



**Archdiocese of St. Louis
Office of Sacred Worship
Lectio Divina Bible
Introduction**

Lectio Divina (Latin for "Divine Reading") is a traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God's word. It does not treat scripture as texts to be studied, but as the living word.

The focus of Lectio Divina is not a theological analysis of biblical passages but viewing them with Christ as the key to their meaning. It is not the same as bible study. In Lectio Divina we let go of more intellectual, studious, or effortful ways of reading the scripture and enter a state in which we are quiet and receptive to God's word. We let go of our own words, and let God speak to us.

Although Lectio Divina involves reading, it is less a practice of reading than one of listening to the inner message of the Scripture delivered through the Holy Spirit. Lectio Divina does not seek information or motivation, but communion with God. It does not treat Scripture as text to be studied, but as the "Living Word".

Theological analyses are generally avoided in Lectio Divina, where the focus is on Christ as the key that interprets the passage and relates it to the meditator. So rather than "dissecting peace" in an analytical manner, the practitioner of Lectio Divina "enters peace" and shares the peace of Christ. The focus will thus be on achieving peace via a closer communion with God rather than a biblical analysis of the passage. Similar other passages may be "Abide in my love", "I am the Good Shepherd", etc.

A word or phrase that attracts your attention

A word or phrase can be broken down into many variations. The key words and phrases for each scripture passage in this document are just a few of the possible variations. Many more possible word or phrase can be gleaned from the scripture passage. See: ***Key words and phrases section*** of this document.

For example: "You cannot serve God and mammon"

cannot	God	you
cannot serve	God and mammon	you cannot
cannot serve God	mammon	you cannot serve
cannot serve God and mammon	serve God	you cannot serve God
	serve God and mammon	you cannot serve God and mammon

Individual and/or Groups

Lectio Divina can be done individually and/or in a group setting. Individual reflections are encouraged to be done several times during the week. Group settings allow the opportunity for the exchange of reflections.

An excellent time for individual reflection, is prior to mass, taking the time to center oneself. This should not be the only time of reflection but a culmination of several reflections through the week.

In a group setting, the exchanges of reflections, provides an individual the opportunity to gain a different view point within their mediation. The size of the group depends upon the allotted time and ability for everyone to share their own reflections.



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Within a group setting, a leader should be selected to moderate the session to help the group stay on track and focused on the scripture passage. Group leaders should be selected prior to the meeting by either volunteering, nomination, round robin, etc. Leader rotation allows everyone an opportunity to lead and not over burden a particular individual.

The facilitator or up to four readers are selected from the group for the scripture passage. The facilitator moderates the readers and the group so that Lectio Divina flows smoothly. Different readers allowing the group the opportunity to hear the scripture passage differently.

- ✚ Each reader will read the scripture passage. The facilitator will ask the group to pause a few minutes before the next reading. The group will remain in silence until after the fourth reading. The facilitator will invite the group to share.
- ✚ Each reader will read the scripture passage. The facilitator will ask the group to pause a few minutes after the reading. After the second reading, the facilitator will pause group for “meditatio” reflection and then invite the group to share. The facilitator will invite the third reading. After the third reading, the facilitator will pause group for “oratio” reflection and then invite the group to share. The facilitator will invite the fourth reading. After the fourth reading, the facilitator will pause group for “contemplation” reflection and then invite the group to share.

Group meeting can be held in person, phone conference, video conference, or electronic media. Each media provides a different environment and experience for the participant. At different times a person may feel more comfortable with a different media. The best option is to provide a media combination.

Approach

The first step is the reading of Scripture. In order to achieve a calm and tranquil state of mind, preparation before Lectio Divina is recommended. The biblical reference for preparation via stillness is

*"Be still, and know that I am God."
Psalm 46:10*

The biblical basis for the preparation goes back to 1 Corinthians 2:9–10 which emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing the Word of God. The preparatory step should open the mind to finding Christ in the passage being read.

*"these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God"
1 Corinthians 2:9–10*

*"in the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not"
John 1:26*

Following the preparation the first movement of Lectio Divina is slow and gradual reading of the scriptural passage, perhaps several times. The biblical basis for the reading goes back to Romans 10:8–10 and the presence of God's word in the believer's "mouth or heart". The attentive reading begins the



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process through which a higher level of understanding can be achieved. In the traditional Benedictine approach the passage is slowly read four times, each time with a slightly different focus.

Lectio Divina

Read the following passage four times.

- The first reading, simply read the scripture and pause for a minute.
Listen to the passage with the ear of the heart. Don't get distracted by intellectual types of questions about the passage. Just listen to what the passage is saying to you, right now.
- The second reading, look for a key word or phrase that draws your attention.
Notice if any phrase, sentence or word stands out and gently begin to repeat it to yourself, allowing it to touch you deeply. No elaboration. In a group setting, you can share that word/phrase or simply pass.
- The third reading, pause for 2-3 minutes reflecting on "*Where does the content of this reading touch my life today?*"
Notice what thoughts, feelings, and reflections arise within you. Let the words resound in your heart. What might God be asking of you through the scripture? In a group setting, you can share your reflection or simply pass.
- The fourth reading, pause for 2-3 minutes reflecting on "*I believe that God wants me to today/this week.*"
Notice any prayerful response that arises within you, for example a small prayer of gratitude or praise. In a group setting, you can share your reflection or simply pass.

