

# LECTIO DIVINA

## Listening to the Word of God in Scripture

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*Lectio Divina* - divine reading - is one of the great treasures of the Christian contemplative tradition. It is an ancient tradition of prayer that can be traced back to a Hebrew method of studying the scriptures called *haggadah* which was part of the devotional practice of the Jews in the days of Jesus. In the Christian context, it is a prayerful way of reading the book we believe to be divinely inspired. It is traditionally understood as way of cultivating friendship with Christ - listening to the texts of Scripture as if we were in conversation with Christ and he were suggesting topics of conversation. The daily encounter and reflection on the word of God leads beyond acquaintanceship with Christ to an attitude of friendship, trust, and love; and eventually conversation gives way to silent communion.

### Different forms of Lectio Divina

The monastic form of *Lectio Divina* is an ancient method that was practiced by the Desert Mothers and Fathers and later in monasteries both east and west. The monastic way is unstructured. One listens to the word of God in a particular passage chosen for the occasion and then follows the attraction of the Spirit. A slightly different way of practicing *Lectio Divina* developed in the Middle Ages (the Scholastic form), placed more emphasis on rational analysis and less on personal experience. This form divides the process into fixed stages which offer a helpful way to learn *Lectio Divina*, especially in a group context. But the more spontaneous monastic form is ultimately better suited to a contemplative lifestyle and a meditation practice.

### Growing in relationship

Growing in relationship with God is a process like any other relationship. We need to begin by listening and entering into dialogue with God's Word. As the dialogue unfolds we will discover different ways of being in relationship. There are the moments of listening to the other and pondering the meaning of his/her words. There are the moments of responding and dialoguing, as well as being with the other when no words need to be said. These moments may come in any order.

### Lectio Divina and meditation

*Lectio Divina* and contemporary meditation practices (such as Christian Meditation and Centering Prayer) are distinct prayer forms which can be profoundly complementary. *Lectio* is a way of reading, reflecting, responding and resting in the Word of God that helps us grow in relationship with the divine and deepen our commitment to be in God's presence. Meditation is a practice that enables us to move beyond conversation to communion and prepares us to receive the gift of contemplation. Our meditation frees us from obstacles to hear the Word of God on an increasingly deeper level.

## Lectio Divina and Bible study

Bible Study is the reading of the scriptures and related commentaries in order to gain understanding about the historical and cultural context of the passage. Well-grounded Biblical interpretation provides a solid conceptual background for the practice of *Lectio Divina* and is compatible with a contemplative reading of the Scriptures.

### Guidelines for Lectio Divina

- **Moment One: (*Lectio*)** Read the Scripture passage for the first time. Listen with the 'ear of your heart'. What phrase, sentence or word stands out to you? Begin to repeat that phrase, sentence or word over and over, allowing it to settle deeply in your heart. Simply return to the repetition of the phrase, sentence or word, savoring it in your heart.
- **Moment Two: (*Meditatio*)** Reflect on and relish the words. Let them resound in your heart. Let an attitude of quiet receptiveness permeate the prayer time. Be attentive to what speaks to your heart.
- **Moment Three: (*Oratio*)** Respond spontaneously as you continue to listen to a phrase, sentence or word. A prayer of praise, thanksgiving, lamentation or petition may arise. Offer that prayer, and then return to repeating the word in your heart.
- **Moment Four: (*Contemplatio*)** Rest in God. Simply be with God's presence as you open yourself to a deeper hearing of the Word of God. If you feel drawn back to the scriptures, follow the lead of the Spirit.

Walk through each moment, taking as much time as you need. There are no *shoulds*, *oughts* or *musts*. Listen with your heart, letting the dialogue unfold in its own time and allowing the Holy Spirit to take the lead. We need to trust that God is eager to be with us and to share with us the inner peace and freedom we desire.

### Becoming a Word of God

Lectio Divina opens us to a process of being transformed into the Word of God, as we faithfully read, reflect, respond and rest in God's Word. Our contemplative journey helps us develop an attitude of resting in God's presence which slowly becomes a part of our daily lives. As we grow in our practice, we discover the increasing capacity to become a channel of God's presence to others. As we receive the supreme gift of contemplation we come to live more and more in union with God, transcending ourselves as the centre and experiencing all in God and God in all. Ultimately, our energy becomes one with the Divine Energy: we become merciful, compassionate and loving.

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