

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina – translated as ‘*sacred reading*’ - is the traditional practice of scriptural reading. It treats the bible as the Living Word of God rather than as a text to be studied theologically. Although it is the reading of the bible in a ‘sacred way’ it can also be a way of intensifying prayer with four steps:

reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation

Traditionally the four Latin equivalents are used to express these four steps:

Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, Contemplatio

Another way of describing it would be "*Feasting on the Word.*"

Firstly taking a bite (Lectio), then chewing on it (Meditatio), savoring the essence of it (Oratio) and finally digesting the Word and made a part of the body (Contemplatio). The belief is, that with this attitude of ‘reverential hearing’, the mind and heart are illumined by the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who inspired the Sacred Scriptures.

The roots: The tradition of scriptural reflection and interpretation goes back a long way. It is likely that it was brought to the West, from the Desert Fathers of the East, by John Cassian. It was developed by St Benedict in the communities he established in the 6th century and continues in use today. The daily life in a Benedictine monastery was governed by the motto *Ora et labora* (pray and work) and consisted of three elements: liturgical prayer, manual labor and Lectio Divina, St Benedict wrote:

“Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore the bretheren should have specified periods of manual labor as well as for prayerful reading (lectio divina).”

The Rule of St Benedict stipulated specific times and manners for Lectio Divina. The entire community in a monastery was to take part in the readings during Sunday, except those who had other tasks to perform. In the traditional Benedictine approach the passage is read slowly four times, each time with a slightly different focus.

Example: John 14:27: Jesus speaking: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you" An analytical approach would focus on the reason for the statement during the Last Supper, and the biblical context, but in Lectio Divina rather than "dissecting peace", the practitioner "enters peace" and shares in the peace of Christ. The peace is achieved by a closer communion with God rather than a biblical analysis of the passage.

Summary

Lectio - reading - is the eager seeking after the word of God and divine truth and the way by which God's truth is imparted to us.

Meditatio - meditation -helps us to welcome the word of God into our lives and turn it from a dead word into the living word and presence of God.

Oratio - prayer - is the process of thinking about the things that have been revealed to us through the Word of God and deciding about the impact on our lives.

Contemplatio – contemplation - brings together our union of love with God as a result of the dialogue with God. We are often unaware of this process.

The 4 steps can be followed in any order and repeated as often desired. A different amount of time can be given to each step and some steps repeated more often than others.

Prayer suggestion for using Lectio Divina

Lectio (*reading*)

Matthew 9:9-13

The Call of Matthew

Meditatio (*meditation*)

Jesus came to call sinners, the unworthy. God is merciful and none of us need ever be discouraged or imagine that we are unworthy of being in the presence of God and Christ. However, having received God's gracious invitation, and assurance of mercy and forgiveness, we now have the duty to follow Jesus in his example of mercy and forgiveness to those who have offended us. This means that following Jesus can be 'The Way of the Cross'.

Oratio (*prayer*)

Respond to the call of Jesus by inviting Him to join in a fellowship conversation. Dialogue with Him and tell Him our joy at His good news and our gratitude for God's mercy and forgiveness. Resolve to be ready to forgive others and be united with those who have offended us. Share with God how you intend to follow Jesus in the Way of the Cross.

Contemplatio (*contemplation*)

Be still and be open to any insights, thoughts, desires, resolutions, peace, joy or love that come to mind.

Another reading suggestion is Matthew 13:44-52.