History

The roots of scriptural reflection and interpretation go back to Origen in the 3rd century, after whom Ambrose taught them to Augustine of Hippo. The monastic practice of Lectio Divina was first established in the 6th century by Benedict of Nursia and was then formalized as a four-step process by the Carthusian monk Guigo II during the 12th century. In the 20th century, the constitution *Dei verbum* of the Second Vatican Council recommended Lectio Divina to the general public and its importance was affirmed by Pope Benedict XVI at the start of the 21st century.

A key contribution to the foundation of Lectio Divina came from Origen in the 3rd century, with his view of "Scripture as a sacrament". In a letter to Gregory of Neocaesarea, Origen wrote: "When you devote yourself to the divine reading ... seek the meaning of divine words which is hidden from most people".

Origen believed that The Word (i.e. Logos) was incarnate in Scripture and could therefore touch and teach readers and hearers. Origen taught that the reading of Scripture could help move beyond elementary thoughts and discover the higher wisdom hidden in the "Word of God".

In Origen's approach the major interpretive element of Scripture is Christ. In his view all Scriptural texts are secondary to Christ and are only revelations in as much as they refer to Christ as The Word of God. In this view, using Christ as the "interpretive key" unlocks the message in Scriptural texts.



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The "primordial role" of Origen in interpreting Scripture was acknowledged by Pope Benedict XVI. Origen's methods were then learned by Ambrose of Milan, who towards the end of the 4th century taught them to Saint Augustine, thereby introducing them into the monastic traditions of the Western Church thereafter.

Church Fathers such as St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and St. Hilary of Poitiers used the terms *Lectio Divina* and *Lectio Sacra* to refer to the reading of Scripture.

In the 4th century, as the Desert Fathers began to seek God in the deserts of Palestine and Egypt, they produced early models of Christian monastic life that persisted in the Eastern Church. These early communities gave rise to the tradition of a Christian life of "constant prayer" in a monastic setting. Although the desert monks gathered to hear scripture recited in public, and would then recite those words privately in their cells, this was not the same practice as what later became *Lectio Divina* since it involved no meditative step.

The founders of the medieval tradition of *Lectio Divina* were Saint Benedict and Pope Gregory I. However, the methods that they employed had precedents in the biblical period both in Hebrew and Greek. A text that combines these traditions is Romans 10:8–10 where Apostle Paul refers to the presence of God's word in the believer's "mouth or heart". It was the recitation of the biblical text that provided the rationale for *Lectio Divina*.

While the *Lectio Divina* has been the key method of meditation and contemplation, other Catholic religious orders have used other methods.

Guigo II	Saint Clare	Saint Teresa of Avila
Read (<i>lectio</i>)	Gaze on the Cross (<i>intueri</i>)	Preparation
Meditate (<i>mediation</i>)	Consider (<i>consideare</i>)	Meeting the Lord
Pray (<i>oratio</i>)	Contemplate (<i>contemplari</i>)	Intimate Sharing
Contemplate (<i>contemplation</i>)	Initiate (<i>imatate</i>)	Conclusion

The four stages of *Lectio Divina* as taught by John of the Cross. Seek in *reading* and you will find in *meditation*; knock in *prayer* and it will be opened to you in *contemplation*. The progression from Bible reading, to meditation, to prayer, to loving regard for God.

Guigo II's book *The Ladder of Monks* is subtitled "a letter on the contemplative life" and is considered the first description of methodical prayer in the western mystical tradition. In Guigo's four stages one first reads, which leads to think about (i.e. meditate on) the significance of the text; that process in turn leads the person to respond in prayer as the third stage. The fourth stage is when the prayer, in turn, points to the gift of quiet stillness in the presence of God, called contemplation. Guigo named the four steps of this "ladder" of prayer with the Latin terms *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*.

By the middle of 19th century, the historical critical approach to biblical analysis which had started over a century earlier, and focused on determining the historicity of gospel episodes, had taken away some of the emphasis on spreading *Lectio Divina* outside monastic communities. However, the early part of the 20th century witnessed a revival in the practice, and books and articles on *Lectio Divina* aimed at the general public began to appear by the middle of the century.



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In 1965, one of the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council, the dogmatic constitution *Dei verbum* ("Word of God") emphasized the use of *Lectio Divina*. On the 40th anniversary of *Dei verbum* in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed its importance and stated:

I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *Lectio Divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart [cf. *Dei verbum*, n. 25]. If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church – I am convinced of it – a new spiritual springtime.

