

C4: A Process for Lectio Divina¹ (Divine/Sacred Reading)

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Lectio Divina is a form of prayer often discussed by Cardinal Thomas Collins, the Archbishop of Toronto. It's one of his favorite forms of prayer, and for many years he has led had monthly gatherings in his cathedrals where he practices Lectio Divina. Collins says that: "...fundamentally lectio divina is a prayerful encounter with the Word of God." He goes on to remind us that the word of God isn't simply the Bible – it is Christ, and that "one of the most powerful ways that we encounter him is through the words of Sacred Scripture." Please remember that this is not Bible study, not an attempt to analyze the passage, but rather an encounter with the Word of God, letting enter not only our heads, but our hearts, too. We're looking to hear the word of God, to enter more deeply into it, and to learn what it means to love God.

C-1: Concentrate

Step 1 involves turning away from your exterior concerns and turning towards God. It means finding a time and place (a consistent one, if you can make that happen) that you are going to set aside for God. Here, you shut the door on the outside world – literally, perhaps, but figuratively for sure: shutting down music and putting your phone into silent or even airplane mode. Once you've carved this space out, there are a few simple steps that follow:

1. Recognize God's presence: notice that He really is there. Some people consider the idea that Jesus is present in their hearts, others prefer to imagine Him sitting beside them, and for others it's helpful to remember that God is all around us. Whichever image you use, what's important is that you stop and refresh your awareness of His presence with you.
2. Listen up: God has something He wants to say to you TODAY, and part of your goal in this time is to be as attentive to that as you can be.
3. Focus: In the midst of all the distractions both internal (your mind wandering) and external – other people, animals, notifications, etc – choose to be present to God in this time in the midst of all of them.
4. Remind yourself that you want to hear God's Word!

C-2: Consider

Take a section of scripture and read through it slowly two times. As you go through it, be aware of what God is saying to you here and now in your life. You can highlight the passage write notes in a journal or in the margins, or simply try to remember what sticks out to you.. You're not looking for some new insight or new truth, just something that you need to hear in this moment of your life. Fr. John Bartunek emphasizes here that we are seeking 'whispers' as we read rather than some huge revelation. Be patient here, and don't get discouraged – this will take some practice.

¹ Adapted from *The Better Way* by Fr. John Bartunek

Often some sort of Biblical commentary or other reflection might be helpful (some Bibles include these as footnotes. The *Navarre Bible* and the *Jerome Biblical Commentary* are great print resources, and online the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology (stpaulcenter.com) is also helpful.

C-3: Converse

Having noted some particular item to consider, respond to it. Talk to God about it. Use words of praise, sorrow (contrition), or gratitude. Ask things of God. Whatever you might be considering from step 2 may have implications in your own life, and so this conversation step may also lead you back to your passage for some further consideration – this is ok! The key here is to work at letting down the guard of your heart so God’s word can penetrate, regenerate, and inspire you in the deepest parts of who you are.

It's also important to remember that part of any conversation also involves listening, so if you find yourself without words, allow some time here for silence. For some of us, the fact that we haven’t heard God speak is related to the fact that we don’t often listen for his voice. A time of *Lectio Divina* offers you both the chance to listen to him in the scriptures, but also in the silence of your own heart.

C-4: Commit

Having concentrated, and placed yourself in the presence of God, having considered some passage of His word, and having conversed with Him in response to this passage, you now come to the point where the rubber meets the road: you need to put your meditation into action.

Take some time now to renew your commitment to live as one of Jesus’ followers. The passage you’ve been reflecting on might be leading to some further practical action, so it’s also important here to commit to whatever that might be: an act of charity, an act of penance, some new spiritual discipline, or a different approach to something you’re expecting today. Ultimately, the key here is to bridge the content of your meditation into some concrete action.

Once you’re done, conclude with a prayer that reminds you of your commitment to Christ. Fr. Bartunek’s book has a beautiful one (though you can use any prayer – even a spontaneous prayer on the spot that expresses these sentiments):

You know how weak I am, Lord, but you also know how much I want to follow You. You have planted that desire in my heart. I am yours, Lord. Wherever I go, and whatever happens, I belong to You. I never want to be separated from You. As hard as it is, I want to do Your will, because You are my God, my creator, and my redeemer, my Father and my faithful friend. Thy will be done in my life today, Lord, Thy Kingdom come. Amen.