

## 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 guide our hearts and enlighten our minds that we may hear God's call to come back to him and that we may be made aware of on his unconditional love for us.

## Reading      **Luke 15:1-3, 11-32      The Forgiving Father**

At that time: The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'

So he told them this parable: 'There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me." And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

'But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"

'And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to celebrate.

'Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants

and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.” But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, “Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.

And he said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”

### 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. You may even want to reflect on whom you identify with in this passage; the scribes and Pharisees, the younger son, the elder son or the forgiving father.

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 or startling?
3. *‘The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus.’* Who do you reach out to? How can you be more welcoming to those on the margins of society and those who are different from you?
4. *‘And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything’* Have you ever felt despair? Who did you turn to?
5. *“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion.’* When have you felt the mercy and compassion of a parent after a time of separation? Has this compassion ever overflowed onto others?
6. *‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.’* Can you think of a time when you had the humility to ask for forgiveness? Did you rejoice in the forgiveness you received?
7. *But he was angry and refused to go in.’* When have you felt hard done by? When have you felt jealous of others? Are there times you can’t let go?

## **Pope Francis tells us:**

In this parable Jesus presents to us the true face of God, a God with open arms, a God who deals with sinners with tenderness and compassion. The parable that is most moving for everyone — because it manifests the infinite love of God — is that of the father who enfolds in a close embrace the son who has been found. What strikes us is not so much the sad story of a youth who falls into dissolute ways, but rather his decisive words, “I will arise and go to my father” (v. 18).

The path to return home is the path of hope and new life. God always expects us to resume our journey, he awaits us with patience, he sees us when we are still a long way off, he runs to meet us, he embraces us, he kisses us, he forgives us. That is how God is. That is how our Father is. And his forgiveness cancels the past and regenerates us in love. Forgetting the past — this is God’s weakness. When he embraces us, he forgives us, and forgets it. He doesn’t remember. He forgets the past. When we sinners convert and let ourselves be re-encountered by God, reproach and sternness do not await us, because God saves, he welcomes us home again with joy and prepares a feast.

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.

Painting - The Forgiving Father' by Frank Wesle