

Understanding Lectio Divina: An Intimate Encounter with the Living God



In his book, “Praying the Bible: An Introduction to *Lectio Divina*,” Archbishop Mariano Magrassi O.S.B, quoting scripture and the “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*” writes, “All...should immerse themselves in the scriptures by constant spiritual reading and diligent study...in order to learn ‘the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ (Phil 3:8) by frequent reading of the divine scriptures. ‘Ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of Christ.’”³² Archbishop Magrassi goes on to explain that the Vatican II Council, through the liturgical renewal expressed in “The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*,” stresses the importance of “full, conscious, and active participation in the liturgical celebrations,” and that “pastors of souls should energetically set about doing it through requisite formation.”³³ Moreover, he adds, “Ministers of the word must not become empty preachers of the word of God to others, not being hearers of the word of God in their own hearts.”³⁴ Rather, “Their goal must be to lead all the faithful as the council says to ‘personal contact with the word which allows it to ‘speed on and triumph’ in us.”³⁵ To illustrate what this means, Archbishop Magrassi, being a monk himself, writes,

³² Praying the Bible: An introduction to Lectio Divina. Magrassi Pg. 1

³³ Sacrosanctum Concilium Para. 14

³⁴ Praying the Bible: An introduction to Lectio Divina. Magrassi quoting Augustine sermon 179 cited in Dei Verbum 25

³⁵ Praying the Bible: An introduction to Lectio Divina. Magrassi Pg. 1

“To drink salvation from sacred scripture [is done] in order to arouse a spirit of fervor. In every biblical (and liturgical) proclamation, *lectio sacra* (sacred reading or hearing) becomes the source from which the monk draws his fervor and the final end where he reaches full spiritual maturity.”³⁶

The goal of this teaching is to form “True Disciples of Jesus” in a way that fosters union with God through the sacred reading or hearing of scriptures both in the Liturgy of the Word at Mass and private reading and study of scriptures. True Disciples of Jesus who “taste and see the goodness of the Lord,” and who walk with the Lord in their hearts will be able to make more disciples. God speaks to us through the sacred scriptures.



The Vatican II Council’s “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*,” exclaims,

*In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by **deeds and words** having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the **words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them**. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.*³⁷

The Holy Spirit through the writings in the prologue in the Gospel of John is worth pondering. The evangelist writes,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light,

³⁶ Ibid Pg. 2

³⁷ Dei Verbum Par. 2

but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth (John 1:1-14).



The Evangelist makes it clear that Jesus is the Word Made Flesh who reveals God to us. These sayings, teachings of Jesus, and his deeds, were handed on to us for a reason, e.g. to draw us to union with the Divine.

Understanding Divine Revelation: Context for Prayer

The words and deeds of Jesus indeed fulfill salvation history, but the transmission of Divine Revelation is done through the Holy Spirit. In his book, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Fr. Patrick Hartin writes, “*The actual writings of the New Testament emerged over the course of the century following the death of Jesus of Nazareth. They developed out of the traditions handed on in the memory of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the concept of this tradition that helps us to understand the process out of which the books emerged.*”³⁸ It is important to understand that modern Disciples of Jesus need to understand that, “*the world out of which the New Testament arose was every bit as diverse as our world. Jesus and the Apostles emerged from a world of Judaism that was as diverse as it had ever been, with various groups vying in their claims to represent the true heart of Judaism.*”³⁹ Then comes Jesus Christ the Lord,

In whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (see Cor. 1:20; 3:13; 4:6), commissioned the Apostles to preach to all men that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, (1) and to impart to them heavenly gifts. This Gospel had been promised in former times through the prophets, and Christ Himself had fulfilled it and promulgated it with His lips. This commission was faithfully fulfilled by the Apostles who, by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances, handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy

³⁸ Understanding the New Testament, Hartin Patrick Pg. 14

³⁹ Ibid Pg. 6

*Spirit. The commission was fulfilled, too, by those Apostles and apostolic men who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing.*⁴⁰

Lectio Divina: the Basic Steps **Reading, Meditation, Prayer, Contemplation**

Lectio, Reading:

