

Lectio Divina – Praying with Scripture

This is Latin for divine reading, spiritual reading, or “holy reading,” and represents a traditional Christian practice of prayer and scriptural reading intended to promote communion with God and to increase in the knowledge of God’s Word. This is the way we pray the scriptures. The Scriptures communicate to us the Word of God, the Word that God intends us to receive.

Begin by choosing a short section of Sacred Scripture. The five parts are first taking a bite (Lectio), then chewing on it (Meditatio). Next is the opportunity to savor the essence of it (Oratio). Next, the Word is digested and made a part of the body (Contemplatio). Lastly, the nourishment we received results in action (application).

1. **Lectio** – This first moment consists in reading the scriptural passage slowly, attentively several times.
 2. **Meditatio** – The Christian, gravitating around the passage or one of its words, takes it and ruminates on it, thinking in God’s presence about the text.
 3. **Oratio** – This is prayer, both as dialogue with God, that is, as loving conversation with the One who has invited us into His embrace; and as consecration, prayer as the priestly offering to God of parts of ourselves that we have not previously believed God wants. Invite God into the most difficult and pain-filled experiences. Gently repeat over the healing word or phrase He has given us in our lectio and meditation.
 4. **Contemplatio** – This moment is characterized by a simple, loving focus on God. In other words, it is a beautiful, wordless contemplation of God, a joyful rest in His presence.
 5. **Application**. Our encounter with God and his word must result in growth in virtue or an application to our life. This may arise in a change of attitude, a sense of God’s closeness or consolation, or an act of love.
- When I think of prayer, I’m drawn to the visit of Jesus at the home of Martha and Mary.
 - The encounter in scripture is short, but we learn that when Jesus comes into the home of our soul, we cannot be anxious and running around like Martha, but most slow down and be with the Lord like Mary who chose the better part.
 - Perhaps Martha, out of hospitality, asked our Lord if she could get him something to drink.
 - And his response may have been, *“No thank you, but I can give you something to drink, the living waters of myself, if you would be still and know that I am God.”*
 - There is a reoccurring theme of thirst in the spiritual life.
 - St. Paul said, *“Our ancestors ... drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ.”*
 - That is what prayer does, it dips into the rock of Christ who called himself the living water.
 - We say, *“I know, I’ve tried prayer. I say all these things to God but I never hear him speak to me like he did to Moses in the burning bush.”*
 - Ok, God probably won’t be as dramatic but I guarantee he is speaking.
 - In fact, if we learn the Church’s practice of Lectio Divina or Divine Reading, he will speak to that thirst in our souls.
 - Sts. Ambrose and Augustine said that we speak to God via prayer, but God speaks to us via scripture.
 - Lectio Divina opens our ears to hear his voice in the scripture through five steps: **reading, meditation, conversation, contemplation, and application.**
 - **Steps one and two: pick a reading from scripture and mediate.**
 - It’s easiest to pick one of the 150 Psalms, which the Catechism refers to as the school of prayer.
 - Pick a Psalm that resonates with what you are experiencing now.
 - There are Psalms of gratitude, suffering, praise, penance, etc.
 - Read it through once, then narrow it down to 4-5 verses that caught your attention.
 - Reread the smaller selection asking God to highlight key words or phrases that stir your soul.
 - Now create a mental image similar to when we read a novel.

- Picture yourself sitting at the feet of the teacher like Mary.
 - Get lost in the experience, for Moses never checked his watch when God spoke from burning bush.
 - Psalm 1:2 reads, *“his delight is in the law of the Lord (that is the word of God), and on his law he meditates day and night.”*
- **Step three: Conversation or prayer with God.**
 - Like young Samuel, we need to say, *“Speak Lord, your servant is listening.”*
 - If we cannot hear God’s small tiny voice then check for the following hindrances:
 - 1) Perhaps we have not quieted our soul from the busyness.
 - 2) Maybe we are talking and not listening.
 - 3) Do we have mortal sin on our soul? Confession cleans the home of the soul before Jesus visits.
 - 4) Do we have some worldly attachment that we won’t let go of? Lent says fast from it.
 - 5) Desire His will over your own: *“Thy will be done.”* All these threads can keep our soul from ascending to God said St. John of the Cross, who wrote, *“It makes little difference whether a bird is tied by a thin thread or by a cord ... the bird will be held bound just as surely.”*
- **Step four: Contemplation or beholding the face of God.**
 - What do we do in this step? Nothing!
 - St. John Paul II wrote, *“All harm comes to us from not keeping our eyes fixed on [Jesus], if we were to look at nothing else but the way, we would soon arrive....Remember Jesus, close to your side ... I’m not asking you to do anything more than look at Him.”*
 - When holding a baby in our arms we don’t have to say anything. Just behold the child in love.
 - Contemplation is picturing our self as the child and God as the parent gazing at us in great love and rejoicing in us as a product of his love.
 - Contemplation requires us to be receptive and drink in the loving gaze.
 - St. Francis de Sales said, *“Between lovers, the eyes speak more eloquently than the tongue.”*
 - We must be completely open to God, hiding nothing.
 - God told Moses to remove his sandals when he approached him, because standing before God requires vulnerability.
 - We can’t love nor be loved with a shield or screen up.
- **Step five: Apply our encounter with God to our life.**
 - First, bank up the experience.
 - There will be dry spells in prayer and there will be desolation and trials that we must return to former experiences of God to be strengthened.
 - Second, every encounter with God should compel us to become more like God.
 - St. James said, *“Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”*
 - St. Francis de Sales recommend picking a spiritual bouquet from the garden of God.
 - That is, carrying two or three ideas from our prayer throughout the day and smelling it or returning to it in the stench of daily life.
- In prayer, we sit at the feet of the teacher like Mary because we intend to learn.
 - Psalm 95 states, *“If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts.”*
 - It is Christ, the Rock and fount of living water who is constantly saying to us, *“Follow me.”*
 - We can only follow Him if we are willing to listen to Him.
 - And we can only find him if we ask, seek, and knock in prayer.
 - For the Catechism lays out the fruit of doing Lectio Divina: *“Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you by contemplation.”*