

Lectio Divina

-listening for God in sacred text

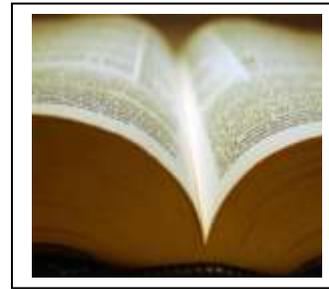


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I can't hear the Spirit saying anything to me? At times the Spirit speaks to us very clearly in the moment. At other times we may feel the promptings of the Spirit as more of a nudge or whisper. And at other times we may not sense anything happening in us at all. It could be that this period of Lectio is simply a time for you to let go of words and images and simply sit in silence.

I don't sense a prayer coming through for me? Author Annie Lamott once said that the two best prayers she knows are, "Help me, help me, help me." And "thank you, thank you, thank you." If you don't sense a prayer in your own words coming through, you might want to say a prayer you've memorized, sing part of a hymn, or just sit in silence.



Introduction

Lectio Divina or holy reading is simply a prayerful way of reading scripture, poetry, devotional writings or any sacred text.

The process opens up the words on the page to reveal a deeper meaning, inviting us to hear what the Spirit may be saying to us at this point in our lives.

History

Lectio Divina has been a part of the devotional practices of people of faith for many centuries. Some believe that this way of prayer evolved early in the history of the church with the desert mothers and fathers. During the third century, certain men and women retreated to the solitude of the desert in order to pursue a more intentional way of living out their faith.



Often known for their wisdom as well as their ascetism, many of the desert dwellers attracted disciples. These communities of followers grew into monasteries of men and women who found balance in a rhythm of work and prayer. It was out of this way of life that Lectio Divina developed.

Seek, Find, Ask, Feel

In the early eleventh century, a monk named Guigo wrote a letter to one of his fellow brothers likening the steps of Lectio Divina to the rungs of a ladder. *The Scala Claustralium* or *The Monk's Ladder* describes Lectio Divina in the following way: *Understand now what the four staves of this ladder are, each in turn. Reading, Lesson, is busily looking on Holy Scripture with all one's will and wit. Meditation is a studious* 2

If no word or image comes to you, you can move on to the next step in the process or you can randomly choose a word or image and see where the Spirit takes you. Either way, not seeing a word that “shimmers” is nothing to fret about.

I can't see how the text relates to my life?

Even for those who practice Lectio on a daily basis, there are times when their initial response is, “Huh? This doesn't speak to me at all.” (This especially happens if you are using the lectionary as the basis of your practice.) Again, don't fret about it. It may be you just need a different perspective on the text. In such cases you can try walking with the text, or explore how other people have responded to it. Read the text to a friend and see what his response is. Find a sermon based on the text on-line and find out what theme the preacher

I don't understand what the passage is about? The first step of the process is simply approaching the text at its most basic level. Rather than worrying about what it “means” think about the words you are reading. Since the words you engage in this prayer practice are intended to help you listen for how the Spirit is speaking to you in this particular moment in your life, don't worry about what meaning the original author was trying to convey.

I have read the passage and no word or phrase jumps out at me? Just as we don't always get the answer we expect when we pray, at times when we pray we don't necessarily get the experience we anticipated. Sometimes during Lectio a word won't jump out at you and say, “Pick me! Pick me!” but you might find yourself thinking back to a particular phrase in the silence.

insearching with the mind to know what was before concealed through desiring proper skill. Prayer is a devout desiring of the heart to get what is good and avoid what is evil. Contemplation is the lifting up of the heart of God tasting somewhat of the heavenly sweetness and savor.

Reading seeks, Meditation finds, Prayer asks, Contemplation feels. 'Seek and you shall find: knock and the door will be opened for you'. That means also, seek through Reading, and you will find holy Meditation in your thinking; and knock through Praying, and the doors shall be opened to you to enter through heavenly Contemplation to feel what you desire.

Reading puts, as it were, whole food into your mouth; Meditation chews it and breaks it down; Prayer finds its savor; Contemplation is the sweetness that so delights and strengthens. Reading is like the bark, the shell; Meditation like the pith, the nut;

Prayer is in the desiring, asking; and Contemplation is in the delight of the great sweetness.