In his book, “Praying the Scripture for a Change: An Introduction to Lectio Divina,” Tim Gray writes, “If we want to hear God in our prayer, the first step is reading well. He adds, “Intelligent reading comes only with practice.” Quoting the twelfth century Cistercian monk William of St. Thierry, ‘In all Scripture, diligent reading is far from superficial perusal as friendship is distinct from acquaintance with a stranger, or as affection given to a companion differs from a casual greeting.’”⁴¹ Archbishop Magrassi writes, “Full hearing requires attentive reading.”

contemplative calm. All Ambrose, he adds, ‘We Scriptures] not in agitation, a few at a time, pausing in



will experience their ability to enkindle the ardor of prayer.”⁴² Ultimately, True Disciples of Jesus understand the importance of God speaking to us through the scriptures, teaching us that He has unconditional love for his people, desiring that we live one with Him in relationship, so we make His love present to others.

He adds, “another requirement: haste is excluded. Quoting St. should read [The Words of Sacred but in calm; not hurriedly, but slowly, attentive reflection...then the reader

Meditatio, Meditation:

After prayerful reading the next step is to meditate. “It means patient analysis and deeper study. A normal and necessary continuation of reading, it presupposes that I am able to create space in my heart for the Word of God to ring out. And it leads to a living assimilation, which forms me into a ‘living library.’”⁴³ In this step we learn that we “must create within our heart a flexible space for resonance, so that the Word can penetrate its deepest parts and touch its innermost fibers. This demands the kind of recollection we feel the need for when something great and beautiful appears in our life.”⁴⁴ Archbishop Magrassi

⁴⁰ Dei Verbum 7

⁴¹ Praying the Scripture for a Change: An Introduction to Lectio Divina. Gray, Tim Pg. 43

⁴² Praying the Bible: An introduction to Lectio Divina. Magrassi Pg. 106

⁴³ Ibid Pg. 109

⁴⁴ Ibid Pg. 109

sums it up quoting the Lord speaking to the Prophet Ezekiel. He writes, “all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart and hear with your ears...’ (Ezekiel 3:10-11)

Receive in your heart: In that inner space made wider by faith and love, where they can touch inner strings and set them vibrating. This divine touch releases grace and salvation for yourself and others. In the mystery of the Word, it is God whom you meet.”⁴⁵ On another

note, Dr. Tim Gray emphasizes the power of our own being when it comes to our spiritual life quoting Jesus’ version of the Book of Deuteronomy’s *Shema* (Hear O Israel) in Mark’s Gospel. Jesus

your heart, and

with all your

Dr. Gray,



says, “You shall love the Lord you God with all with all your soul, *and with all your mind*, and strength (Mark 12:29-30) (emphasis added).”⁴⁶

quoting St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians,

adds, “We are, according to Paul, to ‘have the mind of Christ’ (1 Cor. 2:16)...Furthermore, quoting Paul’s letter to the Romans, he adds, ‘Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.’” (Rom 12:2)⁴⁷ True Disciples of Jesus understand that in Christ we have a grace given that allows us to renew our minds by opening them to Christ, the Word of God made flesh. The Prophet Jeremiah said to the Lord, writing, “When I found your words I devoured them; they became the joy and the happiness of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16).

Oratio, from Oro: I pray, plead:

This step in the process is most important to understand because the careful reading or hearing (lectio), and the process of profound reflection in meditation should lead to a responsive prayer. Dr. Gray, quoting Pope Benedict XVI, writes, “*The diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about the intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying responds with trusting openness of heart.*”⁴⁸ Dr. Gray adds, “The key is to remain in relationship with God as you mull over the connections and implications your

⁴⁵ Ibid Pg. 109

⁴⁶ Praying the Scripture for a Change: An Introduction to Lectio Divina. Gray, Tim Pg. 60

⁴⁷ Ibid Pg. 62

⁴⁸ Ibid Pg. 77

meditation on scripture has for your life and has for the lives of those around you.”⁴⁹ Think of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a model disciple of Jesus. Dr. Gray writes,

