

Lectio Divina *

Lectio divina is a slow, contemplative praying of the Scriptures. Time set aside in a special way for lectio divina enables us to discover in our daily life an underlying spiritual rhythm. Within this rhythm, we discover an increasing ability to offer more of ourselves and our relationships to the Father, and to accept the embrace that God is continuously extending to us in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

Very often our concerns, our relationships, our hopes and aspirations, naturally intertwine with our meditations on the Scriptures. We can attend "with the ear of our hearts" to our own memories, listening for God's presence in the events of our lives. We experience Christ reaching out to us through the words of Scripture.

How to Practice Lectio Divina

Choose a text of the Scriptures that you wish to pray. A good place to begin is with one of the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John; others prefer to slowly work through their favorite book of the Bible. It makes no difference which text is chosen, as long as one has no set goal of "covering" a certain amount of text. The amount of text covered is in God's hands, not yours.

Place yourself in a comfortable position and allow yourself to become silent. Some Christians focus for a few moments on their breathing; others have a beloved "prayer word" or "prayer phrase" they gently recite. For some, the practice known as "centering prayer" makes a good, brief introduction to lectio divina. Use whatever method is best for you and allow yourself to enjoy silence for a few moments.

Prayerfully read. Turn to the text and read it slowly, gently. Savor each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the "still, small voice" of a word or phrase that somehow says, "I am for you today." Do not expect lightning or ecstasies. In lectio divina, God is teaching us to listen to Him, to seek Him in silence. He does not reach out and grab us; rather, He gently invites us ever more deeply into his presence.

Reflect on the word or phrase. Take the word or phrase into yourself. Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas. Do not be afraid of distractions. Memories or thoughts are simply parts of yourself that, when they rise up during lectio divina, are asking to be given to God along with the rest of your inner self. Allow this inner pondering, this rumination, to invite you into dialogue with God.

Converse with God. Whether you use words, ideas, or images--or all three--is not important. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. And give to Him what you have discovered during your experience of reflection. Experience God by using the word or phrase He has given you as a means of blessing and of transforming the ideas and memories that your reflection on his word has awakened. Give to God what you have found within your heart

Rest in God's presence. When He invites you to return to your reflection of his word or to your inner dialogue with Him, do so. Learn to use words when words are helpful, and to let go of words when they no longer are necessary. Rejoice in the knowledge that God is with you in both words and silence, in spiritual activity and inner receptivity.

Sometimes in lectio divina, you may return several times to the printed text, either to savor the literary context of the word or phrase that God has given or to seek a new word or phrase to ponder. At other times, only a single word or phrase will fill the whole time set aside for lectio divina. It is not necessary to assess anxiously the quality of your lectio divina, as if you were "performing" or seeking some goal. Lectio divina has no goal other than that of being in the presence of God by praying the Scriptures.

You may choose to write down the word or phrase and use this as the basis for ongoing conversation with God for yourself or others, or simply reflect on the word or phrase for deeper meaning.

* Based upon the explanation of Lectio Divina by Luke Dysinger, O.S.B.