



Pastor's Column

Lectio Divina: Praying With Sacred Scripture

January 14, 2018 ~ Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Our Catholic prayer arsenal is loaded with all varieties of prayer forms, suited for every need and purpose and for everyone's personal prayer style and preference. There is a prayer form that seems to have gained in widespread popularity and use in recent years: *lectio divina* ("divine reading"). Some people may confuse *lectio divina* with Bible Study, but the crucial difference is that Bible Study helps us to learn more about the biblical texts: their message, their messengers, their literary forms, their time and place of origin, and so on. Bible Study helps us to *know* the Bible, and *lectio divina* allows us to *pray* with the Bible; Bible Study informs our minds, and *lectio divina* inflames our hearts.

There are several ways of going about *lectio divina*; here, I propose one particular method, which I myself use when praying with Sacred Scripture and preparing my weekday and Sunday homilies. It is a method proposed by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in his "swan-song" papal document on Sacred Scripture, *Verbum Domini*. This method involves a four-fold reading of a chosen Scripture text. The first read-through is the **reading** (*lectio*) of a text, which leads to a desire to understand its true content: what does the biblical text say in itself? Without this, there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas. The second read-through is **meditation** (*meditatio*), which asks: what does the biblical text say to us? Here, each person, individually but also as a member of the community, must let himself or herself be moved and challenged. The third read-through is **prayer** (*oratio*), which asks the question: what do we say to the Lord in response to his word? Prayer, as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise, is the primary way by which the word transforms us. The fourth and final read-through is **contemplation** (*contemplatio*), during which we take up, as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality, and ask ourselves what conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us? In the Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul tells us: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (12:2). Contemplation aims at creating within us a truly wise and discerning vision of reality, as God sees it, and at forming within us "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). The word of God appears here as a criterion for discernment: it is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12). We do well also to remember that the process of *lectio divina* is not concluded until it arrives at action (*actio*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity.

I recommend a daily engagement with *lectio divina* with the Gospel text given for that day's Mass, or perhaps even several times each week with the Gospel text for the upcoming Sunday Mass. This would not only give us a Scripture text for our prayer each day (so that we ourselves do not constantly have to play "Bible roulette" in choosing a text for ourselves, but rather allow Mother Church to choose the text for us); this would also help keep us plugged in, as it were, with the cyclical prayer life of the Church world-wide, as that day's or that Sunday's Gospel text is the same text proclaimed at Mass all over the world.

~Fr. Lewis