



MODIFIED *LECTIO DIVINA* (DIVINE READING)

READ

Read the passage out loud (if possible), slowly, simply to become familiar with it.

REFLECT

Read the passage again, silently.

Ask the Lord to let you read and “hear” it as if for the first time. How would you re-tell this story in your own words? (Not more than 5 or 6 sentences)

SPONTANEOUS PRAYER

Pick one person from the passage: _____.

Imagine that you are there, in this person’s “shoes.”

(If the passage does not specifically name persons in its text, simply see if the words themselves evoke any particular feeling. Do they call to mind a previous, or presently occurring, incident or relationship in your life?)

A. How does it feel to be in this situation?

B. Does it remind you of something or someone in your life?

C. Is there anything you would say or do differently?

(This is a personal prayer and contains no intent to change the actual words of Sacred Scripture)

Have a “heart-to-Heart” talk with Jesus.

Sharing your honest feelings about anything that has come to mind in reference to your reflecting on this passage. It might be something that is weighing heavily on your heart, or something that moves you to a deep sense of gratitude and joyful praise.

Choose one word or phrase from this passage that has a special meaning for you:

_____.

RESTING IN GOD

Spend quiet time with the Lord: Read the passage again. Close your eyes. Think of your favorite picture of Jesus and listen to Him.

Spend this time in simple silence, waiting and quietly **listening** for whatever the Lord might “whisper” in your heart.



LEADER/TEACHER INSTRUCTION SHEET

INTRODUCTION:

“Praying with Scripture” is intended for all ages. This handout is effective in the classroom, home school settings, and small groups of adults – or for individual use. Families have effectively incorporated this Scriptural progression, leading to prayer, into their devotional time together. It provides an opportunity for participation by all members. Parents and/or children can take turns reading the passage aloud, followed by telling the story in their own words. Even “little ones” and pre-readers can “pick a favorite person” in the passage – following the steps and answering the questions posed in Step 3. The steps described can seem almost too simplistic—most people are surprised at how the Holy Spirit uses this manner of prayer so powerfully to make a connection to one’s own life. Don’t skip any steps!

SELECTING THE SCRIPTURE PASSAGE:

It is best to begin using narrative passages with people (i.e. the Visitation, the Finding in the Temple). This facilitates the student’s immersion in the Scriptural passage through a specific person, and this personally related identification allows him/her to be more readily open to the truth God desires to reveal. It’s easier, initially, to identify with Elizabeth, the centurion, or a shepherd...than concepts such as the “poor in spirit” or one who desires to “enter through the narrow gate.”

As the students advance, passages without names of specific people can be selected. To answer the questions in number 3, tell the students to simply see if the words themselves evoke any particular feeling. Do they call to mind a previous, or presently occurring, incident or relationship in their life? Initially, select 20-25 verses for each meditation. If that seems to be too much, use 10-15 verses.

Some Suggested Scriptures for use with the prayer worksheet

Luke 1: 26-38	The Annunciation to Mary
Luke 2: 1-20	The Birth of Jesus
Luke 22:1 - 20	Jesus institutes the Holy Eucharist on Holy Thursday
Luke 22:39 - 65	Jesus’ Agony in the Garden and Arrest
Luke 23:33 - 56	The Crucifixion and Death of Christ
John 20:11-18	Jesus Appearance to Mary Magdalene after the Resurrection
Acts 2:1-4	Pentecost: Public manifestation of the Church
	(could also include 2:5-15, 22-24, 32-33, 36-40)

PRIOR TO TAKING STUDENTS THROUGH *PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE*:

It’s important that the leader/teacher has prayed through the passage using the described progression himself/herself prior to guiding others through it.

CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE FOR PRAYER

It is crucial that a proper atmosphere for prayer be created. The enthusiasm, yet reverential awe, with which the leader/teacher approaches Sacred Scripture, impressionably conveys to the students an understanding that this is, indeed, the very Word of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and capable of transforming—positively, joyously—our lives, our world, to the glory of God. It is said that Christianity is not so much taught, as “caught”, and in a very significant sense, this is true of prayer, the heart of our Catholic Faith.



