

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina means *divine reading*.

The Four Movements of Lectio Divina

- a) **Lectio** -- Settling and shimmering – read the text a few times, first silently, then aloud and then silently again. Listen for a word or phrase that grabs your attention in some way – the word or phrase that *shimmers* for you.
- b) **Meditatio** – savoring and stirring – reflect on the word or phrase, think about it, free associate -- listen for what thoughts, images, memories and meanings it evokes – see what it stirs up in you.
- c) **Oratio** – summoning and serving – what prayer does this word or phrase summon up in you? What message do you feel God is giving you in this word or phrase? Are you being called to a new awareness or action?
- d) **Contemplatio** – slowing and stilling – now try to just sit with God. This last movement is about resting in the still presence of God. Simply be.

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History of Lectio Divina:

During the early centuries of the church, (3 – 5 centuries) wise men and women fled the population centers and went into the desert to be fully present to God and to deal with their own inner struggles with faithfulness and holiness. These Desert Fathers and Mothers – this was the beginning of the monastic movement in the Christian church – many people followed them seeking their wisdom and guidance for spiritual life.

One tradition was to ask them for a word – this word would be something they would think about and ponder and meditate on for a long period time, with the hope and expectation that this word would be an opening into wisdom. This practice is one of the roots of Lectio Divina, where we approach the Bible with the same request.

St Benedict described this practice as to “listen with the ear of our heart.”

The Attitudes of Lectio:

Lectio = reading; Lectio Divina = divine reading

- Lectio Divina is an experiential hearing of the Word of God; understanding the word as the divine presence.
- Lectio Divina is an ancient practice of listening deeply to the voice of God speaking through the sacred texts.

- Lectio Divina cultivates in us the ability to be fully present to the holy call, the understanding of the holy given to us.
- The holy is mediated through the words of the sacred text.
- Lectio Divina is understood as an encounter with God, with the Spirit of God.

The words of Scripture are so familiar to many of us. We must bring certain attitudes to the hearing of the Word:

(1) **Humility:**

- (a) acceptance of our ignorance about God and many other things. If you have very fixed ideas, or very cherished ideas on what certain passages of Scripture mean, Lectio Divina invites you to strive for some humility in understanding.
- (b) humility to know that we are not going to be perfect at doing this; this is a tall order and we need the humility to know that this is going to be different each time we try it.
- (c) In spite of our very best efforts our listening is limited, but Lectio Divina can and will be an inexhaustible means of spiritual enlightenment and growth because it underscores that everyday God speaks to us with something new.
- (d) Our individual listening is in part defined by our position in time and place, and most profoundly influenced by our attitudes, our experiences and our prejudices.

(2) **Openness:**

- (a) We undermine the process if we think that we have heard all this before. Lectio Divina calls for an alert listening, an openness to all that is possible in the moment – that God has a special and unique message for you this day as you are here and now. We are not simply reading a text we have read so often before, we are meeting a Person, a Divine Person, the God who loves us. Lectio Divina is an encounter with God.
- (b) We need to bring an openness to conversion, to an expansion of our understanding, and a willingness to change, to be changed by the Word of God.
- (c) The Scriptures are a love story from God to us and when we receive love it changes us, when we give love it changes us.
- (d) Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will teach us everything. That is what we open ourselves to in Lectio Divina – the teaching of the Spirit mediated through the Word of God.

(3) **Faithfulness:** to this practice of prayer. Like anything else, we get better with practice.