

LECTIO DIVINA – LISTENING WITH THE HEART

Your Word is a Light for My Steps

Lectio Divina (Latin for godly reading) is a simple yet profound method of prayer found in many traditions of Christian spirituality. Sometimes it is called 'meditative reading' or 'spiritual reading', but could perhaps better be described as praying with a listening heart. The 'lectio' of Lectio Divina is a listening with the heart, as you tend to do quite naturally when you are struck by the beauty of a sunset, as you are mulling over a treasured memory, or as you pay attention to someone you love.

In praying this way you hear a scripture passage or other sacred text and you let God guide your heart. You read slowly, with pauses, and relish or drink in the words you are hearing. A natural process takes place: heartfelt listening moves naturally into a deep reflection upon the words and the silences between them; and that deep reflection leads you to some kind of heartfelt response. You find yourself speaking from the heart to the God who has spoken to you.

Let the ease and rhythm of this approach to prayer carry you deeper into God.



Jesus Christ is revealed to us through His holy Word, whenever we read the Scriptures or hear them proclaimed at Mass. Through Him we come to know the Father. (T-07136A-CW-V2)



Beginning

Choose your scripture passage and become comfortable with it. Read it over a few times to get past any questions that arise about meaning. Invite God to speak to you through the text. Ask for openness. Let yourself settle into an expectant stillness.

This kind of prayer has three 'phases' that you move between as you feel drawn: lectio (reading), meditatio (meditation) and oratio (prayer).

Lectio

Read slowly and gently, listening with your heart to the words. There is no need to rush. No need to get to the end of the passage. When a particular word or phrase strikes you and seems to have some savour, linger with it ...

Meditatio

... let it into you. Pause with it. Let the word or phrase resonate. Repeat it to yourself, relish it, let it echo and soak into you until the 'flavour' begins to go, then ...

Oratio

... let yourself respond in prayer, in words from the heart, or a space full of silence, or spontaneous, unspoken feeling. Whenever the moment feels ripe, begin to read again ...

Ending

When you are ready, mark the end of your time of prayer with some closing gesture or words of prayer. Afterwards you might want to make a note of anything that seemed significant.

PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH THE IMAGINATION

God often seems to speak to people in prayer through the imagination. This can move beyond what I feel I ought to say and think in God's presence and what I think the correct ideas ought to be. Instead the imagination helps me to understand what it is I really want from God, what it is God is calling me to or what it is that God is offering me at this moment in my life.

'But,' many people say, 'I have no imagination.' They tend to mean they don't have the kind of imagination that comes up with vivid, technicolour images. But imagination works in different ways for different people. Some see images with the detail of a film director. Others get a sense of the 'feel' of a place, without picturing it in the same way. Others again will build up a mental scene detail by detail.

Everyone has imagination! Take a moment now to get a sense of a place you are fond of, or a person you love. The power that enables you to know what that feels like is the imagination. And the following exercise can help you to use that same power in prayer.

This prayer works well with any gospel or Old Testament scene where there is action taking place (so don't choose passages that are simply teaching or poetry). One or two examples of suitable passages are given below.

Take a few moments to become still and quiet, and invite God to work through your imagination as you pray with the passage. Ask God for what you want, perhaps 'To know you more clearly, love you more dearly, follow you more nearly'.



Read through the text two or three times until you are thoroughly familiar with the story. Then let the scene gradually build up in your mind's eye. Take your time, see everything that is around, hear, feel, taste, and smell.

Where are you? Take your own place in the unfolding scene. You may start as a bystander, or one of the central characters, or simply enter into the action as yourself.

Let yourself be drawn naturally into

conversation with Jesus or another participant. Stay in the scene for as long as you have chosen to, and then draw the prayer to a close.

Some passages suitable for imaginative prayer

Matthew 14:22-33

Mark 10:46-52

Luke 5:1-11

John 13:1-17

Exodus 3:1-6

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Peter walks on the water

The cure of Bartimaeus

Call of four disciples

Jesus washes the disciples' feet

Moses and the burning bush

The call of Samuel