



Year of the Word

For more resources, including other articles on Scripture, reflection questions on the Sunday readings, 10 ways your parish can promote Scripture, and much more, visit www.austindiocese.org or call (512) 476-4888.



Diocese of Austin
The Catholic Church
of Central Texas
512.476.4888
www.austindiocese.org
The Year of the Word 2007

Lectio Divina is a way to pray the Word

By *Mary Beth Huba*

Lectio Divina, or divine reading, is a practice that can be traced to the third century of the church's history and is entwined with the monastic tradition. It is a method for individual meditation on Scripture whereby one listens for the message of the Holy Spirit. It is not a Bible study, although this can provide background for the exercise. Neither is it a liturgy of the Word, which is a community prayer. It is not the same as spiritual reading, which includes other texts and materials. The four parts of the Lectio Divina — lectio, meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio — guide this personal reflection on the Bible.

Lectio derives from the Latin, meaning "to read," however, in this instance it also implies divine listening. Those starting this process may decide to select one of the readings from the daily liturgy or concentrate on a particular book in the Bible, such as a Gospel or one of Paul's letters, and work through it slowly. After choosing a focal Scriptural passage, read it thoughtfully, perhaps several times. The purpose is not to construct meaning but to listen reverently for the Holy Spirit to whisper to us personally. Opening to the Spirit allows a few words or a phrase to relate to our experience, our need, right now.

Meditatio is meditation or reflection on those words that God has called us to today. This is a time of stillness in which we allow God's words to wash over us like the ebb and flow of a gentle tide. The passage may draw forth memories or experiences or questions. We are led to "ponder" as Mary does (Luke 2:19). What truths become evident as we return over and over to the divine Word? This is not a time for analysis but for connecting with the Lord as he speaks to us personally.

Oratio, or prayer, is our response to the movement of the Holy Spirit. We converse with our God, expressing our love and awe, our sorrow, our pain, and our joy. We plead and we give thanks. All of these things we bring before our God and Father through the Son. As we see our lives in a new light, we have the opportunity to change, to rededicate, to grow in this new understanding and to face what needs healing. We ask, we make our promises but most importantly again we listen. How often do we forget that prayer is not God's response to us but our response to God?

This leads to contemplatio, contemplation, the time of quiet rest. We empty ourselves of our anxieties, our questions, our impatience, even our accomplishments and plans. Now is the time to simply be with God, to enter into loving union. How this can happen in our world of distractions and responsibilities is part of the mystery of God. Sometimes we wonder if anything is happening and yet change may unfold slowly in the depths of our being.

Jesus tells us that we must bear good fruit (John 15: 1-17). As we embrace the practice of the Lectio Divina and allow ourselves to listen to the whispers of the Holy Spirit guiding our lives we will rejoice in the power of God's love and truth. We will look for "the fruit of the Spirit [which] is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23) and know that God is with us.

Mary Beth Huba is a member of St. Helen Parish in Georgetown and holds a master's degree in theology from St. Mary University in San Antonio.