



Learning to pray: Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a Latin term meaning “divine reading”, and it describes a manner of praying which allows us to meditate upon and contemplate the words of Holy Scripture. Centuries ago, this method of praying was practised by those who lived “monastic” lives, people we tend to call monks and nuns. In more recent times, the practice of *lectio divina* has become more popular among all sorts of Christians, not just those in religious orders, because it combines two essential aspects of our Christian lives – reading the Bible, and offering ourselves to God in prayer.

The basic heart of *lectio divina* is silent, prayerful reading. Traditionally, the process of such reading has been understood in several stages. We read the Word of God, slowly and reflectively so that it sinks into us. Then we think about the text we have chosen, and ruminate upon it, taking note of any particular words or phrases which strike us or which we find particularly engaging. Then we try to leave our thinking behind and open ourselves to God in prayer, saying silently whatever is on our minds at that moment. That prayer will be informed by our meditation on the text. Finally we find ourselves letting go of as much of ourselves as we can, trying to listen to God speaking to us.

These stages are not a formula or a prescription, but rather a way of trying to understand what is going on in the process of praying the scriptures. Sometimes our experience will match the fourfold process quite clearly, and sometimes it will not.

“One thing I have asked of the Lord, this is what I seek; That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to behold the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple.” (Psalm 27:4)

One can use any scriptural passage for *lectio divina*, but it is important that it is not too long. Something like ten or fifteen verses of the Bible is plenty. The best texts with which to start are probably taken from the gospels, and there are some suggestions below.

Some passages for reflection:

Luke 2.1-16 – the birth of Jesus

John 1.1-14 – the Incarnation of the Word

Matthew 5.1-12 – the Beatitudes

Mark 15.33-41 – the Crucifixion

John 20.1-18 – the Resurrection

To get started, try going to a quiet place and recall that you are about to listen to the Word of God. Then read the scripture passage aloud to yourself, to let yourself hear with your own ears the words. When you have finished reading, pause and recall if some word or phrase stood out or something touched your heart. If so, pause and savour that insight, feeling, or understanding. Then go back and read the passage again because it will have a fuller meaning. Pause again and note what happened. If you want to pray, to enter into dialogue with God or Jesus in response to the word, you should follow the prompting of your heart. This kind of reflective listening allows the Holy Spirit to deepen awareness of God's taking the initiative to speak with us.

Lectio Divina can also be an effective form for group prayer. After a passage is read, there can be some extended silence for each person to reflect on what he or she has heard, particularly noting whether any word or phrase became a special focus of attention. Members can be invited to share out loud the word or phrase that struck them. This is done without discussion. Then a different person from the group would read the passage again with a pause for silence. Different emphases might be suggested after each reading: What gift does this passage lead me to ask from the Lord? What does this passage call me to do?

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.