

Lectio Divina: My sheep hear my voice



Jesus as the Good Shepherd, mosaic, 5th c. Galla Placidia Mausoleum, Ravenna, Italy.

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 as we read the Gospel and reflect on what it means to envisage Jesus as a shepherd and hear his voice.

Reading John 10:27-30

At that time: Jesus said, ‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.’

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 might want to imagine that you are listening to Jesus as he tells you that he is the Good Shepherd and will protect you.

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. *'Jesus said, 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.'* How do you discern the voice of Jesus from the distracting voices around you? What challenges do you experience in following Jesus?
4. *'They will never perish'.* Do you feel the security of Jesus' words when you feel threatened or anxious? How does it feel to know that Jesus will never abandon you? What kind of care do you need from the Good Shepherd.
5. *'No one will snatch them out of my hand'* What has been a distraction for you in following Jesus? How can you reach out to those who are separated from Jesus' flock?
6. *'I and the Father are one.'* Who are the people in your life who give you a sense of being at one with them and enables you to know that you are loved and valued?

Pope Francis tells us:

Jesus is presented as "the Good Shepherd", and says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand" (vv. 27-28). These words help us to understand that no one can call himself a follower of Jesus, if he does not listen to His voice. And this "listening" should not be understood in a superficial way, but in an engaging way, to the point of making possible a true mutual understanding, from which one can come to a generous following, expressed in the words, 'and they follow me' (v. 27). It is a matter of listening not only with ears, but listening with the heart!

And so, the image of the shepherd and the sheep indicates the close relationship that Jesus wants to establish with each one of us. He is our guide, our teacher, our friend, our model, but above all he is our Saviour. In fact, the following expressions from the Gospel passage affirm, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand" (v. 28). Who can say that? Only Jesus, because the "hand" of Jesus is one thing with the "hand" of the Father, and the Father is "greater than all" (cf. v. 29).

These words communicate to us a sense of absolute security and immense tenderness. Our life is fully secure in the hands of Jesus and the Father, which are a single thing: a unique love, a unique mercy, revealed once and for all in the sacrifice of the Cross. To save the lost sheep which we all are, the Shepherd became lamb, and let himself be immolated so as to take upon himself and to take away the sin of the world. In this way he has given us life, life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10)! This mystery is renewed, in an always surprising humility, on the Eucharistic table. It is there that the sheep gather to nourish themselves; it is there that they become one, among themselves and with the Good Shepherd.

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.