



Lectio Divina



What is the Lectio Divina?

The Bible is the Word of God which is always alive and active, always new. Lectio Divina is a traditional way of praying the Scriptures so that the Word of God may penetrate our hearts and that we may grow in an intimate relationship with the Lord. It is a very natural way of prayer and was developed and practiced by the early monks and thus came to the first Carmelite hermits.

For some centuries reading the Bible in one's own language was rather frowned upon and this led to a lessening of the practice of Lectio Divina. Thankfully in recent years, along with the whole Church, the Carmelite Order has rediscovered the importance of Lectio Divina as a privileged way of growing in the relationship with Jesus Christ. Through the practice of Lectio Divina, as individuals and as community, we leave space for God's Word to transform us so that we may begin to look upon our world as it were with the eyes of God and to love what we see with the heart of God.

"Lectio Divina", a Latin term, means "divine reading" and describes a way of reading the Scriptures whereby we gradually let go of our own agenda and open ourselves to what God wants to say to us. In the 12th century, a Carthusian monk called Guigo, described the stages which he saw as essential to the practice of Lectio Divina. There are various ways of practicing Lectio Divina either individually or in groups but Guigo's description remains fundamental.

He said that the first stage is **lectio** (reading) where we read the Word of God, slowly and reflectively so that it sinks into us. Any passage of Scripture can be used for this way of prayer but the passage should not be too long.

The second stage is **meditatio** (reflection) where we think about the text we have chosen and ruminate upon it so that we take from it what God wants to give us.

The third stage is **oratio** (response) where we leave our thinking aside and simply let our hearts speak to God. This response is inspired by our reflection on the Word of God.

The final stage of Lectio Divina is **contemplatio** (rest) where we let go not only of our own ideas, plans and meditations but also of our holy words and thoughts. We simply rest in the Word of God. We listen at the deepest level of our being to God who speaks within us with a still small voice. As we listen, we are gradually transformed from within. Obviously this transformation will have a profound effect on the way we actually live and the way we live is the test of the authenticity of our prayer. We must take what we read in the Word of God into our daily lives.

These stages of Lectio Divina are not fixed rules of procedure but simply guidelines as to how the prayer normally develops. Its natural movement is towards greater simplicity, with less and less talking and more listening. Gradually the words of Scripture begin to dissolve and the Word is revealed before the eyes of our heart. How much time should be given to each stage depends very much on whether it is used individually or in a group. If Lectio Divina is used for group prayer, obviously more structure is needed than for individual use. In group prayer, much will depend on the type of group. Lectio Divina may involve discussing the implications of the Word of God for daily life but it cannot be reduced to this. The movement of the prayer is towards silence. If the group is comfortable with silence, more time could be spent resting in the Word.

The practice of Lectio Divina as a way of praying the Scriptures has been a fruitful source of growing in relationship with Christ for many centuries and in our own day is being rediscovered by many individuals and groups. The Word of God is alive and active and will transform each of us if we open ourselves to receive what God wants to give us.

Suggested Structure of Lectio Divina Meeting

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| 1. Welcome | () | |
| 2. What is Lectio Divina? | () | |
| 3. Brief Outline | () | |
| 4. Opening Prayer | () | |
| 5. Reading of Scripture Passage | () | (Music on) |
| 6. Handout the Scripture text | | (Music off) |
| 7. Context | | |
| 8. Reading of Scripture Passage | () | (Music on) |
| 9. Silence | | |
| 10. Reading of Scripture Passage | () | |
| 11. Leader invites people to share a passage,
word or phrase that struck them... | () | (Music off) |
| 12. Reading of Scripture Passage | () | (Music on) |
| 13. Share ask questions | | (Music off) |
| 14. Closing prayer | () | |