

Lectio Divina: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”



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 to the need for God in our lives and to be humble in prayer.

Reading Luke 18:9-14

At that time: Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: 'Two men went up into the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get." But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.'

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 Jesus is telling you personally to pray and not lose heart.

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 told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.'* How often do you compare yourself to others? When have you been complacent or judgmental of others.
4. *'God, I thank you that I am not like other men'.* Do you sometimes thank God you are not like certain people because you feel you are morally superior to them? Do you sometimes feel you have to justify to God your virtues and achievements? How can your prayer become more God-centred and not self-centred?
5. *'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'* What behaviours have separated you from God? What will help to bridge this divide? Are you aware of your faults and failings and are you honest about them in your heart before God?
6. *'For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.'* When have you been judgemental, self-centred and full of pride? How can you grow in humility?

Pope Francis tells us:

It is not enough, therefore, to ask how much we pray, we have to ask ourselves how we pray, or better, in what state our heart is: it is important to examine it so as to evaluate our thoughts, our feelings, and root out arrogance and hypocrisy. But, I ask myself: can one pray with arrogance? No. Can one pray with hypocrisy? No. We must only pray by placing ourselves before God just as we are. Not like the Pharisee who prays with arrogance and hypocrisy. We are all taken up by the frenetic pace of daily life, often at the mercy of feelings, dazed and confused. It is necessary to learn how to rediscover the path to our heart, to recover the value of intimacy and silence, because the God who encounters us and speaks to us is there. Only by beginning there can we in our turn encounter others and speak with them. The Pharisee walked toward the Temple, sure of himself, but he was unaware of the fact that his heart had lost the way.

The tax-collector however presents himself with "empty hands", with a bare heart and acknowledging himself to be a sinner, the tax collector shows us all the condition that is necessary in order to receive the Lord's forgiveness. In the end, he is the one, so despised, who becomes an icon of the true believer.

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.