An Invitation to Visio Divina

LISTENING WITH THE EAR OF THE HEART

Related to the prayer of Lectio Divina in which one dwells with a passage from Scripture, the prayer of Visio Divina, or “divine seeing,” includes the contemplation of art in conversation with God. In a society that is ever more inundated with images, Visio Divina requires us to slow down and truly look. We open the eyes of our soul and see how Christ is illuminated for us in art. This practice does not require any special knowledge or appreciation of art, just a willingness to attend to and interact with the colors, textures, forms and overall impressions.

Visio Divina is an invitation to wonder. The image comes alive with personal meaning meant just for us at this point in our spiritual journey. This is the same movement of the Spirit we can experience when listening to Scripture in the manner of Lectio Divina.

“All that is good, all that is true, all that is beautiful brings us to God.”

— POPE FRANCIS

Once you have selected an image, sculpture or icon, settle yourself into presence and begin the four-fold movement:

GAZING

Consider the image or object before you. Look slowly and thoroughly, taking a first glance, noting the colors, movement, textures, people, places and things. If the piece is three dimensional, walk around it. How does it change when you sit or stand? Remain with the image for a time. When you are ready, allow those sights and thoughts to pass by, making space for the inner eye of the heart to open and interact with the image.

RESPONDING

Respond to the image with prayer. Did the image remind you of an experience, person or issue for which you’d like to offer thanksgiving or intercession? Did it open a new awareness, or spark a conviction? Offer that prayer to God.

REFLECTING

Take a second, deeper look. Rest in the presence of the image; allow the image to reach beyond the intellect and into an unconscious level. What truth does it hold for you? Engage your imagination. Where are you in the artwork? What do you see from that perspective? You may also journal, and/or use these questions to inspire your reflections: How does this image inform or illuminate your relationship with God? How does it speak to your spiritual journey? How does this experience support your willingness to be opened, to be healed?

RESTING

Respond to the image with prayer. Did the image remind you of an experience, person or issue for which you’d like to offer thanksgiving or intercession? Did it open a new awareness, or spark a conviction? Offer that prayer to God.
Visio Divina ("Divine Seeing") is praying with images- using art as a way to invite God to speak to you. Here are some simple steps you can use to try this prayer practice. You can use the image above or any piece of art that you prefer. Begin with the art in front of you.

2. Relax your body, neck, shoulders.
3. Say a short prayer asking Jesus to be with you, such as “Lord, open the eyes of my heart.”
4. Open your eyes and silently look at the picture.
5. Let your eyes pause and focus on the part of the image you are first drawn to.
6. Gaze upon just that part of the picture for a moment.
7. Close your eyes, still seeing that image in your mind. Rest with it.
8. Open your eyes. Now look at the whole image, allowing it to draw forth a word, an emotion, or an image from your heart.
9. How might you encounter God through this painting? How might God be calling you? What thoughts, words, questions, does this image raise/ What emotions, if any, do you feel?
10. Close your eyes and pay attention to any stirrings within you.
11. Open your eyes
12. Use a journal to jot down a word or phrase about your experience.
Visio Divina – The Practice of Sacred Seeing

The practice of Visio Divina (Latin for divine seeing) is a prayer practice that creates space to listen and pay attention to the Holy in our lives. Based on the 6th century monastic practice of Lectio Divina where the object of prayer is a passage of scripture, Visio Divina allows the Spirit to speak through images.

Get Ready: Take a few moments to get ready. Find a comfortable position where you can gaze at the photograph. Settle into God’s presence by connecting with your breath. Move your awareness from your head into your heart. Know that God can be known through many different forms and images. Be present. Be open.

Eyes to See: Allow your eyes to gaze gently on your image. Let them sweep the whole of the picture. Notice the shapes and the colours. Notice the lines and the details. Look for symbols.

Notice if there is a place on the image where your eye is invited to linger. Are you called back again and again to a certain detail or colour? Try not to think about it too much. Simply notice where your energy is drawn. Notice where you eye is avoiding or passing over. What part inspires you? Where do you experience resistance?

Slowly become aware of the place on the image that is just for you today. It might be a colour, a shape, or a tiny detail. Linger here. Be open and present to this.

Open Heart: Take a second longer look. Open your imagination. As you reflect on your place on the image, what feelings or longings are evoked? What memories or hopes are stirred? Make room within your heart for whatever wants to emerge.

Be here. Be present. Let go of judging or critiquing. Simply be, lingering here, opening your heart to whatever wants to rise.

Respond: Slowly begin to notice what being revealed in your seeing and through what you are feeling. What is the invitation in this moment of your life? In the day-to-day life you are living what is God calling you to do or be? What insights have you gained? What invitation is growing in you? What work would you like to do today?

Enjoy: Let go. Rest. Enjoy a few moments of stillness in this space.

You may want to spend time reflecting on your experience or in your journal.