

Using *Lectio Divina* and *Visio Divina*

Barbara Sutton, D.Min.



The practice of praying with visual images is called *visio divina*, or divine seeing. It is adapted from the sixth-century Benedictine practice of Bible reading called *lectio divina*, using both the text and art to help the reader encounter the living Word of God. The rhythm of *visio divina* ignites the senses to “hear and see” the Word of God as one listens, meditates, and prays with the sacred text.

Studying a text of Scripture and the illustration involves uncovering layers of meaning. One is the intended message of the inspired author who wrote for a particular audience at a particular time. When we have discovered the “voice” of the text, we can bring its images and lessons into the present and discern its significance for our own life situations.

Facilitating *Lectio Divina*

- **Listen:** As one encounters the living Word of God, listening with the “ear of your heart” (Rb 1980: *The Rule of St. Benedict*, prologue) is as essential as being instructed, informed, or inspired by the Word of God as well as being formed into a truly obedient person of faith.
- **Meditate:** To meditate on the Word of God means to let his Word descend from our logical mind into our intuitive heart, ruminating on the Scripture text itself. Meditating “engages thoughts, imagination, emotion and desire. . . . In order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen our will to follow Christ” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2708).
- **Pray:** As we respond to the question *What does this text mean to me?*, we humbly repent, remove obstacles to our relationships, and deeply pray from the heart and soul. In the abiding presence of Christ, listen for the soft gentle voice of the Holy Spirit directing your choices.
- **Contemplate:** In contemplation the single goal is to be present to God. In this movement, experience a mystical encounter with God.

Facilitating *Visio Divina*

- **Listen:** As you hear the Word of God proclaimed, listen with the “ear of your heart” for a word or short phrase that God has for you this day.
- **Meditate:** Ruminating on the Word, turning it over in your heart and mind. What does the word or phrase you have chosen mean to you today?
- **See:** Fix your gaze on the picture, asking God to open your eyes to see what God wants you to see. What do you see? Where do you see God in this picture?
- **Pray:** What do you want to pray for today?
- **Contemplate:** Sit quietly and rest in the presence of God.
- **Become Christlike:** How do the Scripture and the image encourage you to be more like Jesus and the disciples?

Barbara Sutton, D.Min., is an adjunct professor of theology and Associate Dean of Ministerial Formation and Outreach at St. John’s School of Theology and Seminary in Collegeville, MN.

For Reflection

- In what way do you connect spiritually with beauty?
- How does your rhythm of “hearing and seeing” the Word of God impact your faith?