

Lectio Divina – A Brief History

Lectio Divina means “Divine Reading” and refers specifically to an approach to prayer and scripture reading practiced by monastics since the early Church.

The idea of praying with sacred scripture comes to the Church through ancient Jewish tradition. Christians in the early Church continued this tradition and further developed the practice of prayer and meditation using mostly the psalms as a rich source of heartfelt engagement with God. This development is evident in early Church History in the 48th chapter of the Rule of St. Benedict (A.D. 480-453).

In the 11th century, a Carthusian prior named Guigo formalized Lectio Divina, describing the practice in a letter written to a fellow religious. This letter has become known as *The Ladder of Monks* and describes a four-runged ladder to Heaven, each rung being one of the four steps in his method of prayerful scripture reading. These steps are provided below along with a short definition of each and brief quotes from Guigo’s letter:

Lectio (reading): An attentive, slow, repetitious recitation of a short passage of scripture.

“looking on Holy Scripture with all one’s will and wit”

Meditatio (meditation): An effort to understand the passage and apply it to my own life.

“a studious searching with the mind to know what was before concealed”

Oratio (prayer): Engaging or talking with God about the passage.

“a devout desiring of the heart to get what is good and avoid what is evil”

Contemplatio (contemplation): Allowing oneself to be absorbed in the words of God as the Holy Spirit draws us into His presence through scripture.

“the lifting up of the heart to God tasting somewhat of the heavenly sweetness”

Read more: <http://rcspiritualdirection.com/blog/2012/04/21/what-is-lectio-divina-and-will-it-help-my-prayer-life-a-guide-to-lectio-divina#ixzz2OIEgYojX>

Accepting the Embrace of God
The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina
*by Fr. Luke Dysinger, O.S.B. **

THE PRACTICE of LECTIO DIVINA

CHOOSE a text of the Scriptures that you wish to pray. Many Christians use in their daily lectio divina one of the readings from the Eucharistic liturgy for the day; others prefer to slowly work through a particular book of the Bible. It makes no difference which text is chosen, as long as one has no set goal of “covering” a certain amount of text: the amount of text “covered” is in God’s hands, not yours.

PLACE YOURSELF in a comfortable position and allow yourself to become silent. Some Christians focus for a few moments on their breathing; other have a beloved “prayer word” or “prayer phrase” they gently recite in order to become interiorly silent. For some the practice known as “centering prayer” makes a good, brief introduction to lectio divina. Use whatever method is best for you and allow yourself to enjoy silence for a few moments.

THEN TURN to the text and read it slowly, gently. Savor each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the “still, small voice” of a word or phrase that somehow says, “I am for you today.” Do not expect lightening or ecstasies. In lectio divina God is teaching us to listen to Him, to seek Him in silence. He does not reach out and grab us; rather, He softly, gently invites us ever more deeply into His presence.

NEXT TAKE the word or phrase into yourself. Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories and ideas. Do not be afraid of “distractions.” Memories or thoughts are simply parts of yourself which, when they rise up during lectio divina, are asking to be given to God along with the rest of your inner self. Allow this inner pondering, this rumination, to invite you into dialogue with God.

THEN, SPEAK to God. Whether you use words or ideas or images or all three is not important. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. And give to Him what you have discovered in yourself during your experience of meditatio. Experience yourself as the priest that you are. Experience God using the word or phrase that He has given you as a means of blessing, of transforming the ideas and memories, which your pondering on His word has awakened. Give to God what you have found within your heart.

FINALLY, SIMPLY rest in God's embrace. And when He invites you to return to your pondering of His word or to your inner dialogue with Him, do so. Learn to use words when words are helpful, and to let go of words when they no longer are necessary. Rejoice in the knowledge that God is with you in both words and silence, in spiritual activity and inner receptivity.

SOMETIMES IN lectio divina one will return several times to the printed text, either to savor the literary context of the word or phrase that God has given, or to seek a new word or phrase to ponder. At other times only a single word or phrase will fill the whole time set aside for lectio divina. It is not necessary to anxiously assess the quality of one's lectio divina as if one were "performing" or seeking some goal: lectio divina has no goal other than that of being in the presence of God by praying the Scriptures.

CONCLUSION

LECTIO DIVINA is an ancient spiritual art that is being rediscovered in our day. It is a way of allowing the Scriptures to become again what God intended that they should be - a means of uniting us to Himself. In lectio divina we discover our own underlying spiritual rhythm. We experience God in a gentle oscillation back and forth between spiritual activity and receptivity, in the movement from practice into contemplation and back again into spiritual practice.

LECTIO DIVINA teaches us about the God who truly loves us. In lectio divina we dare to believe that our loving Father continues to extend His embrace to us today. And His embrace is real. In His word we experience ourselves as personally loved by God; as the recipients of a word which He gives uniquely to each of us whenever we turn to Him in the Scriptures.

FINALLY, lectio divina teaches us about ourselves. In lectio divina we discover that there is no place in our hearts, no interior corner or closet that cannot be opened and offered to God. God teaches us in lectio divina what it means to be members of His royal priesthood - a people called to consecrate all of our memories, our hopes and our dreams to Christ.

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