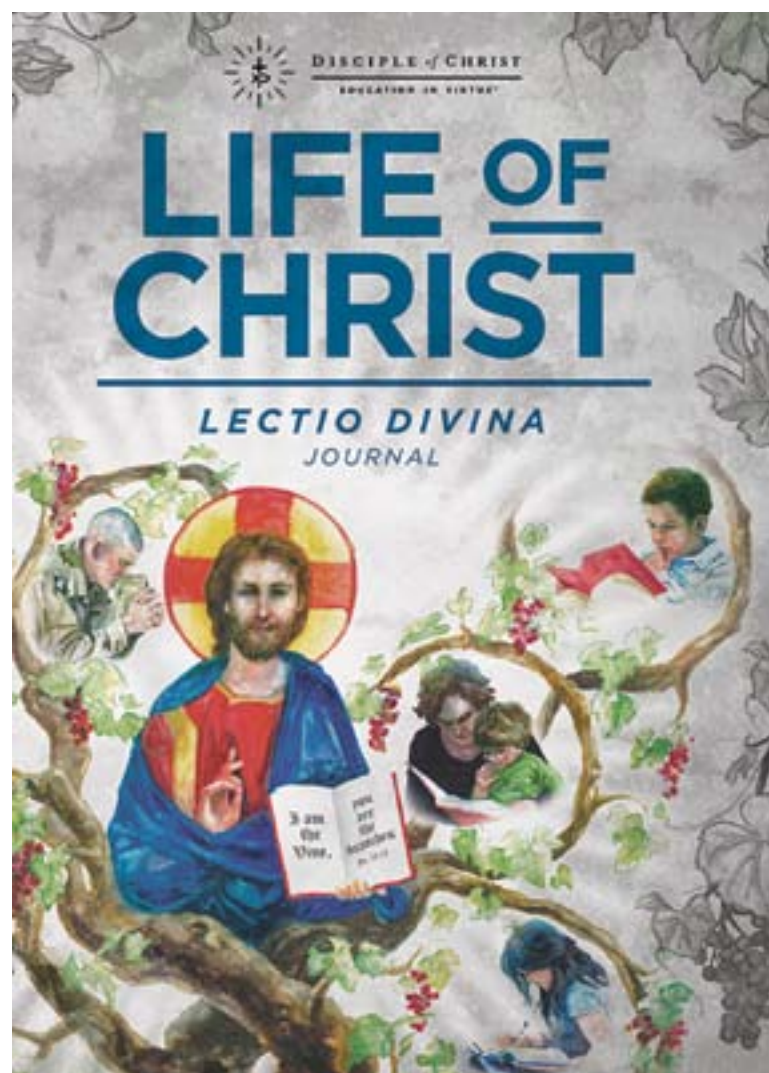
One way to encounter Christ is through the Scriptures. In the recently published book *Life of Christ: A Lectio Divina Journal*, the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist offer people a chance to move through Christ’s life, meditate on his words, and encounter and know him through the *Lectio Divina* method of Scripture study.

“There are many excellent meditation books about the life of Christ, but we thought they were missing something – a chance to use the Scriptures to have a real conversation with Jesus,” said Sister John Dominic, OP, the book’s author. “We put together an overview of Christ’s life, from the Annunciation to Mary through the Ascension of Jesus, using 78 significant New Testament passages.”

One such passage is Mark 1:16-20, the call of the first Apostles, to which four pages of the 326-page book are devoted. The first two pages include a prayer related to the passage, followed by six questions about it and space for the reader to write a short response to each. The third page features a work of art which pertains to the passage being studied, with two related questions. The fourth page provides space for the writing of a personal meditation on the passage and of reasons to be grateful to and praise God.

In using this format, the book follows the four traditional *Lectio Divina* steps of reading, meditating, praying, and contemplating, viewing the person of Christ as the key to the meaning of the passages rather than trying to provide a theological analysis.

“The key to getting the most out of the book and of *Lectio Divina* is to move through each passage slowly,” Sister John Dominic said. “What we tried to do in classes where the book was tested before publication was to spread one passage out over a week, giving students ample time to look at the Scripture, the artwork, and each one of the questions, plus time to put this all together and present a meditative response.



“The students wrote me letters about their response to the book and the format. Many of them said it taught them how to pray in a way they never thought of before and made them feel close to the person of Christ in ways they never experienced.”

The Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist have been teaching at Worthington St. Michael School since the fall of 2011. The book is the latest addition to the sisters’ “Disciple of Christ, Education in Virtue” curriculum, which is being used in religious education classes at St. Michael and at Columbus St. Mary, Mother of God Church and School and Columbus Holy Family School. The book’s format can be used for students of junior high age and older and for adults, individually and in groups.

Sister John Dominic is one of the four sisters who founded the Ann Arbor, Michigan-based congregation in 1997. She has been living a consecrated life

since 1982, when she joined the Nashville Dominicans. She is principal of Spiritus Sanctus Academy in Ann Arbor.

“The book is a natural extension of our virtues-based curriculum,” she said. “In looking at the life of Christ through *Lectio Divina*, young people can see how virtuous behavior can be incorporated into everyday life, allowing them to gradually grow in interior happiness and freedom.

“In today’s culture, there is a lot of acedia or spiritual sloth. *Lectio Divina* is an antidote to that. Many people don’t know how to cultivate their spiritual lives. This method gives them a way to do this that is uncomplicated, understandable, reaches to them at whatever their spiritual level may be, and allows spirituality to grow at each person’s own pace.

“Young people especially are exposed to so much ugliness and distortion through pornography and the violence and disregard for humanity that is part of much of modern culture. Using this book to look at the life of Jesus and their own lives gives them a chance to view things in a different way and encounter truth, beauty, and goodness.

“This encounter shows how a life of virtue becomes an interior habit, a way of life, which enables someone to be more open to the Holy Spirit, allowing a person to make his or her own personal commitment to live as a disciple of Christ and to be able to answer with conviction his question, ‘Who do you say that I am?’”

Bishop Earl Boyea of Lansing, Michigan, former president-rector of the Pontifical College Josephinum, says the volume is “more than a textbook. It introduces young people to a prayerful reading and understanding of the life of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. It provides them an opportunity to know Jesus in a personal way, to listen to his voice as they reflect and pray and to respond to his invitation to follow him through resolutions and the practice of the virtues. ... I pray that this work will achieve wide circulation and lead many young people to a personal encounter with Jesus and the fullness of life he offers us.”

The cost of individual copies of the book is \$21.99 plus postage and handling.

For more information, go to www.educationinvirtue.com/product/life-of-christ.