

Introduction

Lectio Divina, Divine Reading: is an ancient practice that seeks to deepen our relationship with God by reading with attention to the meanings and images in the text. The goal of Lectio Divina is to invite the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts and hearts to experience God's presence in, with, and under the words of scripture. We are invited to read in a way that shows God's presence and action with the writers in their time; and see God's presence and actions in our lives and communities.

Lectio Divina is undertaken not with the intention of gaining information but of using the texts as an aide to contact the living God. Lectio is a form of prayer which enables one to penetrate beyond the letter of text and to see how the Holy Spirit is speaking to us through these inspired words here and now. Ordinarily lectio is practiced by the slow perusal of sacred Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments; though attention to the Church Fathers and other writers may also be fruitful.

One must resist the temptation of covering a given amount of material within a prescribed time frame. A person is well advised to linger over a single word or phrase for an indefinite period of time. Lectio is open-ended and subject to continuous growth.

Lectio divina runs counter to our modern tendency to view the Bible from the scientific standpoint that is, as a document to be read like studying for a test and trying to remember the facts. The goal is to experience God's presence, not for me to get data, to use. It is to let the text shape us as we read.

In the twelfth century, a Carthusian monk called Guigo, described the stages which he saw as essential to the practice of Lectio Divina. There are various ways of practicing Lectio Divina either individually or in groups. These steps are *GUIDES NOT RULES*.

1. Guigo recommended that the first stage is lectio (**reading**) where we read the Word of God, slowly and reflectively so that it sinks into us. Any passage of Scripture can be used for this way of prayer but the passage should not be too long. I find it helpful to read out loud quietly, or even whisper the text as I read it. At the least, the need to breath helps slow me down as I read.
2. The second stage is **reflection** where we think about the text we have chosen and ruminate upon it so that we take from it what God wants to give us. You might ask yourself "What word or words stood out, caught my attention, seemed new, or brought to mind an image, or a question?" One or two words or short phrases are enough. Small and slow, is the key to Lectio Divina.

3. The third stage is **prayerful response**. At this point, read the text again, slowly, with the word or image that you found in the text in your mind. We leave our thinking aside and simply let our hearts speak to God. This response is inspired by our reflection on the Word of God. If a word raises a question, do not try to answer it - live with the question. This stage is not about "figuring out the text," so that we can argue for its truth, or explain it. In what way, in what direction, is the text moving your heart? What do you want God to say to you, now?
4. The final stage of Lectio Divina is **rest or contemplation** where we let go not only of our own ideas, plans and meditations but also of our particular words and thoughts. We simply rest in the Word of God. We listen at the deepest level of our being to God who speaks within us with a still small voice. As we listen, we are gradually transformed from within.

One of the joys of Lectio Divina in a group setting is the opportunity to hear what others heard and felt.

I Corinthians 15:20-22 ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. ²¹ For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²² for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

John 15: 10-11 ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

Psalm 119:5-8

⁵ O that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping your statutes!

⁶ **Then I shall not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.**

⁷ I will praise you with an upright heart,
when I learn your righteous ordinances.

⁸ **I will observe your statutes;
do not utterly forsake me.**

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 ¹⁵See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.