

Lectio Divina: Their hearts are far from me.



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

Let the Spirit enter our hearts and enlighten our minds so that we may open our hearts to the ways of God and allow his Spirit to transform us by the way we act.

Reading Mark 7:1-8.14-15.21-23

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round him, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and the Jews in general, follow the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow; and on returning from the market place they never eat without first sprinkling themselves. There are also many other observances which have been handed down to them concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes. So these Pharisees and scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?' He answered, 'It was of you hypocrites that Isaiah so rightly prophesied in this passage of scripture:

This people honours me only with lip-service,
while their hearts are far from me.
The worship they offer me is worthless,
the doctrines they teach are only human regulations.
You put aside the commandment of God to cling to human traditions.'
He called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and
understand. Nothing that goes into a man from outside can make him
unclean; it is the things that come out of a man that make him unclean.
For it is from within, from men's hearts, that evil intentions emerge:
fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency,
envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make
a man unclean.'

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. '*Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?*'. What teachings of the Church do you struggle to follow? Do you know of any religious tradition today which does not make sense to you, but which you continue to adhere to? Are there traditions that you cling to at the expense hearing God's call and answering it?
4. '*This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me.*' How do you feel about those who do not practice what they preach? In what ways can you pay more attention to what goes on in your heart so that you can be transformed by God's Spirit?
5. '*The worship they offer me is worthless, the doctrines they teach are only human regulations.*'. For what would Jesus criticise us today? Do you find that by trying to be holy you pay too much attention to the trivial externals and follow the rules

unquestioningly? Do you ever find that your practices and routines interfere with helping others and showing compassion?

6. *“Listen to me, all of you, and understand.”* In what ways can you pay more attention to what goes on in your heart so that you can be transformed by God’s Spirit? How can you be more attentive to the voice of God so that you can grow in understanding?

Pope Francis tells us:

Today the Lord invites us to flee from the danger of giving more importance to form than to substance. He calls us to recognize ever anew what is the true centre of the experience of faith, namely, love of God and love of neighbour, purifying it from the hypocrisy of legalism and ritualism.

The message of today’s Gospel is also reinforced by the voice of the Apostle James, who tells us in synthesis what true religion must be, and he says thus: true religion is “to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27).

“To visit orphans and widows,” means to practice charity towards one’s neighbour beginning with the most needy, most fragile and most marginalized people. They are the people that God takes care of in a special way and asks us to do likewise.

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.