

## Sacred Reading (*Lectio Divina*)

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*Lectio Divina* which is also known as Sacred Reading, Holy Reading, Meditative Reading or Praying the Scriptures is a spiritual practice that has long been practised in the Church and has recently been rediscovered and recovered.

Of *Lectio Divina*, Pope Benedict said in 2005:

*"I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of Lectio Divina: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart. If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church - I am convinced of it - a new spiritual springtime."*

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### What is *Lectio Divina*?

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*Lectio Divina* is a gift from the monastic life of the church which is finding new expression today. *Lectio Divina* was fundamental to monastic spiritual formation and the principle way of meditating for the monks.

How it worked was, the monks would gather in the chapel, and one of the brothers who could read (remember not many could) read a small portion of Scripture until the one listening noticed a stirring, an inner response to what was being read. He/she would

then go to their cell (room) and reflect on what was heard. The one reading would continue until all had left the chapel.

Today in monastic life *Lectio* is more of a private practice but the monks will often gather together in the library and work with short biblical text (no more than few verses) for an hour or more.

In the practice of *Lectio* the monk was making an assumption, namely that the words of Scripture were an ongoing source of wisdom, guidance and inspiration. They also believed that God spoke directly and personally to them through the words they read, and it was that word, personally addressed to them, for which they were listening.

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### The process of *Lectio Divina*.

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*Lectio Divina* usually consists of four stages or phases. The first phase was that from which the practice derived its name, *Lectio*, the reading of the text. Then would follow *Meditatio* or meditation, reflection on whatever it was that one especially heard in the reading. This would lead into *Oratio* or prayer, responding to what had been heard in a prayerful way before God. Finally there would come *Contemplatio*, contemplation or resting, when one simply sat in the presence of the One from whom they had heard and towards whom they had drawn closer.

Before beginning we prepare ourselves to approach the text with reverence and call on the Holy Spirit to enable our hearing of the word God has for us.

### **LECTIO** (Reading)

The first stage of *Lectio* is to read, aloud if possible, a small portion of Scripture. This is done slowly and contemplatively.

When a word (or phrase) seems to grab our inner attention we then stop. That is the word that God has for us on this occasion and the word that we will take further into the process of *Lectio* to reflect upon.

Engaging in *Lectio Divina* is to experience a gentle, reflective style of reading that is akin to reading a love letter, where we pause over the words seeking and expecting to hear God address us personally.

### **MEDITATIO** (Reflection)

The next phase of the process is *Meditatio* (or meditation). Here we reflect on the word we have heard in the *Lectio*. We ask ourselves: What does this say to me? Am I struck by anything? How did I experience God in my reading? Why have I heard this now? What is God saying to me?

Meditation is where we engage the faculties in the process (mind/feelings/imagination). Unlike some uses of the word meditation, which suggest simply sitting in quietness allowing the mind to focus on the breathing or a particular word or object, in the meditative part of *Lectio* our mind is actively engaged in thinking. But it is not just any thinking, it is thinking about God. It is not analytical or critical thinking, rather it is a type of 'heart' thinking which asks where we are in the text we have read.

### **ORATIO** (Responding)

The next step is *Oratio* or prayer (and please note, these are not strict stages that are worked through

sequentially. We may go back to a step or skip across one, depending on how we are led.)

*Oratio*, rather than being something we do, emerges from our meditation. This is where we respond to what we have heard in our *lectio* and *meditatio*. For example, we may have been challenged, this is the place for response. We may have been confronted with an area of sin in our lives and we make our confession or repentance. Or a hurt may have been exposed and we cry out our anguish. We may have been made aware of our blessed lives so we give voice to our gratitude and joy.

*Oratio* is the response of the heart to God when we have heard ourselves personally addressed through the word. This doesn't always happen and that is okay. We may move from meditation to contemplation.

### **CONTEMPLATIO** (Resting)

The final phase of the process of *Lectio Divina* is Contemplation, 'being with' God. This comes to us as pure gift and grace. Contemplative prayer is resting in God, allowing the Spirit to fill and move us as God wills. It is in the spirit of Psalm 131, "*Enough for me to keep my soul tranquil and quiet like a child in its mothers arms, as content as a child that has been weaned.*"

It is usual to conclude a period of *Lectio* with a prayer of gratitude expressing our thanks for the grace God has given us in this practice.

It is also quite common to add a fifth step, *Actio*. This is where we consider, what might God be asking of me through the word given today?