**Lectio Divina – an introduction**

According to ancient Christian leadership, *lectio divina* is broken down into the following steps named in Latin:

1. *Lectio* (reading),
2. *Meditatio* (meditation),
3. *Oratio* (prayer),
4. and *Contemplatio* (contemplation).
5. Then, as a result of the encounter with God in Scripture, we are also called to *Actio* (action).

Each of these steps together form a process by which we encounter God in his sacred word and respond to his grace. They form parts of a larger whole, but each one comes with a certain set of skills for us to master. Let’s look briefly at each step.

***Lectio* (Reading)**

In the first phase of *lectio divina* we understand what the passage we are reading says in itself. This is the literal meaning of the Scripture passage and the lessons everyone should recognize in reading it. At this stage we do not yet consider our own lives in connection with the Scriptures. We do not let our opinions influence our reading, but seek to understand the message of the passage as interpreted by the Church independently of anyone’s opinions. This phase is summarized with the question: *What does the text say that everyone should understand?*

***Meditatio* (Meditation)**

In the meditation phase of *lectio divina*, we ask, *what does this text say to me, today, and to my life?* We allow God to pull up certain memories of people, places, and events in our lives that relate to the passage we are reading. Meditation is also an opportunity to see ourselves in the text. We can consider our own feelings as if we were a participant in the text or try to understand what it would be like to be one of the people represented in the text. In this way we come to a deeper appreciation of how God is working in our lives through the sacred word. Having entered into the story ourselves, we can return to the present and consider the areas in our own lives that God is calling us to contemplate.

***Oratio* (Prayer)**

Through a meditation on Scripture, we experience an intimate encounter with God that leads us to respond in prayer. Having met our Lord in his holy word, we courageously speak to him in our own words. In this way we consider prayer to be a simple conversation with God. It is a conversation that comes in various forms: we ask petitions (or requests) of him, we give him thanks, and we give him praise. At this phase we can ask ourselves: *What can I say to the Lord in response to his word?*

***Contemplatio* (Contemplation)**

A true encounter with the Lord always leads to transformation. Indeed, the Lord God proclaimed, “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5). Through contemplation we come to an understanding of the parts of our lives that need to be transformed by God’s grace. We humble ourselves and open our lives up to his transformative power. This step comes with the willingness to change, an openness and trust in God, and the decision to follow God’s will rather than our own. With this decision comes a fear of losing what we find comfortable and safe. At the same time, we feel the excitement of a call to heroic adventure and a hopeful future of living the life we are meant to live. At this step in the *lectio divina* process, we ask ourselves: *What conversion of the mind, heart, and life is the Lord asking of me?*

**Actio (Action)**

Finally, although this phase is often not considered to be a part of *lectio divina* proper, it is an essential result of the encounter with God in Sacred Scripture. Having received God’s love and grace, we go forth to serve others out of the love we have been given. Our transformation calls us to witness to others; it calls us to selflessly serve our brothers and sisters in Christ. These acts are done not so much out of a sense of duty, but out of the inspiration we receive from the acceptance in faith of God’s love.

**Additional Thoughts on How to Practice Lectio Divina**

Find a place of quiet and solitude so you can think, listen and hear from God. The practice naturally flows from one part to the next, so you could simply move on to the next prompt when you’re ready or you could use a gentle timer allowing five minutes for each.

**Lectio | read**

Select a short passage from Scripture that you would like to explore and read the passage through many times. Read it aloud, read it silently, read it slowly, pausing between each line or phrase.

As you continue to read the text, listen for a word or phrase that stands out to you: What draws you in? What resonates with you? What makes you uncomfortable? What leaves you with questions? You will take this word or phrase with you into the next step, meditation.

**Meditatio | meditate**

Now it’s time to focus in on the word or phrase that stood out to you. Bring the word or phrase to mind and meditate on it; repeat it in your mind slowly, noticing what comes up for you. As feelings emerge, let them sink in without distracting you from your meditation—the word or phrase might still have more to give.

**Oratio | pray**

As you transition from meditation into prayer, begin communicating with God about the word or phrase that stood out to you. Explore what made it capture your attention initially and share any feelings that came up for you during your meditation. As you share these things in prayer, take note of any new insight you are given in regards to the text and/or what has been awakened in you through your word or phrase.

**Contemplatio | contemplate**

As your time in prayer comes to a close, spend a few minutes in God’s presence contemplating what has happened within you throughout the time of reading, meditation, and prayer. Bring to mind any new insights you’ve received during this time, whether personal or in relation to the text, and let them sink in, coloring your way of being. You might be surprised how much such a simple and quiet process can alter your perspective and give you new direction.

*Note: While Lectio Divina is traditionally practiced with Scripture, it can also be practiced using poetry or song, or, as in the practice of Visio Divina, with a work of art or even a scene outside your door.*

**Actio (Action)**

Finally, consider one way you could take what the Lord has revealed to you today and put it into practice to express love in the world, bring glory to Christ, or encourage and strengthen the saints. Ask the Father if there is a way He wants you to act on what you have learned or experienced today?