



Retreat in Daily Life

Lectio Divina

*When your words came
I devoured them,
for your words were my delight
and the joy of my heart.*

Jeremiah 15:16

*Your words are sweeter to my taste
than honey in the mouth.*

Psalms 119:103

*And the word was made flesh
and dwelt among us.*

John 1:14

God became incarnate in the person of Christ Jesus. It is through Jesus' words, actions, teaching and relationship with the people he lived among, that we come to understand his message. His words are captured in the Scriptures and are available to us and it is through dwelling with his Word that we are helped to enter into his world and develop our relationship with him.

Listening with the heart or *lectio divina* is one such way to dwell in his Word. Just as we might read a loved one's letter over and over to get a sense of what they are saying and meaning and to help us respond, so in listening with the heart to God's Word in Scripture allows it to become more and more familiar to us.

Lectio divina has four phases or parts:

1. Lectio
2. Meditatio
3. Oratio
4. Contemplatio

Another way to think about this is Reading, Repeating, Responding and Resting

1. LECTIO (Reading)

Hear the word as a message from God, a communication from One who loves you. Read through the passage you have chosen, gently, a couple of times, then read slowly until something strikes you. You are slowing down. You are tuning in to the revelation of God.

2. MEDITATIO (Repeating)

Let the words you have chosen continue to speak to you. Say them again and again, as if God is saying them to you, allow yourself to be drawn in deeper. Let the words speak to your heart. If you have chosen a sentence, after a while savour just one or two words. Maybe they remind you of other passages of Scripture. When you feel you have savoured these words to the full, you are ready to move on.

3. ORATIO (Responding in prayer – “Heart speaks to Heart”)

This is our human response to God’s word. Remember Mary who “pondered these things in her heart”.¹ God wants to pull you closer and reveal himself to you. Be open. Ask what these words mean for your life or what God’s invitation is to you through these words? Speak to God from your heart, there are no rights or wrongs. Share with God whatever comes to your heart and mind. Simply pray in your way and allow God to pray in you.

4. CONTEMPLATIO (Resting)

Contemplatio is when we rest in the embrace of God. It is God’s response to us and is totally beyond our control. Essentially, God is looking at you with love and you gaze back at God. Your whole self and being is focused on God. It is like a close sharing between friends. Allow God’s Word to resonate deep within you.

A Reflection on Lectio Divina

The four stages of lectio divina (lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio) invite the one praying to allow the Word of God to deepen and take root in the heart in an organic way where one step leads naturally to the next.

¹ Luke 2:19

Lectio

Ghislaine Salvail reminds us that the *lectio* or reading ‘constitutes an opening’. It is an entry point, a threshold. I read the text as a personal communication from the One I love. As I read, I let the words come alive, hearing them as for the first time. I read and re read, slowly, reflectively. This helps to ‘engrave the text on the memory’.²

Meditatio (pondering)

Through the slow repetition of the words I begin to receive the ‘Word’ and am brought into the next phase of the prayer. *Meditatio*, or pondering, expands the listening, inviting me to greater fullness, inviting me to greater receptivity, allowing the Word to break me open. The words begin to sound in my heart as I discover little by little ‘the mystery of the Word.’ I notice which words have stayed with me, which words draw me in, engage me, call me, remind me of other words, images, stories in Scripture. In this deepening movement, I reflect and make connections. I allow myself to ruminate and to enter into the experience with all of my senses. It is a deeper listening, a reading between the lines, a lingering and a relishing.³

Oratio

Oratio, or prayer, is my response to God as I ponder and savour this Word. *Meditatio* grounded on *lectio* expands my capacity to truly listen, and transforms the way I respond to God: I praise, I give thanks, I petition, I repent, I adore.⁴ This ‘prayer of the heart’ is a spontaneous following of the Holy Spirit at work within me and is pure gift.⁵ St Augustine evokes the movement well in his words: ‘If the text is prayer, pray; if it is groaning, groan; if it is thanks, be joyful; if it is a hopeful text, hope; if it expresses fear, then fear.’⁶ Above all, I seek to be real.

Contemplatio

Out of this genuine exposure of my authentic self I am brought to the possibility of communion. I find here the love after all the words, the passions, the sufferings are spent and I am in union with the beloved.⁷ It is, as Thelma Hall calls it, the ‘entering into silence – which is too deep for words’.⁸ Here I entrust myself to God with a loving attentiveness that is rooted in a ‘heart-to-heart conversation’ where ‘silence takes the place of language’.⁹

Through this encounter I am left with a ‘word of life’ that I take with me into my daily life and through the course of my day and night it continues to work and transform me from within, finding echoes in a variety of ways in everything I do.

² Ghislaine Salvail, *At the Crossroads of the Scriptures: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Pauline Books, 1996) pp45-6

³ *Ibid*, p47

⁴ M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: Crossroad, 1998) pp63-4

⁵ Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (Paulist Press, New York, 1988) p42

⁶ Salvail, *Crossroads* p53

⁷ Pennington, *Lectio Divina* p65

⁸ Hall, *Too Deep* p49

⁹ Salvail, *Crossroads* p59

Some texts to pray with . . .

Isaiah 43: 1-5

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine

Psalm 91

Say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God in whom I trust'

Lamentations 3: 22-26

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end

John 15: 9-11

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love

I John 3: 1-2

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are