

«LECTIO DIVINA»  
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**Lectio Divina** is a way of reading/praying Scripture which can be traced back through early Christian times to the Judaism of the pre-Christian era. For persons who have a strong faith in God's prior initiative in contacting them, it is a traditional way of replying. God's communication arrives for the Catholic through Scripture as it is understood in the Tradition of the Roman Church. For contemporary persons of faith, Catholics included, this communication from God is not always easy to respond to. The reasons for this are varied, but one principal reason is the increasingly triumphant media consumerism of the contemporary world: the flood of information and entertainment is so overwhelming in its power to distract that only a determined effort can enable a believer to make the response to God's Word which God desires.

Lectio Divina is a way of reading/praying Scripture which has various aspects. These aspects are not to be regarded as differentiated stages, but as viewpoints of a single act which is at once simple and complex: simple, because it is basically an attempt to respond to God's Word with all my heart; complex, because it is basically an attempt to respond to God's Word with all my heart. In the concrete act of Lectio Divina these aspects can be distinguished from each other but not separated. As distinguished, they can be made the focal point of attention. But they all have one common essential element: all acts of Lectio Divina take place in the context of faith. The deeper the faith, the more profound the reception of God's message conveyed in the Word and the more authentic the response.

All Lectio Divina should be viewed as an indirect participation in the liturgy, i.e., it is connected with the worship of God. (Lectio Divina has as its ultimate goal the "sanctity" of those who make use of it; and "sanctity" in the Judaeo-Christian tradition means the fitness to stand in God's presence.) Further, as used and explained in contemporary Catholic life Lectio Divina has a wide range of meanings. Each has its own particular value. The interpretation given in this presentation does not pretend to exhaust all the possible riches of Scripture when it is approached under the rubric of Lectio Divina.

Aspect One: Lectio. This aspect consists in the repeated reading of a passage of Scripture in order to understand the meaning which the original authors, human and divine, intended it to convey. The text should be read again and again. Further, in the Lectio we try to understand the passage in its original context. The more specific the context, the better: historical, geographical, cultural, literary—above all, religious. In what context was the original author writing? That is: when was he writing? where was he writing? in what circumstances was he writing? how does his faith manifest itself in the text? what faith response does he expect? In this aspect, scholarly commentaries can be of considerable help, though their frequent lack of explicit attention to the faith dimension must be kept in mind. The faith dimension is crucial. The faith dimension transcends the original circumscribed conditions in which the text was composed and has universal and lasting validity. Continued rereading can help us understand this faith dimension and the religious point which is at its center. Further, such re-reading in faith can help us place this point in the context of the entire Bible. How does the Spirit, the ultimate author of this passage and of all Scripture, want this passage to fit in to the rest of what He has inspired in the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church?

Aspect Two: Meditatio. This aspect consists in an attempt to understand what the relevance of the original meaning of a text has for me today. It consists in reflection on the lasting purpose of the text—the original religious point of the human and divine authors—that transcends the temporal and spatial limitations of the text's original setting by reason of the faith dimension. Meditatio seeks to know what the text indicates to me as a believer of today with regard to how I live. In order to make sure that God is the One Who is speaking to me in a text, I have to make sure that what seems relevant for today is linked to the original meaning. 1) Lectio: original meaning. 2) Meditatio: relevance of that meaning for today. What is the relevance for today of the religious point which the authors, human and divine, were making in the text in its all-important faith dimension? How am I addressed by this religious point which is communicated through a reading of the text in faith? How were the original addressees expected by God to respond? How am I expected to respond as a believing member of the Catholic Church?

Aspect Three: Oratio. This aspect consists in prayer that comes spontaneously from the Lectio and from the Meditatio. It is an unscripted reaction of the heart of a believer in response to a text written by a believer and addressed to believers. It is a plea for God's help for our faith in understanding what He is saying and in responding as He wishes us to respond. In this way the Oratio can encompass pleas for a great variety of virtues, as well as for many other gifts. The Spirit inspired the text with just such pleas in mind. Hence the Spirit is ready to respond to such pleas. This Oratio is not something that remains only internal. It is ordered ultimately also to what is external, to the way we live our faith in all the dimensions of our life. Here we are at the heart of true prayer: as a person I address the Persons of the Father through Christ in the Spirit.

Aspect Four: Contemplatio. This aspect consists in adoration, praise and silence in faith before the God Who is communicating with me as result of my attempts to come to grips with His word. When I am intrigued by a beautiful sunset I instinctively spend time contemplating what I see so that it can become a part of my lifetime experience of beauty. When I am intrigued by a meaningful insight into Scripture with regard to how I should live and believe I instinctively spend time contemplating what I see so that it can become a part of my lifetime experience of following Christ. This prayerful contemplation results in my standing before almighty God with my

heart exposed, so that the initiative is with Him, so that with His help the fruit of my prayer may become a part of me. Contemplation results in an attitude of listening with my heart. "Heart" here is to be understood in the Semitic sense of the center of my being, that point at which my memory, intellect, will, affections meet and where "I" am really "I". It is where I make my choices before God. My heart in this sense is made up of all my past choices. I am the result of all of my past free choices.

The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place "to which I withdraw." The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant. (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, §2563)

Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ. It is the action of God and of man, springing forth from both the Holy Spirit and ourselves, wholly directed to the Father, in union with the human will of the Son of God made man. (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, §2564)

True contemplation will reveal this heart more and more to me because it reveals God more and more to me. True contemplation will help me see who I really am and who I am destined to be in God's sight. True contemplation will work towards a transformation of my heart. Christ is the privileged center of Christian contemplation, for it is through Christ that I go to the Father: in knowing Christ, I know the Father as Christ's brother and as the Father's child. To the extent that I know Christ the Father reveals to me my identity as it is now and as He wants it to be. To the extent that Contemplatio functions, it protects the entire process of Lectio Divina from the danger of imposing a narrow interpretation of who I am on my heart. For only the Trinity really knows who I am, and in the Contemplatio They reveal my identity to me. In Contemplatio God has the last word.

Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, Contemplatio. Four interconnected aspects of a prayerful approach to God through Christ in replying to His initiative in reaching out to me in Scripture.