

A Message Just for You

Lectio Divina

What is Lectio Divina?

“Lectio Divina means to read the Bible with reference and openness to what the Spirit is saying to us in the present moment. When we approach the Word of God as a word spoken to me, God’s presence and will can be made known. The regular practice of Lectio Divina presents occasions when my story and God’s story meet, and in that moment something surprising can happen. To read the Bible “on my knees” reverently, attentively, and with deep faith that God has a word for me in my own unique situation.” ~ Henri Nouwen

“Lectio Divina invites us into a sacred relationship with the Word and nurtures in us a way of being with God that gradually spills over into the whole of our lives.” ~ Christine Valters Paintner and Sr. Lucy Wynkoop

Scholastic Approach to Lectio Divina

Lectio: Read the Scripture passage at least twice out loud. The first time just get a feel for the passage. When you read the passage a second time, allow God to draw your attention to the word or phrase meant just for you in this moment. If nothing stands out to you, read the passage a third time. Sometimes a word or phrase stands out as clear as a bell while at other times the experience may be more subtle.

Meditatio: (Med e tah ti oh) Meditate on the word or phrase that stood out to you. How is God’s Word speaking to you in this moment? Is there an invitation? Is there a call? Does a memory surface? What image comes to mind? What feelings are evoked? Take your time and allow God to speak to you in the depths of your soul. Notice that God is speaking to you personally about your life right now.

Oratio: (Or ah ti oh) Respond to God who has been speaking to you. What is your response? What is your prayer? Allow your words to come from a place deep within where the Spirit dwells. Be spontaneous. You may be moved to journaling with words. Perhaps no words can express what is moving within you. You may be moved to express yourself through art, music, dance or other creative activities.

Contemplatio: (Con tem plah ti oh) Still yourself and rest in the loving embrace of God. Words are never sufficient to express all that stirs within. Simply be present to the Sacred One. Savor the silence. Connect with the Divine Presence deep in your soul.

Operatio:(op er ah ti oh) This step is often overlooked but is such an important step. This is about taking our prayer into our everyday life and interacting in the world influenced by our time of prayer – a time when God spoke to us in the depths of your being.

Four Senses of Scripture

In ancient times, four senses of Scripture were identified: literal, allegorical, moral, and unitive. It was believed that Scripture had a mysterious dynamism that moves one to ever-deeper level of understanding of the Word.

Literal: Most biblical scholars mainly focus on the literal sense focusing on the historical and cultural background of the text and the meaning of different words to enhance their interpretation of the Word. While this has great value, it is not the objective of Lectio Divina.

Allegorical: We move into the allegorical sense, when we pray with Scripture and interiorize its message. It becomes apparent that Scripture speaks about us and our lives and offers wisdom. We are listening to Scripture in a totally different way when we connect our own personal spiritual journey to events in sacred texts.

Moral: The moral sense of the Word comes into play when we allow Scripture to shape our way of being in the world. Our sense of what is right and what is wrong is expanded.

Unitive: Embodying Scripture leads us to the unitive dimension of the Word. We reach the unitive level when we are deeply immersed in the Word of God. Scripture has become a part of who we are.

Monastic Approach to Lectio Divina

Instead of thinking of Lectio as steps on a ladder, the Monastic approach views it as moments along the circumference of a circle: reading, meditating, praying, and contemplating flowing naturally into one another. The moments are connected to one another and to the center where God speaks to the heart. Paying attention to any one of the four is to be in direct relationship with all the others. You may begin your prayer with any of them and move easily from one to another as inspired by the Spirit. The monastic approach allows Lectio Divina to become a holy rhythm whereby you will live and breathe and move with God.

Resources

Nouwen, Henri with Christensen, Michael J and Laird, Rebecca J. *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit*. New York, New York: HarperCollins, 2010.

Valters Paintner, Christine and Wynkoop, OSB. *Lectio Divina: Contemplative Awakening and Awareness*. Mahwah, New York: Paulist Press, 2008.