One of the ways we can engender and maintain this respect for God's Holy Word is by impressing upon the students the importance of silence during the actual time of prayerful meditation (note that following Step 1, no words need be spoken). To foster an environment of "heart-to-Heart conversation" and subsequent "listening," silence **must** be practiced in order to be personally experienced; it does not come naturally in our noisy, distractible world. As the students become familiar with and are guided appropriately through this process, they will come to love, and be irresistibly drawn to, the peace and freedom of silent communion with the Lord Jesus.

STUDENT INSTRUCTION PRIOR TO USING THE HANDOUT:

Prior to beginning the actual meditation, give an overview of the progression from step to step. Explain to the participants that this is a simple progression allowing one to meditate (ponder) on a passage of God's Word.

Explain that, for the first step ("Read"), you will read the passage out loud and they should listen carefully (not reading along in their own Bible, due to different translations but more importantly as step one is, above all, "hearing" the passage.

In the second step ("Reflect"), they will read the passage silently, asking Jesus to help them understand its meaning. Following this silent reading, they will "re-write" it in their own words, as if explaining it to a small child, perhaps a younger brother or sister. (Initially, students will give merely a reiteration of the events of the text. As they have more opportunity to practice *Lectio*, encourage and affirm them when they use words that display their understanding of the meaning of the passage, even using fewer sentences to describe the passage.)

In the third step ("Spontaneous Prayer"), instruct them to choose a person to whom they feel "drawn", or with whom they can somehow identify. It is important to discuss the possibilities for their choice of a person. For example, in the "Finding in the Temple" they can choose to "walk in the shoes" of Jesus, Mary, or Joseph; one of the Temple teachers; or any person Mary and Joseph met in seeking their Son. If they're not drawn to a particular person, encourage them to be present as a "silent observer."

Proceed in briefly pointing out the responses requested of them. This "walking" through the passage in the shoes of the person they've chosen allows them to "make it their own," to be increasingly open to the heartfelt movements of the Holy Spirit. The narrative, and the truth it contains, is deposited more permanently in the storehouse of their mind and heart.

Note that the question, "Is there anything you would say or do differently?" refers to their own personal life experience as recalled to their remembrance through the passage.

[Along with the other questions, it is aimed at a natural, "unforced" personal application and possible resolution. Sometimes, a student will reply in reference to the person they've chosen from the passage (i.e., as "Peter" – expressing regret for having denied Jesus). This, too, is beneficial.]

After completion of the third step, they are to transition to the fourth step ("Resting in God") and enter into the silent prayer in accordance with the time allotted

Tell them you will quietly announce the close of the meditation with a vocal group prayer by asking everyone to pray the Our Father.



AFTER THE MEDITATION IS FINISHED:

Ask for volunteers to give their responses/reflections. One or two can read their “summary” from Step 2. **Always ask which person** they chose from the passage; also, **ask which word** or phrase they chose **and why** it had a special meaning.

It’s beneficial, if any are willing, to briefly share their answers to the points from Step 3. Leaders/Teachers should be careful to affirm student's personal responses unless, of course, they have expressed error in understanding objective truth.

SUMMARY OF STEPS AND SUGGESTED TIMES:

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| 1. Read the passage out loud. | [3 min.] |
| 2. Students/adults silently read it again and write out the main points. | [3 min.] |
| 3. Follow the instructions— answer the questions as indicated.
It requires a 3rd “closer look” at the text. Responses are written on the handout or in a prayer journal. | [6 min.] |
| 4. Students/adults close their eyes and silently “listen” to Jesus. | [3 min.] |

Remember, the purpose of this prayer “exercise” is not only to get to know Jesus better through greater intellectual knowledge and remembrance of Scripture, but even more importantly, to facilitate an opening to a greater “heart knowledge” of our Divine Savior. As students become accustomed to praying in this manner, the time allotted for Step 4 may gradually be extended.



