

Lectio Divina

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When praying, I find lectio divina—"spiritual reading"—a wonderful help. We should not think of "spiritual reading" as reading in the normal sense in the same way we should not think that allowing a mint to dissolve in our mouth is eating. Normally, we read quickly—the quicker the better—to amass information or understand some issue. But in spiritual reading, we seek to turn our heart and mind and spirit ever so gently to the Divine Center. We seek to be unified, focused, synoptic. It is prayerful reading in which all of our external and internal senses swing like a needle to the pole star of the Spirit. We become "all ears" to God.

Praxis

How is this done in practice? You might want to begin with a brief Scripture passage or a small reading from one of the recognized masters of Christian devotion. Read slowly, quietly, prayerfully. Pause at any word or phrase where you feel the Spirit's drawing. Suppose you come to Nehemiah's wonderful statement, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Stop and wait, yielded and still. Perhaps the Spirit will plumb your own feelings of weakness and helplessness, exposing deep reasons for your lack of strength and giving you intense longing for a strength not your own and not dependent upon the winds of circumstances.

You may begin praying this Scripture: "Lord, let me receive your joy.... Forgive my hankering to find joy in things that never fully satisfy—food and trivial conversation and other frivolous things. Let me soak in your joy." The Spirit may teach you about your internal resistance to God's joy. Perhaps song and dance come. Or joy-filled prayer in a language unknown to your conscious mind. And more.

The Invisible God

Maybe you are meditating on Paul's great confession in 1 Timothy 1:17: "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen." Perhaps the word "invisible" stands out in bold relief. "Lord," you pray, "I have failed to appreciate this reality about you. I've wanted a god I can verify with scientific tools so I can be certain you exist. But you are invisible, pure Spirit not controlled by human realities. In trying to get you down to manageable size, maybe I've created my own graven image. Forgive me."

"I notice in Scripture how those who were obsessed with your physical manifestations were also trapped in a hopeless localization of your presence. How much better to know that time and space never confine you. Thank you for being the God who is invisible.

"Is your 'invisibleness' tied closely to your omnipresence? What if you weren't invisible, and I awoke every morning, staring into your face. It would probably kill me! Moses was nearly done in by merely glimpsing the backside of your glory. Thank you for being the God who is invisible."

A Paeon of Praise

Perhaps you are drawn toward the great prayer St. Francis gave to Brother Leo. “You are holy, Lord, the only God, and your deeds are wonderful. You are strong. You are great. You are the Most High. You are Almighty. You are love. You are wisdom. You are humility. You are endurance. You are rest. You are peace. You are joy and gladness. You are justice and moderation. You are beauty. You are gentleness. You are our courage. You are our haven and our hope. You are our faith, our great consolation. You are our eternal life, great and wonderful Lord, God almighty, merciful Savior.” You may want to take one attribute a day and settle into it.

“You are justice and moderation” may cause you to consider this unique combination of attributes; how justice leads to moderation and how moderation makes justice possible. Contemplating on “You are gentleness” may bring you to experience God’s gentleness, who, Jesus says, is like a mother hen gathering chicks under her wing. Then, you may bring these insights to bear while meditating on “You are strong” on another day.

Lectio divina is a rich mine for prayer. You are free to dig up its treasures to your heart’s delight.