



# LECTIO DIVINA

## Listening to the Word of God in Scripture

Lectio Divina is one of the great treasures of the Christian tradition of prayer. It means Divine Reading, which is reading the book we believe to be divinely inspired. This tradition of prayer flows out of a Hebrew method of studying the Scriptures which was an interactive interpretation of the Scriptures by means of the free use of the text to explore its inner meaning. It was part of the devotional practice of the Jews in the days of Jesus. 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).

Lectio Divina is a traditional way of cultivating friendship with Christ. It is a way of listening to the texts of Scripture as if we were in conversation with Christ and He were suggesting the topics of conversation. It is listening with the “ear” of the heart. The daily encounter with Christ and reflection on His word leads beyond mere acquaintanceship to an attitude of friendship, trust, and love. Conversation simplifies and gives way to communing. Gregory the Great (6th century) in summarizing the Christian contemplative tradition expressed it as “resting in God.”

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”*

## **Preparation**

As with any attempt to progress in the spiritual life, the practice of Lectio Divina will require deliberate patience. Create a space that is restful and devoid of any distractions. This may involve lighting candles, burning incense or utilising the presence of icons. Once we are as calm and peaceful as possible, simply acknowledge that Christ is with us and invoke the blessing and guidance of the Holy Spirit on your time of solitude and prayer.

### **Step-by-Step Lectio Divina**

#### **Lectio –**

It is always advisable to meditate on the scripture from the Mass of the day, particularly the Gospel passage. However, any text of scripture will do. The key is not to rush. Begin to read very slowly, vocally, and gently, coming to an understanding of the words themselves along with the related ideas and images that surface. When a particular passage or word strikes us we pause to consider it more fully. At the first pause, we will then naturally move into meditatio.

#### **Meditatio –**

Now we meditate on what we have read, visualizing it and listening for His prompting or His guiding. We seek the deeper spiritual meanings of the words as we place ourselves in a gospel scene as one of the participants or simply hear God speaking directly to us as we read the words. Simply allow the words to penetrate our hearts and minds and follow where God leads us through the text. As we begin to respond or converse with God about our encounter with Him, we then move into oratio.

#### **Oratio –**

As we are drawn into the passage we begin to converse with God about what we are reading. Oratio is simply the response of the heart to God. It is important here to remember that God has revealed Himself as a person. When we talk with Him, it is sometimes helpful call this to mind. Our conversation should be as natural as with someone whom we deeply love and desire to know.

In whatever manner we are led, we ask for forgiveness, we thank Him, we praise Him, we ask Him to for the grace to be changed by what we have read. We ask Him to help us more fully realize what He wants us to be and to help us apply His moral, spiritual, or practical guidance to our lives. As we engage with Him, He may choose to call us deeper, to become lost in this heavenly dialogue with Him. We will eventually find ourselves moving into contemplatio.

#### **Contemplatio –**

Here God satisfies our ultimate thirst and needs as the Holy Spirit prays with us, in us, and through us. Sometimes we recognize this work in our hearts; sometimes it is merely a matter of faith that He is with us and imparting His life-changing grace to us. Always we can know that He is changing us because he has promised that the “word of God never returns empty”.

---

### **Lectio Divina and Bible Study**

Bible Study is the reading of the scriptures for information and an understanding of the context of the passage. It provides a solid conceptual background for the practice of Lectio Divina.

Lectio Divina is a reflective reading of scripture. It is a method of prayer that leads us into the deeper meaning of scripture and the transformation of our lives. A contemplative reading of the Scriptures is compatible with well-grounded interpretation of the Bible.