PASSAGES FROM CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. This mobilization of faculties is necessary in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen our will to follow Christ. Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in *lectio divina* or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him. (2708)

General Directory for Catechesis

Congregation for the Clergy

The Constitution *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council emphasizes the fundamental importance of Sacred Scripture in the Church's life. Together with tradition, it is the 'supreme rule of faith,' since it transmits 'the very word of God' and makes 'to resound...the voice of the Holy Spirit.' For this reason the Church desires that in the ministry of the word, Sacred Scripture should have a pre-eminent position. In concrete terms, catechesis should be 'an authentic introduction to *lectio divina*, that is, to a reading of the Sacred Scriptures done in accordance to the Spirit who dwells in the Church. In this sense, to describe Tradition and Scripture as sources for catechesis means that catechesis must imbibe and permeate itself with biblical and evangelical thought, spirit and attitudes by constant contact with them.' (127)

National Directory for Catechesis

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Catechesis should assume the thought and perspective of Sacred Scripture and make frequent, direct use of the biblical texts themselves. 'The presentation of the Gospels should be done in such a way as to elicit an encounter with Christ, Who provides the key to the whole biblical revelation and communicates the call of God that summons each one to respond.'

Sacred Scripture is also the primary source in the explanation of the Word of God that is a central function of catechesis. Catechesis rooted in Sacred Scripture should:

- 'Initiate a person in a correct understanding and fruitful reading of the Bible.'
- Be 'an authentic introduction to *lectio divina*, that is, to a reading of the Sacred Scriptures done in accordance to the Spirit Who dwells in the Church.' (67)

Novo Millennio Ineunte - At the Beginning of the New Millennium

Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II, 2001

There is no doubt that this primacy of holiness and prayer is inconceivable without a renewed *listening to the Word of God*. Ever since the Second Vatican Council underlined the pre-eminent role of the Word of God in the life of the Church, great progress has certainly been made in devout listening to Sacred Scripture and attentive study of it. Scripture has its rightful place of honor in the public prayer of the Church. Individuals and communities now make extensive use of the Bible, and among lay people there are many who devote themselves to Scripture with the valuable help of theological and biblical studies. But it is above all the work of evangelization and catechesis which is drawing new life from attentiveness to the Word of God. Dear brothers and sisters, this development needs to be consolidated and deepened, also by making sure that every family has a Bible. ***It is especially necessary that listening to the Word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient and ever valid tradition of lectio divina which draws from the biblical text the living Word which questions, directs and shapes our lives.*** (39)



Verbum Domini - The Word of God

Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Benedict XVI, September 30, 2010

(86) The Synod frequently insisted on the need for a prayerful approach to the sacred text as a fundamental element in the spiritual life of every believer, in the various ministries and states in life, with particular reference to *lectio divina*. The word of God is at the basis of all authentic Christian spirituality. The Synod Fathers thus took up the words of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*: ‘Let the faithful go gladly to the sacred text itself, whether in the sacred liturgy, which is full of the divine words, or in devout reading, or in such suitable exercises and various other helps which, with the approval and guidance of the pastors of the Church, are happily spreading everywhere in our day. Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture.’ The Council thus sought to reappropriate the great patristic tradition which had always recommended approaching the Scripture in dialogue with God. As Saint Augustine puts it: ‘Your prayer is the word you speak to God. When you read the Bible, God speaks to you; when you pray, you speak to God.’ Origen, one of the great masters of this way of reading the Bible, maintains that understanding Scripture demands, even more than study, closeness to Christ and prayer. Origen was convinced, in fact, that the best way to know God is through love, and that there can be no authentic *scientia Christi* apart from growth in his love. In his *Letter to Gregory*, the great Alexandrian theologian gave this advice: ‘Devote yourself to the *lectio* of the divine Scriptures; apply yourself to this with perseverance. Do your reading with the intent of believing in and pleasing God. If during the *lectio* you encounter a closed door, knock and it will be opened to you by that guardian of whom Jesus said, “The gatekeeper will open it for him.” By applying yourself in this way to *lectio divina*, search diligently and with unshakable trust in God for the meaning of the divine Scriptures, which is hidden in great fullness within. You ought not, however, to be satisfied merely with knocking and seeking: to understand the things of God, what is absolutely necessary is *oratio*. For this reason, the Savior told us not only: “Seek and you will find”, and “Knock and it shall be opened to you”, but also added, “Ask and you shall receive.”’

