

The Practice of Lectio Divina

Resting in God's Embrace

A step-by-step guide to praying Scripture by Fr. Luke Dysinger, OSB.*

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 our own memories. Our own personal story becomes salvation history.

How to Practice Lectio Divina

- ✚ Choose a text of the Scriptures that you wish to pray. Many Christians use in their daily Lectio Divina one of the readings from the Eucharistic liturgy for the day; others prefer to slowly work through a particular 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.
- ✚ 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.
- ✚ 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.
- ✚ Speak to 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 meditation. 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 embrace. And when he invites you to return to your contemplation 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.

Lectio Divina as a Group Exercise

In the churches of the Third World, where books are rare, a form of corporate Lectio Divina is becoming common, in which a text from the Scriptures is meditated on by Christians praying together in a group.

This form of Lectio Divina works best in a group of between four and eight people. A group leader coordinates the process and facilitates sharing. The same text from the Scriptures is read out three times, followed each time by a period of silence and an opportunity for each member of the group to share the fruit of her or his Lectio.

The first reading is for the purpose of hearing a word or passage that touches the heart. When the word or phrase is found, the group's members take it in, gently recite it, and reflect on it during the silence that follows. After the silence, each person shares which word or phrase has touched his or her heart.

The second reading (by a member of the opposite sex from the first reader) is for the purpose of "hearing" or "seeing" Christ in the text. Each ponders the word that has touched the heart and asks where the word or phrase touches his or her life that day. Then, after the silence, each member of the group shares what he or she has "heard" or "seen."

The third and final reading is for the purpose of experiencing Christ "calling us forth" into doing or being. Members ask themselves what Christ in the text is calling them to do or to become today or this week. After the silence, each shares for the last time, and the exercise concludes with each person praying for the person on the right of him or her.

Those who regularly practice this method of praying and sharing the Scriptures find it to be an excellent way of developing trust within a group. It also is an excellent way of consecrating projects and hopes to Christ before more-formal group meetings.

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