

Lectio Divina: I am the living bread

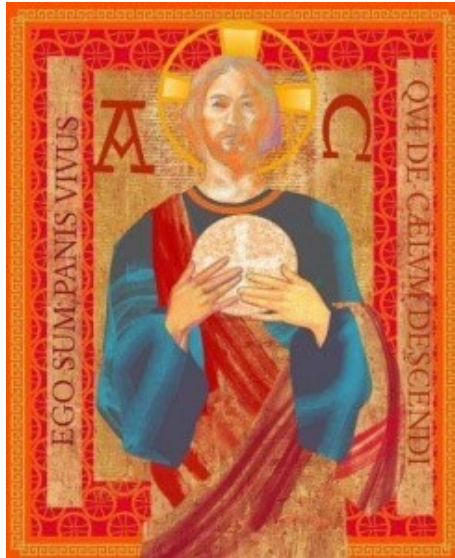


Image from the World Wide Web

Lectio Divina – Listening to God’s Word with our hearts

“And the word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us”

In Imaginative Contemplation we pray with the Scriptures, allowing Christ in the Scriptures to speak to us through our imagination. In Lectio Divina we pray with the Scriptures by dwelling on God’s word by listening with our heart. In Imaginative Contemplation, Jesus’ words, actions, teaching and relationships with people become familiar to us when we enter into the Scripture passage using our imagination. In Lectio Divina, God’s word becomes familiar to us by listening with our hearts and dwelling on His words. Listening with our hearts is something we do automatically in everyday life when we for example dwell on the beauty of nature or listening to someone we love or recall a poignant memory. Lectio Divina or divine reading has four parts: reading, repeating, responding and resting.

Reading: Begin by reading the Scripture Passage slowly until a word or a phrase resonates with you. Then stop for the moment.

Repeating: Dwell on the words you have chosen. Repeat them again and again as though God is saying them to you. Try not to analyse them, just let them speak to you. Savour the words.

Responding: Be like Mary and “ponder these things in your heart”. Allow God’s heart to speak to your heart. He wants to be close to you so ask yourself what this invitation could mean. Speak to God with your heart. Be open to what he is trying to reveal to you. Share with God whatever is coming into your heart and mind.

Resting: Rest in the embrace and love of God. It is God’s response to us. Your whole being is focussed on God so dwell in the moment. When you feel ready, move on.

As you listen to the following passage, note which parts move you but don’t analyse anything. Then when you are ready, **read, repeat, respond** and **rest** and when you have dwelt on the words that initially resonated with you, continue on reading the passage and repeat the process.

Prayer

We acknowledge we are in the presence of God so let us say:

Direct O Lord and guide and influence all that is happening in my mind and heart during this time of prayer: all my moods and feelings, my memories and imaginings; my hopes and desires; may all be directed and influenced to your greater glory, praise and service and to my growth in your Spirit.
Amen

As you listen to Jesus telling the crowd that He is the bread from heaven, let the Spirit of God enter you so that we can enter into Communion with God and one another.

Reading John 6:51-58

Jesus said to the crowd:

I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

Then the Jews started arguing with one another: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' they said. Jesus replied:

I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. As I, who am

sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me. This is the bread come down from heaven; not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.'

Questions for Reflection

As you slowly read this Gospel passage, allow its words to soak into your mind. You may want to light a candle to help you ponder the passage, reflect on the image above or on the words of Pope Francis below.

1. What is this passage saying to you?
2. What word(s), sentence or phrase in this Gospel passage most caught your attention; most touched your heart; most challenged you; most comforted you? Is there anything in this passage that you found uncomfortable?
3. *'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever'*. How important is celebrating the Eucharist for you in your Christian life? What effect does this celebration of thanksgiving have on your life? How are you nourished and sustained by "the living bread"?
4. *'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him'*. How does the Sacrament of the Mass and the celebration of the Eucharist help you to draw closer to Jesus? What fruits of the Eucharist are evident in your life? How do you share these fruits with the community in which you live?
5. *'As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me'*. Where is the Father sending you? Where do you draw life from the Father and from Jesus? In what ways can you prepare to fulfil that mission?

Pope Francis tells us:

What is meant by "eat the flesh and drink the blood" of Jesus? Is it just an image, a figure of speech, a symbol, or does it indicate something real? In order to answer, one must divine what is happening in Jesus' heart as he breaks the bread for the hungry crowd. Knowing that he will have to die on the cross for us, Jesus identifies himself with that bread broken and shared, and it becomes for him the "sign" of the Sacrifice that awaits him. This process culminates in the Last Supper, where the bread and wine truly become his Body and his Blood. It is the Eucharist, which Jesus

leaves us with a specific purpose: that we may become one with Him. Indeed he says: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him”. That “abiding”: Jesus in us and we in Jesus. Communion is assimilation: partaking of Him, we become as He is. This requires our “yes”, our adherence of faith.

The Eucharist is Jesus himself who gives himself entirely to us. Nourishing ourselves of Him and abiding in Him through Eucharistic Communion, if we do so with faith, transforms our life, transforms it into a gift to God and to our brothers and sisters. Nourishing ourselves of that “Bread of Life” means entering into harmony with the heart of Christ, assimilating his choices, his thoughts, his behaviour. It means entering into a dynamism of love and becoming people of peace, people of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of sharing in solidarity. The very things that Jesus did.

Jesus concludes his discourse with these words: “he who eats this bread will live for ever”. Yes, living in real communion with Jesus on this earth lets us pass from death to life. Heaven begins precisely in this communion with Jesus.

We shall now spend 10 minutes reflecting on this scripture passage by reading, repeating, responding and resting as described above. We will then share what we thought, felt etc. only if you are comfortable to do so.

End Prayer Suscipe of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.

Scripture texts: from the Jerusalem Bible 1966 by Dartington Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday and Company Ltd.