

## *Lectio Divina*

### *Background*

*Lectio Divina* means “Spiritual or Sacred Reading”. It is an ancient and revered monastic prayer practice developed in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century CE and inspired by Benedict of Nursia (c480-c547). This expression for prayer was used earlier by Sts Ambrose (c340-397), Augustine (354-430) and Hilary of Poitiers (c310-c367). Benedict (480-547; in his Rule Chapter #48) and Pope Gregory I (c540-604) are considered the founders of the practice.

Guigo II (+1188/1193) later reflects on what he considers the four stages of prayer: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*. John of the Cross (1542-1591) taught these four stages, writing, “Seek in **reading** and you will find in **meditation**; knock in **prayer** and it will be opened to you in **contemplation**”

### *Revival*

In recent decades there has been a revival in *Lectio Divina*. In 1965, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council encouraged a return to this ancient prayer practice. They encourage all the ordained to,

hold fast to the Sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading and careful study... This is to be done so that none of them will become "an empty preacher of the word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly" since they must share the abundant wealth of the divine word with the faithful committed to them, especially in the sacred liturgy. The sacred synod also earnestly and especially urges all the Christian faithful, especially Religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the "excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:8). "For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." (5) Therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself...through devotional reading.. And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and people may talk together; for "we speak to God when we pray; we hear God when we read the divine saying." (Dei Verbum, #25).

Benedict XVI writes of *Lectio Divina*:

I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *Lectio Divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart [cf. [\*Dei verbum\*](#), n. 25]. If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church – I am convinced of it – a new spiritual springtime.

Pope Francis also recommends *Lectio Divina*. His reflections are worth quoting in full:

There is one particular way of listening to what the Lord wishes to tell us in His Word and of letting ourselves be transformed by the Spirit. It is what we call *lectio divina*. It consists of reading God's Word in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us...

In the presence of God, during a recollected reading of the text, it is good to ask, for example: 'Lord, what does this text say to me? What is it about my life that you want to change by this text? What troubles me about this text? Why am I not interested in this?'

Or perhaps: 'What do I find pleasant in this text? What is it about this word that moves me? What attracts me? Why does it attract me?'

When we make an effort to listen to the Lord, temptations usually arise. One of them is simply to feel troubled or burdened, and to turn away.

Another common temptation is to think about what the text means for other people, and so avoid applying it to our own life. It can also happen that we look for excuses to water down the clear meaning of the text. Or we can wonder if God is demanding too much of us, asking for a decision which we are not yet prepared to make.

This leads many people to stop taking pleasure in the encounter with God's Word; but this would mean forgetting that no one is more patient than God our Father, that no one is more understanding and willing to wait.

He always invites us to take a step forward, but does not demand a full response if we are not yet ready. He simply asks that we sincerely look at our life and present ourselves honestly before Him, and that we be willing to continue to grow, asking from Him what we ourselves cannot as yet achieve.

*Evangelii Gaudium* (#152-3)

Further background on *Lectio Divina* from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops may be found [here](#).

## *The Practice*

The following is a suggested approach for Lectio Divina in the Parish of Lockleys, designed for small groups. The prayer begins quietly with awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Then *Four Movements* unfold. The *Lectio* may conclude with petitionary or intercessory prayer and the “Our Father”.

The same approach for groups can be easily adapted when praying privately.

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*The Beginning:* The *Lectio* begins with silence, as each person becomes aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the stillness of their heart, and invites the Spirit to open each one’s heart and direct them to come to hear God’s Word freshly.

*Movement 1:* One voice reads the text slowly

- After a suitable moment, each speaks a word or phrase that they have noticed or attracts them. What attracts or draws me in the text?

*Movement 2:* After some time of quiet, a second voice reads the same text slowly

- After a moment, each speaks the reason that their chosen word or phrase was ‘attractive’. Why did this word or phrase attract me?

*Movement 3:* After some time of quiet, a third voice reads the same text slowly.

- After a moment,
- each speaks what implication this word or phrase has for the person’s life or call to discipleship: What will I do or how will I be as a result of God’s Word to me through this time of *Lectio Divina*?

*Movement 4:* After a time of quiet has passed, each person prays (either out loud or quietly) for the person on their right in the light of what they have heard this person pray.

- Their prayer concludes with the person praying out loud with the word “Amen”, to which all respond “Amen”. Then the next person prays for the one on their right.

*The Conclusion:* *Lectio Divina* may conclude with intercessory or petitionary prayer and the “Our Father”