



Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina means sacred or divine reading. It is a process of prayer that involves four movements often summarised as reading, reflecting, responding and resting. When we pray using Lectio Divina we see the words of scripture as God's living words spoken into our hearts in this moment.

Lectio Divina has its roots in a Hebrew method of studying scripture called *haggadah*, an interactive interpretation of the Scriptures by means of the free use of the text to explore its inner meaning. It was part of the devotional practice of the Jews in the time of Jesus. The Jews would memorize the text in a process that involved repeating the passage over and over softly with the lips until the words gradually took up residence in the heart, thereby transforming the person's life.

The earliest forms of Lectio as Christian prayer were in the desert monastic tradition dating from the third century. The desert monks did not have their own Bibles so they would memorize vast amounts of Scripture and in this way would meditate on the sacred texts throughout the day.

Lectio is not bible study, i.e. using an analytical, historical and literary study of the Bible which can be useful and illuminating as a complementary approach. The Bible is a complex anthology of texts from distant cultures, written two to three thousand years ago and includes very varied literary genres from history to prophecy to erotic poetry to pastoral letters to imaginative fiction. The Bible for Christians is our sacred scripture, our sacred story. This Good News about God comes to us to in a series of layers of understanding – literal, metaphorical, moral and mystical – and this requires individual and collective discernment.

In Lectio we are invited to listen to the biblical text with "*the ears of the heart*" (St Benedict). The heart referred to here is the ancient metaphor for the seat of our whole being. To be whole-hearted means to bring our entire selves before God – our intellect, our emotional life, our dreams and intuitions, our deepest longings. For the early Hebrews, the heart was the organ of capacity for God's very self.

Lectio Divina is like reading poetry; we need to slow down, to savour what we read.

Spiritual writer, Cyprian Consiglio has this warning about prayer and spiritual practice and some useful guidance:

“It is possible to become obsessed with technique and lose sight of the workings of grace, of God’s initiative. Prayer is not “magic” ... we do not conjure up God, we do not bring God down from heaven, and we do not make ourselves holy. We dispose ourselves, we stop, we listen, we watch, we make ourselves available, and we put ourselves in situations and environments that are conducive to prayer and meditation. And then we wait for the working of grace, like the bride awaiting the bridegroom.”

Lectio Divina Practice

Find a comfortable position where you can remain alert and yet also be relaxed in your body. Bring your attention to your breath and allow a few moments to become centred.

The first movement is known as **Lectio** (Reading) in Latin. The text is read slowly. Bring yourself fully present, listening with the ears of the heart. Listen for a word or phrase that beckons to you, that calls for your attention, that shimmers. Notice if a word or phrase creates an energetic response in you; this could be a positive response (joy, delight, inspiration...) or a response where you experience resistance or challenge. Trust your intuition in being drawn to a word or phrase. Gently repeat this word to yourself in the silence that follows the reading.

The second movement is **Meditatio** (Reflecting). You will hear the text read again slowly. In the silence following the reading stay with the word or phrase that called for your attention. Savour the word or phrase with all your senses: notice what smells, sounds, tastes, sights and feelings are evoked. Listen for any images, memories or feelings that are stirred. Welcome and be open to what arises, knowing that we are held within God’s tender compassion and infinite grace.

The third movement in Latin is **Oratio** (meaning speech or responding). After this third and final reading, if you feel moved, please share the word or phrase you were contemplating. Simply say the word or phrase, without explanation or commentary. There is no obligation to share, you are welcome to simply sit in the silence. Notice how you are touched by what others share. Ask God for the grace to have your heart changed by what you hear and to live out that change in your everyday life.

The final movement in Lectio is known as **Contemplatio** (Resting). Release all the words, thoughts, images, memories and invitations that have emerged in your prayer and simply rest in the presence of God, the Ground of Being.

References

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