

**LECTIO DIVINA (Meaning -Divine Reading)**  
by Dr. Gabriella Van Breda – January 2018

**History of Lectio Divina**

The special technique called Lectio Divina (literally meaning *divine reading*), is a method of prayer, meditation, and communication with God. Rather than rushing through Scripture and written prayer, it aims to slow the prayer down, so that the reader may absorb the word and in doing so spend time with God. The rhythm of the Lectio Divina is a careful balance of action and reception, praying and listening to God.

The concept of Scripture being something to absorb, take in, and digest slowly has its origins in the 3rd century when Origen Adamantius began to explore the idea of there being a larger wisdom behind the written word of God than is immediately evident. He asserted that there was a way to understand this higher meaning by allowing the words to "touch" the listener. Private reflection on Scripture was also practiced in 4th century Eastern monasticism, though it was not quite the same as the Lectio Divina method. In the 6th century Lectio Divina became an essential part of monastic life and prayer. St. Benedict incorporated it in The Rule of St. Benedict, his spiritual and organizational guide to life in the monastery. This contemplative and careful approach to Scripture reminds us of St. Benedict's Rule 6, on the importance of silence and obedience through listening: "If in fact speaking and teaching are the master's task; the disciple is to be silent and listen" (Rule of St. Benedict, Rule 6). In this case God is the master who is speaking to them during the Lectio Divina, and one needs to listen closely.

**Like many concepts in St. Benedict's monastic vision, he drew inspiration for Lectio Divina from the Bible: "The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach" (Romans 10:8-10). The living word of God is surrounding you, in your heart, mouth, and ears. Another example is in Hebrews. "For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).**

Lectio Divina continues to be a fundamental part of Benedictine life today. Outside of the monastery it experienced a revival in the 20th century when Pope Paul VI included it as an important practice in Christian faith, in his document *Dei Verbum*, as part of the Second Vatican Council reformations and changes. This may have been in part a response to the 19th century's more historical approach to Scripture. Revitalization of the Lectio Divina continues in the 21st century with Pope Benedict XVI saying:

**"I would like to mention the spread of the ancient practice of Lectio Divina or *spiritual reading* of Sacred Scripture. It consists in pouring over a biblical text for some time, reading it and rereading it, as it were, *ruminating* on it as the Fathers say and squeezing from it, so to speak, all its *juice*, so that it may nourish meditation and contemplation and, like water, succeed in irrigating life itself" (Sunday Angelus, November 6th, 2005).**

**Therefore *Lectio Divina* is a form of meditation rooted in liturgical celebration.**

The method of lectio divina I want to share with you today follows four steps: *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *contemplatio* (contemplation), and *oratio* (prayer). However we are going to use it in a slightly different way in order to make meaning of our learning and so that the scriptures on the prophetic utterance can become more meaningful to us in our lives, our work and their effect in our context as Christian leaders.

**Therefore we will use lectio divina (divine reading) in the following way.**

- **Read the text**
- **Meditate on the text**
- **Each person prays about the text asking God to reveal Himself in and through His word.**
- **Reflect together on the text.**

The goal of this reading is not to rush through several chapters of Scripture. The reader, rather than trying to take in large sections of Scripture, adopts a reflective stance towards a short Scripture passage, pausing on a single word or phrase that resonates with the mind and heart.

**This *reading* leads to the second step, known as *meditatio*—Latin for meditation—that invites one to reflect upon what was read. Ancient monks explained this process as a deep, unhurried thinking about the Word one has read— ruminating, somewhat like the way a cow chews the cud.**

### **Reflection**

This is where we connect our newly discovered insights from the word to daily life experiences, with the inspiration that comes from the Word of God and that has the gracious capacity to refresh the heart and mind.

**Some of the questions for reflection could be:**

- **What is God communicating to us through the Word?**
- **What does this reading say to me personally?**
- **What does it mean for us as students of the scriptures.**
- **Does the Word really function as a “two-edged sword” (Heb 4:12)?**
- **Does it cut to the heart? How does the Word help us to change our hearts and minds?**
- **How will we carry this message from God gently and gratefully into our lives this week?**

## **For more in-depth study**

### **The Historical Critical approach**

Using the Historical Critical Approach as a hermeneutical approach does not mean fault finding but rather it means asking questions, weighting evidence, and forming judgments. Questions such as:

- Who wrote this book
- When
- Where
- Why
- How
- For what purpose
- To what audience
- In what circumstances
- Using what sources
- What did the terminology used by the authors convey in terms of meaning to the readers of their time.

Understanding the text historically means that we understand the text should not be studied in a vacuum as if it had no relationship to the events surrounding its writing. One of our primary convictions as Christians is that God does not reveal Himself in a vacuum but in history. He was the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob as He is of us today.