Reading is the first ground that precedes and leads one into Meditation. Meditation seeks busily, and also with deep thought, digs and delves deeply to find that treasure; and because it cannot be attained by itself alone, then he sends us into Prayer that is mighty and strong. And so Prayer rises to God, and there one finds the treasure one so fervently desires, that is the sweetness and delight of Contemplation. And then contemplation comes and yields the harvest of the labor of the other three through a sweet heavenly dew, that the soul drinks in delight and joy. (Scala Claustralium, I)

Reading seeks for the sweetness
Of a blessed life,
Meditation perceives it,
Prayer asks for it,
Contemplation tastes it.

-Guigo, the Carthusian, 11th c

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Spiritual practices have been described as doors which open conversations with the Holy One. Sometimes, however, we have questions about the practice itself which need to be answered before the real conversation can begin. The following may answer some of the questions that arise when you start doing Lectio Divina.

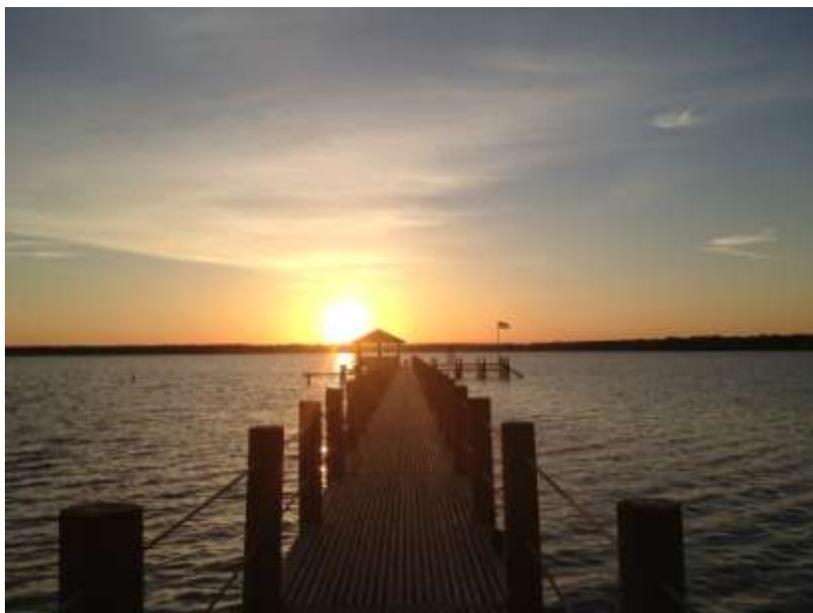
What if?....

I can't decide what text to use? You may want to begin with a familiar passage like the 23rd Psalm or the Lord's Prayer.

Focusing on the upcoming gospel reading for Sunday is also a good way to use Lectio Divina to enhance not only your personal devotions but also your worship experience. The readings and wonderful insights may be found on the Text Week website at

www.textweek.com.

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The Four Steps of Lectio Divina

Read (lectio)

Meditate (meditation)

Pray (oratio)

Contemplate (contemplation)

The Process of Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina can be done alone or in a group. There are many different forms it can take. It can be done with just about any type of writing—scripture, poetry, and devotional writings all lend themselves well to the process. It helps to choose a passage that isn't too long. A paragraph or two at the most is a good length for this type of reading and prayer.

1. Read the passage through slowly once or twice. If you are alone, you may want to
2. Read it aloud or you may want to write it out for yourself to form a physical

connection to the words. Sit with the passage as a whole for a few minutes.

- What is the text about?
- What is the literal meaning of the text?

3. Read the passage slowly again, looking for a word or phrase that stands out to you – something that catches your eye or “shimmers” as you read the text. If you read the text aloud, it may be a word that resonated as you spoke it. If you wrote it out, it may be a phrase where you paused while writing. Sit with this word or phrase for a few minutes.

- What meaning does this particular word or phrase have for you at this time in your life?
- What do you hear the Spirit saying to you through the text?

4. Read the passage through a third time. Sit prayerfully for a few minutes.

- Do you sense an invitation to action or feel you are being called to respond in a certain way to this text?
- What may God be nudging you to do?

5. Read the passage through a final time. After the last reading, sit in silence, resting with the experience.