*As we step on the oratio rung of the ladder of lectio divina and talk with Jesus about the things He has shown us through lectio and meditation, it is in this moment when we start to talk through our questions, puzzlement, wonder, fear, complaints, and happiness regarding the things we discovered on the sacred page. In doing so we imitate Christ's greatest disciple, the Blessed Virgin Mary, who 'kept these things in her heart,' (Luke 2:51) where they fermented like fine wine. In oratio we talk with God about the Word he has spoken to us in Scripture and seek how it may be applied to our lives as a word spoken to us.*⁵⁰

True Disciples of Jesus understand the importance and power of keeping the scriptures in their hearts.

Archbishop Magrassi comments that by the end of the meditation process “the Bible becomes second nature...A spiritual person becomes a living library.” Eventually through practice “inner reading, which does not require a book can be done at any time of the day, even during work, if this is performed in an atmosphere of silence.”⁵¹ He acknowledges that “meditative reading as we have described it leads to spontaneous prayer: Reading to, is prayer. In any case the two activities compliment each other, they are two movements in the mystical dialogue, harmoniously alternating, the soul leaves its reading to run to God. William of St. Thierry calls this meditative prayer: it springs from the heart at the touch of the divine Word.”⁵² Archbishop Magrassi and others remind us to look at how the church has prayed in community for years. In short, we need to look at the shape of the Mass.

Basically, in the readings God speaks, in the “Responsorial Psalm: the people’s response, a lyric moment of sung prayer. The Word descending in our hearts causes them to vibrate and creates an echo in song. That song is the exultant thanks of our whole being, rapt in contemplation of the mystery revealed in the Word.” Moreover, “it is a response in which we speak to God using God’s own words: the psalms or scriptural canticles.” Furthermore, the next step is silent personal prayer. The song tends to fade into silence. This is the most personal and meditative moment of the response, a free outpouring of the soul

⁴⁹ Ibid Pg. 79

⁵⁰ Ibid Pg. 80

⁵¹ Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina. Magrassi Pg. 111

⁵² Ibid Pg. 113

which has been personally touched by some of the words it has heard.”⁵³ Ultimately, “This is the method the church uses to pray; it knows no other...All Christian prayer, contemplation (presented later) included, fits into the pattern of listening and response which is prayed reading.”⁵⁴

In his book “What Happens at the Mass,” Fr. Jeremy Driscoll O.S.B, describes this movement on a more profound level. He writes, “The first is a movement from God the Father to the world, while the second is a movement from the world to God the Father.”⁵⁵ Fr. Driscoll defines these movements. “The first in this full Trinitarian and ecclesial shape can be described as follows: the Father gives Himself through the Son in the Holy Spirit...the

on our behalf.”⁵⁶ True this can be described as “When the Father places Church (the first that the Church may do



offer it as its own back to the Father (the second movement).”⁵⁷ The shape of this dialogue in the Vatican II “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* describes that in “the liturgy God speaks to his people, and the people respond in song and prayer.”⁵⁸ This is true in *lectio divina*, which may lead to contemplation.

very shape of God’s saving activity Disciples of Jesus understand that the “Paschal Mystery of Christ.” His Son into the hand of the movement) He does so in order something with His gift; namely,

Contemplatio, Contemplation:

Contemplation is crescendo of *lectio divina*. Dr. Gray writes, “the first three steps require arduous effort, the last is effortless and yet beyond all of the abilities of our will. Dr. Gray quotes Guigo the Carthusian, stating, ‘Contemplation is when the mind is in some sort lifted up to God and held above itself, so that it tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness.’”⁵⁹ Basically, by no power of your own, you somehow know that God is present in you, that He

