

## Practices that create space for Christ to Transform: Learning to Read Scripture with the heart of a lover

**The Process of *lectio divina***... spiritual reading; ‘accepting the embrace of God’

1. *Lectio* - reading/listening
2. *Meditatio* - meditation
3. *Oratio* - prayer
4. *Contemplatio* – contemplation of God

The true *lectio divina* method is that you read until you hear God speaking. Then you meditate for a season on what you have been struck with, and then you move into prayerful contemplation of the Lord Himself who meets you in the Word. Some days are more fresh than others. Some days hunger is being created, some days it is being satisfied. Always it will be purifying.

This ancient practice has been kept alive in the Christian monastic tradition, and is one of the precious treasures of Benedictine monastics and oblates. Together with the Liturgy and daily manual labor, 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. (Luke Dysinger, *Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, <http://www.ccel.org/info/lectio.htm>)

Eugene Peterson in *Eat This Book* recommends *lectio divina* as a way of metabolizing Scripture into “acts of love, cups of cold water, missions into all the world, health and evangelism and justice in Jesus’ name, hands raising in adoration of the Father.” There’s no substitute for time spent reading the Bible. Spiritual reading starts, however, by recognizing how often the Bible asks people to speak and listen. “If we are to get the full force of the word, God’s word, we need to recover its atmosphere of spokenness,” he says. This includes reading aloud, listening to spoken Scripture, memorizing it, and imagining the sights, smells, and sounds surrounding those who first received God’s word. Two persons held up as models of *lectio* are Elijah who listens for the still, small voice of God (1 Kings 19:12), ‘the “faint murmuring sound” which is God’s word for us, God’s voice touching our hearts.’ (Luke Dysinger), and Mary, who ‘pondered/treasured all these things in her heart’ (Luke 2:19, 51).

### **The Practice of *Lectio Divina***

This is a slow, contemplative praying of the Scriptures which enables the Bible, the Word of God, to become a means of union with the triune God.

**The Private** or personal exercising of this ‘art’ of reading ‘with the ears of the heart’ (St. Benedict in the *Prologue to the Rule*). There are four stages in the process/way.

1. *Lectio* - reading/listening

Choose a time which is as free as possible from the pressures of daily demands and busyness. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak through the Scripture passage you are reading, and to make you aware of the presence of Jesus and his desire for you. ‘The amount of text “covered” is in God’s hands, not yours’ (Luke Dysinger). Read the Bible passage slowly, not for exegesis, but to attend to the words or phrases that ‘move’ you. ‘This gentle listening is an “atunement” to the presence of God in that special part of God’s creation which is the Scriptures.’ We must learn to love silence. If we are constantly speaking or if we are surrounded with noise, we cannot hear gentle sounds. The practice of *lectio divina*, therefore, requires that we first quiet down in order to hear

God's word to us. This is the first step of *lectio divina*, appropriately called *lectio* - reading. (Luke Dysinger)

THE READING or listening which is the first step in *lectio divina* is very different from the speed reading which modern Christians apply to newspapers, books and even to the Bible. *Lectio* is reverential listening; listening both in a spirit of silence and of awe. We are listening for the still, small voice of God that will speak to us personally - not loudly, but intimately. In *lectio* we read slowly, attentively, gently listening to hear a word or phrase that is God's word for us this day. (Luke Dysinger)

## 2. *Meditatio* - meditation

Ruminate, meditate, lean into the words and phrases that have impressed you, and allow the the Word to touch the deep places of the heart.

‘Through *meditatio* we allow God's word to become His word for us, a word that touches us and affects us at our deepest levels.’ (Luke Dysinger).

## 3. *Oratio* - prayer

Pray what you have been meditating. Enter the conversation with God responding to what he has spoken to you and entering his embrace. Offer your deepest self to God including your joys and your pain.

THE THIRD step in *lectio divina* is *oratio* - prayer: prayer understood both as dialogue with God, that is, as loving conversation with the One who has invited us into His embrace; and as consecration, prayer as the priestly offering to God of parts of ourselves that we have not previously believed God wants. In this consecration-prayer we allow the word that we have taken in and on which we are pondering to touch and change our deepest selves. (Luke Dysinger).

## 4. *Contemplatio* - contemplation

Rest in His Presence. Focus on the God of the Word, embrace the Trinity's embrace.

FINALLY, WE simply rest in the presence of the One who has used His word as a means of inviting us to accept His transforming embrace. No one who has ever been in love needs to be reminded that there are moments in loving relationships when words are unnecessary. It is the same in our relationship with God. Wordless, quiet rest in the presence of the One Who loves us has a name in the Christian tradition - *contemplatio*, contemplation. Once again we practice silence, letting go of our own words; this time simply enjoying the experience of being in the presence of God. (Luke Dysinger)

*Philippians 1: Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.*