

1.3 – METHODS OF PRAYER & LECTIO DIVINA

Teacher's Notes

I. Methods of Prayer

A. Methods are a means to an end

Methods of prayer are like the scaffolding on a building under construction. Scaffolding is needed to construct the building, but it is not the building. The scaffolding serves the construction of the building - but *what matters is the building*. So too, we need methods of prayer to help to dispose us to God, but methods can never become more important to us than our relationship to God! It sounds silly but this is a mistake many people make. They are so worried about techniques and methods of prayer that they miss the whole point. They spend all sorts of energy discovering and refining and changing techniques of prayer – and never really pray! Don't do this. Sacred Scripture and the lived experience of the Saints give us very reliable methods that will dispose us very powerfully to God.

B. Methods of Prayer

Most people begin with vocal prayer after their conversion (set prayers, the rosary, prayer booklets such as *The Miracle Hour* by Linda Schubert, etc.). There is no better model than that proposed by Fr. Bob, our Founder, in his book called *The Catholic Disciple*. It is important, for those who are able, to move on to some form of meditation. There are many different methods in the history of the Church and its various spiritual traditions, but the core of them is the same:

Ex. Classical Meditation

- 1) Recollecting yourself (entering into God's Presence)
- 2) Meditating on a passage from the Creed, a good meditation book, an icon, a passage of scripture, etc. One may imagine himself in a scene of the Gospels, etc.
- 3) End with a colloquy

The method of prayer that we recommend is called *Lectio Divina*. We'll spend the rest of this talk explaining it and why we recommend it above other methods.

II. Lectio Divina

A. What does "lectio divina" mean?

Lectio Divina = "Divine reading" → Praying the Scriptures with the mind of Christ.

- It has been around almost as long as the Church herself:

"The first to use the expression 'lectio divina' was Origen (circa 185-254), who affirmed that to read the Bible profitably it is necessary to do so with attention, constancy and prayer.

Later on, *lectio divina* became a mainstay of religious life. The monastic rules of Sts. Pacomius, Augustine, Basil and Benedict made the practice of diving reading, together with manual work and participation in liturgical life, the triple basis of monastic life."

(<http://www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=76678>)

B. Why Lectio Divina?

- Not just one more method of prayer out of all the methods out there
- Not just another devotion that is here today and gone tomorrow
- Tested and proven form of prayer, a Saint-maker!
- An ideal integration of all that we have said above about prayer. It incorporates vocal prayer and meditation, and leads to contemplation. It facilitates a real intimacy with the Lord.
- It is strongly recommended by John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI who have exhorted the faithful to adopt this form of prayer:

“It is especially necessary that listening to the word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient and ever valid tradition of *lectio divina*, which draws from the biblical text the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives.”

(John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 39)

- Recently Pope Benedict has given similar exhortations:

“*Lectio divina* consists of meditating fully on the biblical text, reading and re-reading it, ‘ruminating’ it in a certain sense, and squeezing all of its ‘juice’ so that it nourishes meditation and contemplation like sap, and is able to irrigate concrete life.

As a condition, *lectio divina* requires that the mind and heart be illuminated by the Holy Spirit, that is, by the inspirer Himself of the Scriptures, and place oneself, therefore, in an attitude of ‘religious listening’.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus at St. Peter’s Square*, November 6, 2005)

“If this practice is promoted with efficacy, I am convinced that it will produce a new spiritual springtime in the Church.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the International Congress Organized to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation ‘Dei Verbum’*, September 16, 2005)

- Let’s break these quotes down a little to see why *lectio divina* is so highly recommended.

1) Led by the Holy Spirit

“*Lectio divina* requires that the mind and heart be illuminated by the Holy Spirit” (Benedict XVI)

- Form of prayer that is led by the Spirit, not my agenda, not me deciding what I want to do with the prayer.
- The Lord chooses the text for us, speaks to us about the text, instructs us, prompts us, guides our response. His agenda predominates. Prayer time becomes His time, where He can accomplish what he wants to do.
- We grow in docility to the Holy Spirit, learn to listen to the voice of the Shepherd and respond to it. Who knows our wounds, our weaknesses, our faults, what we need at any particular time, but the Holy Spirit?

