

Lectio Divina

“Lectio Divina” [“divine, or sacred, reading”] is the name given to a spiritual tradition among Christians over the last two thousand years, in which they attentively and prayerfully read the word of God.

Although there is an element of study in “Lectio Divina”, it is not the same as Bible Study, or exegesis, where one seeks to interpret the sacred text through analysis, and with the help of the work of scripture scholars. In Lectio Divina we seek not to master or grasp the sacred text, but rather through it, prayerfully and silently, to come into the presence of God. We seek to be humbly attentive to God’s Holy Word, to savour it, and to let it enter into our heart as much as our heads, so that it may transform us.

One approach to Lectio Divina is simply to move systematically through a book of the Bible, but it never involves worrying about “covering” a certain quantity of text: what matters more is the quality of our humble attentiveness. We choose a small portion of the sacred text, and reflect prayerfully upon it.

Lectio Divina is not intended to increase our intellectual knowledge of the Bible [though it also has that effect]; instead, it is intended to draw us closer to God, and to transform our attitudes and behaviour.

Three concepts from the Tradition:

1. Memory: To Hear: We read the text aloud, or repeat it from memory (which was all that many could do in ancient times, with a lack of books – it still is a profound way of encountering the Word of God). We start with the sacred text itself. We need to be immersed in it. We read it, or repeat it from memory, aloud again and again. We go, not to commentaries, but to the Word itself.

2. Intellect To Know: We need to reflect on the sacred text, for it is Light for our path. This is why we need to see the context of the passage, and be aware of the background and purpose of the text. What was the original intent of the human author? We also use our imagination to enter into the text, and to see it from the perspective of those who are in it. We reflect on

how it is connected to the whole of God's plan, from Old to New Testament, and see the connections. We think about how it speaks to us today.

3. Will – To Love: In our loving attentiveness to the Word of God in Scripture, we open our hearts to the Word of God: Jesus our Lord. We spend time with the one we love, through our prayerful reading of Scripture, and we resolve to serve him faithfully. Lectio Divina always involves time in silent adoration of the Lord, and a resolution to let our lives be deeply transformed by God's Word.

An Approach to Lectio Divina

There is no set method of engaging in Lectio Divina, but we benefit from a long tradition of reading the Bible in this way, and so can learn from those who have gone before us.

It is wise to **set aside some time** each day: perhaps 15 or 30 minutes, and, if possible, to find a **place** where we can pray undisturbed.

Read **aloud**, if possible.

For the **text**: 1) go slowly through a book of the Bible; or, 2) read one of the Mass readings of the day; or, 3) choose some passages that are united in theme; or, 4) choose the passage in some other way.

Rituals are helpful: perhaps sit in front of an icon or statue or crucifix. It is good if a home can have a prayer corner. Some light a candle as a sign that they are beginning prayer. **Posture**: Sit, stand, or kneel – whatever you find most helpful. The best place to pray is before the Blessed Sacrament.

Pray at the time of day that is best for you as an individual. For the text, use a Bible that has print that is easy to read.

One Approach in Practice:

1. I place myself in the presence of God, and spend some time in silent attentiveness. "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."
2. I read a passage slowly, aloud.
3. I spend some time in silent reflection upon it: "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

4. I think of 1) the context of the passage; 2) the way it fits together; 3) the people in it; 4) what is God saying to my head: to know God? To my heart: to love God? To my hands: to serve God and my neighbour? 5) I seek to understand any confusing elements.
5. I read the passage again.
6. I spend time in silent prayer: “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” Perhaps I repeat again and again a word from the passage. Perhaps I simply seek to be silent and attentive in the presence of the Lord. Perhaps I sing.
7. I read the passage again.
8. What light does it give for my path today?
9. I thank God for coming to me through the Word.
10. I say a prayer – such as the Lord’s Prayer, and enter once more into my service of the Lord.

Lectio Divina: Bibliography

- Bianchi, Enzo. Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio Divina. Trans. James Zona. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1998.
- Casey, Michael. Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina. Liguori Publications: (Triumph Books) Liguori, Missouri, 1995.
- Colombas, Garcia. M. Reading God: Lectio Divina. Trans. Gregory Roettger. Schuyler, NE: Benedictine Mission House, 1993
- Magrassi, Mariano. Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina. Trans. Edward Hagman. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998.
- Martini, Carlo. “The exercise of Lectio Divina” in The Joy of the Gospel Trans. James McGrath. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994, pp. 1-9.
- Masini, Mario. Lectio Divina: An Ancient Prayer that is Ever New Trans. Edmund C. Lane. New York: Alba House, 1998.
- Morello, Sam Anthony. Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer Washington: ICS Publications, 1995.

Pennington, Basil. Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Reading the Scriptures New York: Crossroad, 1998.

Salvail, Ghislaine. At the Crossroads of the Scriptures: An Introduction to Lectio Divina. Trans. Paul Duggan. Boston: Pauline Books ad Media, 1996

Thomas Collins, Archbishop of Toronto
