

LENT – JUST DO IT! (Spiritual Practises for Everyday Life)

Week 1: Lectio Divina – Spiritual Reading

Lectio Divina is an ancient spiritual technique in which we aim to read the scriptures for personal transformation, rather than for information. It has been practised by monastics and contemplatives since the early centuries of the Christian faith.

In order to practice *lectio divina*, select a short Bible passage. Let it be a unit that tells a complete story or thought and has a natural ending. Passages from the gospels are very good for beginning with *lection divina*. (You may want to use the gospel from the previous Sunday's liturgy or the one coming up – check your church diary!) Then select a time and place that is peaceful and in which you may be alert and prayerfully attentive. A good suggested time frame is 20-30 minutes. Prepare yourself for prayer in whatever way is natural for you. This may be a spoken prayer where you ask God to open you to the presence of the Spirit, a gentle relaxation process that focuses on your breathing, or simply a few minutes of silence to empty yourself of thoughts, images, and emotions. Some like to light a candle as a reminder of God's presence and the special nature of this time set apart with God.

Lectio Divina then has four steps. Their traditional Latin names are *lectio, meditatio, oratio,* and *contemplatio*. Simpler English names are reading, reflecting, expressing and resting.

Reading - Slowly begin reading the biblical passage as if it were a long awaited love letter addressed to you. Approach it reverentially and expectantly, in a way that savors each word and phrase. Reading aloud helps! Read the passage 2 or 3 times, until you hear a word or phrase that touches you, resonates, attracts or even disturbs you.

Reflecting - Ponder this word or phrase for a few minutes. Let it sink in slowly and deeply until you are resting in it. Listen for what the word or phrase is saying to you at this moment in your life, what it may be offering to you, what it may be demanding of you.

Expressing - When you feel ready, openly and honestly express to God the prayers that arise spontaneously within you from your experience of this word or phrase. These may be prayers of thanksgiving, petition, intercession, lament, or praise. Some like to do this step by journaling, as writing down their thoughts helps them to remember any insights that have come to them.

Resting - Allow yourself to simply rest silently with God for a time in the stillness of your heart - remaining open to the quiet fullness of God's love and peace. This is like the silence of communion between a parent holding a sleeping child or between lovers whose communication with each other passes beyond words. When your mind starts to wander and dart here and there, gently bring it back to stillness again.

End your *lectio divina* with a prayer such as the Lord's Prayer, the Grace or another favorite prayer.

There are many sources of inspiration to help develop the practice of *Lectio Divina*. www.soul-shepherding.org/lectio-divina-guides has a collection of downloadable guides. And www.contemplativeoutreach.org/category/lectio-divina has some good explanations and definitions. For those who want to read the original monastic writers on the practise, try www.lectio-divina.org. This is a bit heavier going!!!

A wonderful book about meditating on the scriptures is [Eat This Book: a conversation in the art of spiritual reading](#) by Eugene Peterson.

God bless your efforts!

