

Lectio Divina

By Deacon Frederick Bartels

Lectio Divina (Latin for “divine reading”) has long been cherished as a spiritually fruitful method of meditation on scripture, especially the gospels and the Person of Jesus Christ, dating back to the early monastic communities of the Church.¹ It is a way of praying with the scriptures; its purpose is to allow God’s word to penetrate our hearts and direct our lives, in order that we may advance spiritually toward infused contemplation, get to know better Jesus to whom we have entrusted ourselves, and deepen our union with God. The goal of *Lectio Divina* is one of transformation of the person by the loving Word of God. The following is a brief, simple outline and explanation of this ancient prayer tradition.

Begin by setting aside some time each week with the intention of meditating on scripture. One need not worry over allotting large amounts of time to do this. Fifteen minutes is a good starting point. You might want to increase the time set aside for prayer later on. Go to a quiet place with your Bible. Rest comfortably for a moment in God’s presence, calming the mind and heart, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us according to the will of God and who teaches us to pray (cf. Rom 8:26-27). Select a brief passage from Scripture upon which to meditate.

***Lectio* / Reading:** Read the passage aloud prayerfully, slowly and deliberately. The goal here is to become familiar with it. Listen to the words attentively, letting them penetrate your mind and soul. The emphasis is on remaining passive to the word of God in simplicity of heart, in order to allow its power to shape your thoughts, attitudes, and behavior.

***Meditatio* / Meditation:** Read the passage again silently, meditatively.² Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to hear the passage anew, as if its words are entirely new to you. The main element of this step is to reflect on what is read. “Ancient monks explained this process as a deep, unhurried thinking about” the Word of God—as a kind of “rumination.”³ How do these words strike you? What might they mean in your life? Try to grasp the important content of the story. What is special, meaningful, exciting, challenging or troubling about it?

During the step of *meditatio*, you might spontaneously imagine you are a person in that particular time and place, surrounded by the same circumstances and figures. If you have not picked a

¹ USCCB, “Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Art and Practice of Lectio Divina,” <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/word-of-god/upload/lectio-divina.pdf>

² From the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on meditation: Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. This mobilization of faculties is necessary in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen our will to follow Christ. Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in *lectio divina* or the rosary. (2708)

³ USCCB, “Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Art and Practice of Lectio Divina.”

person, put yourself in the scene as an observer and think about a particular element, message or meaning that is of interest. Does the passage evoke memories of a particular situation or relationship in your life? Does it apply to circumstances in the present? Does it induce an emotion or thought? Speak with Jesus about this passage openly and with honesty from your heart; tell him your understanding of it, and what you think it might mean in your life.

Contemplatio* / **Contemplation:* Read the passage again. Close your eyes and rest in the loving, silent presence of God. “Contemplation is characterized by an openness of the heart, by which the reader experiences God as the One who prays within, who allows the person in contemplation to know the Word wordlessly and without image.”⁴ Additionally, it may be helpful to reflect on an image of Jesus, such as your favorite picture or icon of him. St. Teresa of Avila often prayed while viewing an image of the sacred humanity of Jesus. Wait patiently for the Lord to whisper to your heart.⁵

Oratio* / **prayer:* This last step is characterized by a personal response to God. “This response is dialogical and can be understood as ‘a conversation between friends,’ as St. Teresa of Avila defined prayer.”⁶ It involves childlike surrender to God and self-entrustment to Christ. Give God permission not only to work in your life but take control of it. Pray that the Holy Spirit may transform you into an image of Christ himself, as a Divine Artisan who lovingly and delicately shapes a material, forming it according to his intention.

⁴ USCCB, “Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Art and Practice of Lectio Divina.”

⁵ For more information on contemplative prayer, see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2709-2719.

⁶ USCCB, “Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Art and Practice of Lectio Divina.”

Works Cited:

Catechism of the Catholic Church. Second Edition. Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1994.

USCCB. "*Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Art and Practice of Lectio Divina*." Accessed 29, Aug. 2017. Available at: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/word-of-god/upload/lectio-divina.pdf>. 2009.