

Lectio Divina - divine reading

This is one of the most central and ancient practices of Christian prayer. In lectio divina, we begin by reading a few verses of the Bible. We read unhurriedly so that we can listen for the message God has for us there. We stay alert to connections the Spirit may reveal between the passage and what is going on in our lives. We ask, "What are you saying to me today, Lord? What am I to hear in this story, parable or prophecy?" Listening in this way requires patience and a willingness to let go of our own agendas and open ourselves to God's shaping.

Once we have heard a word that we know is meant for us, we are naturally drawn to prayer. From listening we move to speaking — perhaps in anguish, confession or sorrow; perhaps in joy, praise, thanksgiving or adoration; perhaps in anger, confusion or hurt; perhaps in quiet confidence, trust or surrender.

Finally, after pouring out our heart to God, we come to rest simply and deeply in that wonderful, loving presence of God. Reading, reflecting, responding and resting — this is the basic rhythm of divine reading.

Step #1. Read the scripture slowly. Watch for a key phrase or word that jumps out at you or promises to have special meaning for you. It is better to dwell profoundly on one word or phrase than to skim the surface of several chapters. Read with your own life and choices in mind.

Step # 2. Reflect on a word or phrase. Let the special word or phrase that you discovered in the first phase sink into your heart. Bring mind, will and emotions to the task. Be like Mary, Jesus' mother, who heard of the angel's announcement and "treasured" and "pondered" what she had heard (Luke 2:19).

Step #3. Respond to what you have read. Form a prayer that expresses your response to the idea, then "pray it back to God." What you have read is woven through what you tell God.

Step #4. Rest in the presence of God.