



# Lectio Divina

[www.arlingtondiocese.org/lectiodivina](http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/lectiodivina)

*Lectio divina* is a Latin term that means "divine reading" or "sacred reading." It is a very ancient practice of reading the Scriptures not for information about God but in order to enter into a deep and personal relationship with Him. Through *lectio divina* we gradually let go of our own preconceived notions and open ourselves more and more to the living God. Its goal is union with Him and the transformation of our lives.

The practice of *lectio divina* has been in existence for many centuries, but it was Guigo II (1114-1193), Carthusian prior of the Grande Chartreuse monastery in France, who first set down and described in a more systematic way what are now regarded as the essential stages or steps of the practice. There are various ways of practicing *lectio divina*, but Guigo II's description remains fundamental.

The first stage of *lectio divina* is *lectio* (reading). Any passage of Scripture is fine to use, but it should not be too long. In this initial stage we simply read the Word of God, slowly and reflectively, so that it really sinks into our hearts. We are focused here on what the Word actually says, not what we feel about it or what others may have said about it. In the words of one Cistercian monk, "one must resist the temptation of covering a given amount of material within a prescribed time frame, a particularly modern temptation. This is more difficult to sustain than first meets the eye, and one will run up against it sooner than anticipated. A person is well advised to linger over a single word or phrase for an indefinite period of time, trusting that it will lead to further texts. Such is one of the most attractive features to *lectio divina*, for it is open-ended and subject to continuous growth."

The second stage is *meditatio* (meditation or reflection). Here we think about the text we have chosen and ruminate (literally "chew") upon it, just as our bodies are nourished by chewing and consuming food and drink. We are listening to the voice of God spoken through the words of Scripture.

The third stage is *oratio* (prayer). We leave our reflections aside here and simply let our hearts speak to God in response to what we have been reading and meditating upon. As His Word is a gift to us, we return it to Him in an act of prayer and praise.

The fourth stage is *contemplatio* (contemplation). Here we let go of our own ideas, plans and meditations and rest in the presence of God, who loves us and is always within us. We listen at the deepest level of our being to God who speaks with a still small voice (1 Kings 19:1-13). As we listen, we are gradually transformed from within. This transformation should, over time, have a profound effect on the way we live. What we read in the Word of God must be reflected in how we go about our daily lives, for that is where real transformation (or its lack) is revealed.

These traditional steps of *lectio divina* are not fixed rules but rather guidelines as to how the prayer normally develops. Its natural movement is toward greater simplicity, with less talking and more listening over time.

An atmosphere of unhurried silence is critical to the fruitful practice of *lectio divina*. It is strongly suggested that one dedicate herself or himself to it daily, regardless of how one feels about it in the moment, for at least 30 minutes. Many people find early morning the best time, before the family is up and the tasks of the day break in, but each person must find what works best in the context of her or his own vocation. The important thing is simply to begin!

The practice of *lectio divina* as a way of praying the Scriptures has been a very powerful way to grow in relationship with Christ for many centuries and is strongly recommended by the Church. The Word of God is alive and active and will transform each of us if we open ourselves to receive what God wants to give us through the Scriptures.

---