2) Facilitates real communion with God

“Facilitates an encounter with the Lord” (John Paul II)

“Puts us in an attitude of ‘religious listening’ [to the Lord]” (Benedict XVI)

- Helps us develop a personal relationship with the Lord.
- Brings us to a place of real communion with the Lord, to that “intimate conversation between friends” spoken of by St. Teresa of Avila, where two are speaking, two are

listening, sharing with the confidence of friends, not hiding things, not playing games, but being real, honest and vulnerable.

3) Immerses us in the Word of God

“...meditating fully on a Biblical text... squeezing all of its ‘juice’” (Benedict XVI)

“...draws from the text the living word...” (John Paul II)

- Scriptures are not a dead letter; they are the living word of God:

They are ‘Spirit breathed’, which means they are a pure wellspring of prayer. They are the sure revelation of the heart of God. They reveal clearly and powerfully who God is and what He calls us to. Vatican II said that “such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life.” (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 21)

- *Immerses* us in Scripture, to learn it, memorize it, love it, and let it change us.

- Surest and quickest way to get to know Jesus.

“Our prayer must be firmly rooted in meditation on that Word otherwise we run the risk of constructing our own image of God in place of the true God revealed in Jesus Christ. St. Jerome made it clear that ‘ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.’ The Catechism puts it succinctly and eloquently: ‘The Church “forcefully and specially exhorts all the Christian faithful . . . to learn ‘the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ’ (*Phil* 3:8) by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. . . . Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man. For ‘we speak to him when we pray; we listen to him when we read the divine oracles.’” (CCC 2653)

4) *Lectio divina transforms us.*

“...the living word that questions, directs and shapes our lives.” (John Paul II)

- As I meditate upon the Scriptures, led by the Spirit, I get inside the heart and mind of Christ, and truly become His disciple.

5) We need to have union with the Lord for effectiveness in ministry

“If this practice is promoted with efficacy, I am convinced that it will produce a new spiritual springtime in the Church.” (Pope Benedict XVI)

A foundation for the strategy for the Church in the new Millennium (Pope John Paul II, *NMI*)

- It is only when we begin with real intimacy with the living Lord that our apostolic efforts will bear fruit. You have to fill the chalice before you can pour it out (Soul of the Apostolate). If you’re not being filled with Jesus, what are you pouring out?

III. The Steps of Lectio Divina

A. Lectio Divina is a conversation with God - What happens in a conversation between friends?

- 1) **Reading** God speaks.
- 2) **Meditation** I ponder what God says – how does it apply to my life?
- 3) **Prayer** I respond: “Lord, I need this, I want this, I repent, please do this...”
- 4) **Contemplation** God fills us → communion

B. Lectio Divina is like eating the Word of God

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|-------------------------|-------------------|---|
| 1) Reading | <i>Biting</i> | Separating a chunk (different amounts for different people) |
| 2) Meditation | <i>Chewing</i> | Repeating it (aloud as a murmuring in medieval times) |
| 3) Prayer | <i>Swallowing</i> | Making the Word my own, so it becomes a part of me
Asking God for grace to make the Word a reality in me |
| 4) Contemplation | <i>Digesting</i> | The Lord gives me a taste of that which I seek |

- This analogy is inspired by the word of the Lord to the prophet Ezekiel:

“As for you, son of man, obey me when I speak to you: be not rebellious like this house of rebellion, but open your mouth and eat what I shall give you. It was then I saw a hand stretched out to me, in which was a written scroll which he unrolled before me.” (Ezekiel 2:8-10)

C. Ladder to Heaven with Four Rungs (from *Ladder of Monks* by Guigo the Carthusian)

- The four steps are like four rungs of a ladder leading to heaven (communion with God):

4	_____	contemplation
3	_____	prayer
2	_____	meditation
1	_____	reading

- This analogy is inspired by the story of Jacob’s ladder:

“Then he [Jacob] had a dream: a stairway rested on the ground, with its top reaching to the heavens; and God’s messengers were going up and down on it.” (Genesis 28:12)

D. Seeking and Finding, Knocking and Opening (from St. John of the Cross)

*“Seek in **reading** and you will find in **meditation**;
knock in **prayer** and it will be opened to you in **contemplation**.”*

- This analogy is inspired by the words of Jesus:

“And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Luke 11:9-10)