



# HOLY TRINITY ANGLICAN CHURCH

## *Lectio Divina*: Learning to Pray the Scriptures

For many centuries, most Christians did not have their own copy of the scriptures. The word of God was listened to, and memorized, rather than read. Therefore, the People of God have for the majority of the life of the Church depended on the process of learning to listen attentively and prayerfully to God's word in order to connect it to their individual and corporate lives. It is a practice we would do well to cultivate in our age as well.

Basil Pennington's simple definition of *Lectio Divina* is most helpful: It is letting God, our Divine Friend, speak to us through his inspired and inspiring Word. Since real conversation is never one way, part of *Lectio Divina* is also our response to his Word and to his communication to us through his Word. The ancient practice of *lectio* (which literally means reading) also includes hearing the Word spoken. Because the One we are listening for is God - the One who alone is Divine - we call this listening for him *Lectio Divina*.

To listen well, certain things are essential. Our desire must be to see how our lives and our real experiences connect to the Scriptures and to see the Scripture's connection to the life we are in the midst of, not the life we think we should be living or wish we were living.

In the western world we have countless ways to access the scriptures. Sometimes the very things we know or the ways we have learned to study, to understand, to apply and to communicate the Word of God become our hindrance to a new and deeper encounter with the living Christ to whom all scripture points.

*Lectio Divina* gives us the opportunity to train our hearts to receive a portion of the Word of God as if we have never heard it before. We know the gift of having a friend accept us in the moment for who we are. One who does not read into our words or silences or actions any assumptions, good or bad. Instead, they simply want to listen to be present to us.

*Lectio* is like that; it is a way of listening to God (and later sharing what we have received). We do not have to bring all we know from the past into play. We do not try to instruct or even exhort each other. Instead, we make room for God and his word to reveal Jesus, the Living Word, with us in the present moment.

To listen in a way that will open doors within us to a deep connection to Jesus Christ through His Word we must listen with our whole being. We listen not only with just our minds, but also with our imagination, our emotions, our heart's longings, our wills, and with as honest appraisal as we can make about ourselves. As we engage the text, we are always looking for the One who stands behind and seen through it. Our goal is a relationship with the Triune God.

The real goal of *Lectio* is to deepen our relationship with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We do this in *Lectio* by submitting to the text. It is not ours to “master,” it is there to master us. We let God be God, in the moment in terms of how we see our lives: present, past and future. We also let ourselves be ourselves. We bring who we are and our real life into our listening. Our listening also includes a response to our encounter with God in his Word. We notice; we listen to ourselves so that we can understand what is going on within our own heart in this encounter with God.

Finally, *Lectio Divina* does not end when our time of intentional listening to the Word is finished. What has happened within us is meant to shape us as we move back into the rest of our life. We make choices congruent with what we have gleaned from our time of *Lectio*. We live out with our whole being in our response to what we have received from our engagement with the Word and the One who is behind it. The invitation of God, the comfort of God, the love and pleasure of God, wisdom and insight from God, the rebuke of God – whatever he has given us- is meant to end our time of *Lectio*.

## *Lectio* Process

The process of *Lectio* is composed of different movements that draw us to God.

**Receive:** As the scripture is read to me three times, I move through the following exercises, using a different one in the silence that follows each reading.

**First Reading – Listening intently:** I listen deeply and fully as the scripture is read to me. I become an alert observer of the scene being described in the passage. I allow this scene to be present to me, and I move toward it to be present to it.

**Second Reading – Listening with my senses:** I use my imagination and all of my senses as I seek to enter into the scene itself. I smell, I touch, I feel, I hear, I taste what is before me as if the very scene were in this moment alive to me. I feel what it is like to be in the midst of this scene. I notice the setting, the people, the action, what is done and said and felt. I ask myself in the midst of all that is going on in this scene, what am I to particularly notice?

**Third Reading – Entering with my imagination:** I become part of the scene. I may take the role of one of the people in it, I may stand on the side as an unnoticed observer, I may enter into the inner reality of what Christ is experiencing as the scene unfolds. I don't force my imagination. I just allow God to point out to me my place in the story before me.

**Pause:** As I allow this whole time of watching and entering this scene to flow over and around me, I notice what is happening in me in response to what I have experienced. I pause in my spirit as I notice what is going on within my own heart. What is God speaking to me? About Himself? About me? About my life? What stands out to me? Where have I felt comforted, touched, loved, noticed by God? Where do I feel resistant or afraid or confused? I open my heart up to God to give me whatever He desires from this time of being present to a story from His Word.

**Pray:** I close this time of Ignatian Contemplation by speaking directly to God about what has been happening to me in this time in His Word and with Him.

**Reflect:** As I end my time of prayer or soon after it, I reflect on this encounter with God and his Word.

- How did God meet me in this time?
- How did this time begin for me? How did it end? What changed for me during this time?
- What barriers or difficulties did I experience? How did I respond?
- What began to be formed in me through this time? What about this encounter surprised me? Lead me deeper? Took me to a new place?
- What have I experienced or been given today that I want to come back to?

**Pause:** Simply allow yourself to be with the One who loves you most.

**Here are some helpful passages to use for getting started in the practice of *Lectio Divina*.**

Matthew 5:1-10

John 9: 1-7

Matthew 5:13-16

John 13: 1-11

Mark 4:35-41

Luke 9: 51-62

Luke 11: 5-13

Luke 17: 11-19

Romans 12:9-12

Psalm 1

Psalm 23