

Introduction to Lectio Divina

“The divine word will be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity”(Verbum Domini, 1)

Lectio Divina (Latin for divine reading or sacred reading) is a traditional Benedictine practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God's Word. It does not treat Scripture as texts to be studied, but as the Living Word.

Traditional Lectio Divina is of 4 steps: read, meditate, pray and contemplate. First a passage of Scripture is read, and then its meaning is reflected upon. This is followed by a prayer and contemplation on the Word of God. In the post synodal exhortation 'Verbum Domini', Pope Benedict added the 5th step: action – the personal way of responding to the word.

The focus of Lectio Divina is not a theological analysis of biblical passages but viewing them with Christ as the key to their meaning. For example, given Jesus' statement in John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you" an analytical approach would focus on the reason for the statement during the Last Supper, the biblical context, etc. But in Lectio Divina rather than "dissecting peace", the practitioner "enters peace" and shares in the peace of Christ. In Christian teachings, this form of meditative prayer leads to an increased knowledge of Christ.

The roots of Scriptural reflection and interpretation go back to Origen in the 3rd century, after whom St. Ambrose taught them to St. Augustine. The monastic practice of Lectio Divina was first established in the 6th century by Saint Benedict and was then formalized into a 4 step process by the Carthusian monk, Guigo II, in the 12th century. In the 20th century, the constitution Dei Verbum of Pope Paul VI recommended Lectio Divina for the general public. Pope Benedict XVI emphasized the importance of Lectio Divina in the 21st century.

Lectio Divina is truly “capable of opening up to the faithful the treasures of God's word, but also of bringing about an encounter with Christ, the living word of God”. [Verbum Domini 296]

“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. This prayerful reading of the Bible is not something separate from the study undertaken by the preacher to ascertain the central message of the text; on the contrary, it should begin with that study and then go on to discern how that same message speaks to his own life. The spiritual reading of a text must start with its literal sense. Otherwise we can easily make the text say what we think is convenient, useful for confirming us in our previous decisions, suited to our own patterns of thought”. (Evangelii Gaudium 152)

The 5 steps of Lectio Divina

Lectio

It opens with the reading (lectio) of a text, which leads to a desire to understand its true content:

What does the biblical text say in itself?

Without this, there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas.

Meditatio

Next comes meditation (meditatio), which asks:

What does the biblical text say to us?

Here, each person, individually but also as a member of the community, must let himself or herself be moved and challenged.

Oratio

Following is a prayer (oratio) which asks the question:

What do we say to the Lord in response to his word?

Prayer as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise, is the primary way by which the word transforms us.

Contemplatio

Finally, lectio divina concludes with contemplation (contemplatio), during which we take up, as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality, and ask ourselves:

What conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us?

In the letter to the Romans, St. Paul tells us: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (12:2)

Contemplation aims at creating within us a truly wise and discerning vision of reality, as God sees it, and at forming within us "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16).

The Word of God appears as a criterion for discernment: it is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12).

Actio

We do well also to remember that the process of lectio divina is not concluded until it arrives at action (actio), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity.

How can I make my life a gift for others in charity?

We find the supreme synthesis and fulfillment of this process in the Mother of God. For every member of the faithful Mary is the model of docile acceptance of God's word, for she "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19; 2:51). She discovered the profound bond which unites in God's great plan, apparently disparate events, actions and things.

LECTIO: James 1:27-2:10,14-17

The first reader reads the whole passage, then each in turn reads a sentence until the whole text has been read three times. Please note the word of God should be read with slow, thoughtful attitude essential to lectio divina.

1: 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

2:1 My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

2 For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,

3 and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "Have a seat here, please," while you say to the poor man, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet,"

4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

5 Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?

6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you, is it not they who drag you into court?

7 Is it not they who blaspheme that honorable name by which you are called?[a]

8 If you really fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well.

9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.



10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him?[a]

15 If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food,

16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?

17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Meditatio:

Go through the text again in silence, and then choose a word or a short phrase that has touched you most. In turn say that word or phrase three times in a meditative way.

Sharing:

Share with others what this biblical text speaks to you.. How does it challenge you as an individual and as a part of the Jesus Youth community?

Actio:

Based on the Word heard and shared, each one has to decide on an action and share the same with other

Oratio: praying with the scripture

Following this, allow some moment for silence. Each one makes a prayer of thanksgiving and praise or petition based on the word or a short phrase, and sharing the decision remembering that prayer is the primary way by which the Word transforms us.