In his November 6, 2005 Angelus address, Benedict XVI emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in *Lectio Divina*: In his annual Lenten addresses to the priests of the Diocese of Rome, Pope Benedict – mainly after the 2008 Synod of Bishops on the Bible – emphasized *Lectio Divina*'s importance, as in 2012, when he used Ephesians 4: 1–16 on a speech about certain problems facing the Church. Beforehand, he and Pope John Paul II had used a question-and-answer format. "One condition for *Lectio Divina* is that the mind and heart be illumined by the Holy Spirit, that is, by the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures, and that they be approached with an attitude of "reverential hearing".

Lectio (Reading)

In the first phase of *lectio divina*, we understand what the passage we are reading says in itself. This is the literal meaning of the Scripture passage and the lessons everyone should recognize in reading it. At this stage we do not yet consider our own lives in connection with the Scriptures. We do not let our opinions influence our reading, but seek to understand the message of the passage as interpreted by the Church independently of anyone's opinions. This phase is summarized with the question: What does the text say that everyone should understand?

Meditatio (Meditation)

The second movement in *Lectio Divina* thus involves meditating upon and pondering on the scriptural passage. When the passage is read, it is generally advised not to try to assign a meaning to it at first, but to wait for the action of the Holy Spirit to illuminate the mind, as the passage is pondered upon.

The English word ponder comes from the Latin *pondus* which relates to the mental activity of weighing or considering. To ponder on the passage that has been read, it is held lightly and gently considered from various angles. Again, the emphasis is not on analysis of the passage but to keep the mind open and allow the Holy Spirit to inspire a meaning for it.

In the meditation phase of *lectio divina*, we ask, what does this text say to me, today, and to my life? We allow God to pull up certain memories of people, places, and events in our lives that relate to the passage we are reading. Meditation is also an opportunity to see ourselves in the text. We can consider our own feelings as if we were a participant in the text or try to understand what it would be like to be one of the people represented in the text. In this way we come to a deeper appreciation of how God is working in our lives through the sacred word. Having entered into the story ourselves, we can return to the present and consider the areas in our own lives that God is calling us to contemplate.

Oratio (Prayer)



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In the Christian tradition, prayer is understood as dialogue with God, that is, as loving conversation with God who has invited us into an embrace. The constitution *Dei verbum* which endorsed *Lectio Divina* for the general public, as well as in monastic settings, quoted Saint Ambrose on the importance of prayer in conjunction with Scripture reading and stated:

And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for "we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying.

Pope Benedict XVI emphasized the importance of using *Lectio Divina* and prayers on Scripture as a guiding light and a source of direction and stated "It should never be forgotten that the Word of God is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path."

Through a meditation on Scripture, we experience an intimate encounter with God that leads us to respond in prayer. Having met our Lord in his holy word, we courageously speak to him in our own words. In this way we consider prayer to be a simple conversation with God. It is a conversation that comes in various forms: we ask petitions (or requests) of him, we give him thanks, and we give him praise. We might also ask for the intercession of Mary or the saints represented in the passage we read. At this phase we can ask ourselves: What can I say to the Lord in response to his word?

Contemplatio (Contemplation)

Contemplation takes place in terms of silent prayer that expresses love for God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines contemplative prayer as "the hearing the Word of God" in an attentive mode. It states "Contemplative prayer is silence, the "symbol of the world to come" or "silent love." Words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love. In this silence, unbearable to the "outer" man, the Father speaks to us his incarnate Word, who suffered, died, and rose; in this silence the Spirit of adoption enables us to share in the prayer of Jesus."

The role of the Holy Spirit in contemplative prayer has been emphasized by Christian spiritual writers for centuries. In the 12th century, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux compared the Holy Spirit to a kiss by the Eternal Father which allows the practitioner of contemplative prayer to experience union with God. In the 14th century, Richard Rolle viewed contemplation as the path that leads the soul to union with God in love, and considered the Holy Spirit as the center of contemplation.

From a theological perspective, God's grace is considered a principle, or cause, of contemplation, with its benefits delivered through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

A true encounter with the Lord always leads to transformation. Indeed, the Lord God proclaimed, "Behold, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). Through contemplation we come to an understanding of the parts of our lives that need to be transformed by God's grace. We humble ourselves and open our lives up to his transformative power. This step comes with the willingness to change, an openness and trust in God, and the decision to follow God's will rather than our own. With this decision comes a fear of losing what we find comfortable and safe. At the same time, we feel the excitement of a call to heroic adventure and a hopeful future of living the life we are meant to live. At this step in the *lectio divina* process, we ask ourselves: What conversion of the mind, heart, and life is the Lord asking of me?



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Actio (Action)

This phase is often not considered to be a part of lectio divina proper, it is an essential result of the encounter with God in Sacred Scripture. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Verbum Domini*, “We do well also to remember that the process of lectio divina is not concluded until it arrives at action (actio), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity” (no. 87). Having received God’s love and grace, we go forth to serve others out of the love we have been given. Our transformation calls us to witness to others; it calls us to selflessly serve our brothers and sisters in Christ. These acts are done not so much out of a sense of duty, but out of the inspiration we receive from the acceptance in faith of God’s love.