

“What is Lectio Divina?”

“Lectio Divina” means *sacred reading*, or *holy reading*, and it is one of the oldest forms of Christian prayer. It is meant to allow the Scripture, in all its awesome power, to draw us closer to God.

Since God is the author of Scripture, the Lord is present in the reading and hearing of the Word. St. Jerome, who translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, was an early advocate of “sacred reading.” Sts. Augustine, Basil and Benedict all made ample use of it.

Eventually, the practice became a common form of prayer in monastic communities in Europe. Lectio Divina is still closely associated with monasteries, but in recent decades many Christians who lead active lives in the world have learned to pray this way as well.

Four Stages

The essence of lectio Divina is reading the words of Scripture with one's “heart,” guided by the Holy Spirit. It is not a rigid technique, rather a flexible method that involves 4 stages.

Lectio Divina begins with a scriptural text that is chosen in advance. Typically, it is a short text, often a single verse containing the words of Jesus or an event.

The first step is *lectio* – “reading”. We read for understanding. What is the context of the verse? What did the author mean to convey to the people he was addressing? The question to ask in lectio: “What does the text say?”

The second stage is *meditatio* – “meditation”. We let the verse ruminate. We remember it. We read it or hear it a few times, slowly and carefully. What do the words mean to me? How do they interact with my thoughts and memories? The question to ask in meditation: “What does the text say to me?”

The third stage is *oratio* – “prayer”. Our hearts have been stirred by meditating on the verse. God has spoken to us through the words. Now, what response do we make? The question asked in oratio: “What do I say to God in response to this text?”

The final stage is *contemplatio* – “contemplation”. Our prayer moves beyond words and beyond thought. We simply rest in God. We let His love transform us. The question asked in contemplation: “What is God saying to me?”

Dialogue

Lectio Divina does not always unfold in an ordered progression of stages. Often, we will oscillate between times of acting and times of receiving. We are “busy” reading, thinking, speaking. Then we quietly listen and receive what God has for us.

Nevertheless, the natural movement of lectio Divina is toward ever-greater simplicity. It begins with close scrutiny of the words of Scripture. It ends with wordless enjoyment of God.

Gradually the words of Scripture dissolve and the Word of God is revealed before the eyes of our heart. Reading the sacred words fosters a dialogue with God.

New Habits Needed

In order to enter Lectio Divina, we need to learn some new habits. First of all, we must *slow down*. Sacred reading takes time. Those who consistently pray this way often recommend that we set aside an ample amount of time in a quiet place for it.



We also need to learn to *read differently*. We're accustomed to reading texts in order to understand the information they convey. It's a cognitive process, an act of the intellect. The goal of “sacred reading,” however, is to seek God. It's an exercise of the heart and a process that's led by the Holy Spirit.

Join us on Wednesdays of Lent

7:00 PM – Main Church