In this regard, however, one must *avoid the risk of an individualistic approach*, and remember that God’s word is given to us precisely to build communion, to unite us in the Truth along our path to God. While it is a word addressed to each of us personally, it is also a word which builds community, which builds the Church. Consequently, *the sacred text must always be approached in the communion of the Church*. In effect, ‘a communal reading of Scripture is extremely important, because the living subject in the sacred Scriptures is the People of God, it is the Church... **Scripture does not belong to the past, because its subject, the People of God inspired by God himself, is always the same, and therefore the word is always alive in the living subject.** As such, it is important to read and experience sacred Scripture in communion with the Church, that is, with all the great witnesses to this word, beginning with the earliest Fathers up to the saints of our own day, up to the present-day magisterium.’

For this reason, *the privileged place* for the prayerful reading of sacred Scripture *is the liturgy*, and particularly *the Eucharist*, in which, as we celebrate the Body and Blood of Christ in the sacrament, the word itself is present and at work in our midst. In some sense the prayerful reading of the Bible, personal and communal, must always be related to the Eucharistic celebration. Just as the adoration of the Eucharist prepares for, accompanies and follows the liturgy of the Eucharist, so too prayerful reading, personal and communal, prepares for, accompanies and deepens what the Church celebrates when she proclaims the word in a liturgical setting. By so closely relating *lectio* and liturgy, we can better grasp the criteria which should guide this practice in the area of pastoral care and in the spiritual life of the People of God.

(87) The documents produced before and during the Synod mentioned a number of methods for a faith-filled and fruitful approach to sacred Scripture. Yet the greatest attention was paid to *lectio divina*, which is



truly ‘capable of opening up to the faithful the treasures of God’s word, but also of bringing about an encounter with Christ, the living word of God.’ I would like here to review the basic steps of this procedure. It opens with the reading (*lectio*) of a text, which leads to a desire to understand its true content: *what does the biblical text say in itself?* Without this, there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas. Next comes meditation (*meditatio*), which asks: *what does the biblical text say to us?* Here, each person, individually but also as a member of the community, must let himself or herself be moved and challenged. Following this comes prayer (*oratio*), which asks the question: *what do we say to the Lord in response to his word?* Prayer, as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise, is the primary way by which the word transforms us. Finally, *lectio divina* concludes with contemplation (*contemplatio*), during which we take up, as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality, and ask ourselves *what conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us?* In the *Letter to the Romans*, Saint Paul tells us: ‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect’ (12:2). Contemplation aims at creating within us a truly wise and discerning vision of reality, as God sees it, and at forming within us ‘the mind of Christ’ (1 *Cor* 2:16). The word of God appears here as a criterion for discernment: it is ‘living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart’ (*Heb* 4:12). We do well also to remember that the process of *lectio divina* is not concluded until it arrives at action (*actio*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity.

We find the supreme synthesis and fulfillment of this process in the Mother of God. For every member of the faithful Mary is the model of docile acceptance of God’s word, for she ‘kept all these things, pondering them in her heart’ (*Lk* 2:19; cf. 2:51); she discovered the profound bond which unites, in God’s great plan, apparently disparate events, actions and things.

I would also like to echo what the Synod proposed about the importance of the personal reading of Scripture, also as a practice allowing for the possibility, in accordance with the Church’s usual conditions, of gaining an indulgence either for oneself or for the faithful departed. The practice of indulgences implies the doctrine of the infinite merits of Christ – which the Church, as the minister of the redemption, dispenses and applies, but it also implies that of the communion of saints, and it teaches us that ‘to whatever degree we are united in Christ, we are united to one another, and the supernatural life of each one can be useful for the others.’ From this standpoint, the reading of the word of God sustains us on our journey of penance and conversion, enables us to deepen our sense of belonging to the Church, and helps us to grow in familiarity with God. As Saint Ambrose puts it, ‘When we take up the sacred Scriptures in faith and read them with the Church, we walk once more with God in the Garden.’