⁵³ Ibid Pg. 114

⁵⁴ Ibid Pg. 115

⁵⁵ Ibid 10

⁵⁶ What Happens at the Mass. Driscoll Fr. Jeremy, O.S.B Pg. 10

⁵⁷ Ibid Pg. 12

⁵⁸ Sacrosanctum Concilium Par. 33

⁵⁹ Praying the Scripture for a Change: An Introduction to Lectio Divina. Gray, Tim Pg. 91

loves you, and that He will never leave you. Archbishop Magrassi, quoting St. Gregory the Great, pondering Ezekiel writes, “It is a flight in which the soul, going beyond the words of the text, enters into the divine Word, in anticipation of heaven.”⁶⁰ Quoting Theresa of Avila’s “Interior Castle,” he adds, “What matters is to hear him, gaze on him, and remain under his great light.”⁶¹ Ultimately, “once we have reached this point we can go no higher; we are at the threshold of vision. We are at the final stage of the journey that begins with *lectio* and ends with astonishing intimacy with God.”⁶²

Operatio: Because of *lectio divina* your life should change:

It is important to note that if you enter into *lectio divina* on a regular basis your life is going to change. Dr. Tim Gray adds an extra rung on the ladder of *lectio divina* in order to demonstrate the power the word of God has in people’s lives. He quotes St. James’ letter calling us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But he who looks at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, and shall be blessed in his doing” (James 1:22-25).⁶³ True Disciples of Jesus know that *lectio divina* is the catalyst to make Christ present to others.

⁶⁰ Praying the Bible: An introduction to Lectio Divina. Magrassi Pg. 117

⁶¹ Ibid Pg. 117

⁶² Ibid Pg. 119

⁶³ Praying the Scripture for a Change: An Introduction to Lectio Divina. Gray, Tim Pg. 91

Practicum, Practice:

The readings chosen for this presentation practicum are from the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, which is the Sunday following this presentation.



Wisdom 7:7-11

A reading from the Book of Wisdom:

I prayed, and prudence was given me; I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me. I preferred her to scepter and throne, and deemed riches nothing in comparison with her, nor did I liken any priceless gem to her; because all gold, in view of her, is a little sand, and before her, silver is to be accounted mire. Beyond health and comeliness I loved her, and I chose to have her rather than the light, because the splendor of her never yields to sleep. Yet all good things together came to me in her company, and countless riches at her hands.

The Word of the Lord: Thanks be to God

Psalm 90:12-13, 14-15, 16-17

R. (14) Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart. Return, O LORD!
How long? Have pity on your servants!

R. Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness, that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.
Make us glad, for the days when you afflicted us, for the years when we saw evil.

R. Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Let your work be seen by your servants and your glory by their children; and may the
gracious care of the LORD our God be ours; prosper the work of our hands for us!
Prosper the work of our hands!

R. Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Hebrews 4:12-13

A Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews:

Brothers and sisters:

*Indeed the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword,
penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the
heart. No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we
must render an account.*

The Word of the Lord: Thanks be to God

Gospel Mark 10:17-30

A Reading from the Gospel according to Mark:

R/Glory to you O Lord

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments:

You shall not kill;

you shall not commit adultery;

you shall not steal;

you shall not bear false witness;

you shall not defraud;

honor your father and your mother."

He replied and said to him, "Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, "You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God." Peter began to say to him, "We have given up everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come."

The Gospel of the Lord:

R/ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

Cited Photos

Lectio Divina Pg. 1 Link not found

Sacred heart of Jesus Pg. 2 <https://encrypted-tbn1.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcS8iG-SR8f-peD2N57efbLRaow9yS0nak1HMxES3inDX76AzSNHbA>

Annunciation Pg. 3

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Paschal Mystery Pg. 5

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Mary and Jesus Pg. 7 http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-0BduHEVYQV4/TXpXxBprMvI/AAAAAAAAABIY/mBDjuQzfPE0/s1600/MARY_CHILD2%2525255B1%2525255D.jpg&imgrefurl=http://contemplateonjesus.blogspot.com/2011/08/holy-mary-mother-of-god.html&h=950&w=697&tbnid=6HEFR6CPkDjcgM:&docid=BK9VzdCjg6QDZM&ei=MUIEVtvhHZL2oATHnbaIDg&tbnid=isch&client=safari&ved=0CGoQMMyhGMEZqFQoTCJu-ntinkMgCFRI7iAodx44N4Q

Lectio Ladder Pg. 8

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