Focus on Spiritual Formation: The Practice of Lectio Divinia

“…these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” 1 Corinthians 2:9-10

The Practice

Lectio Divina, which means “Divine Reading” or the reading of Divine Texts, involves the successive reading aloud of a Bible passage in order to draw closer to the Holy Spirit. While most prayer practices entail our ‘speaking’ to God, Lectio Divina is designed that we may listen for God, respond to His message to us and reflect on how to take it into our lives. There are four sequential readings of the selected Scripture, which have been given specific Latin titles and each, in turn, takes us deeper into a meditative state of being open to God’s message for us.

Getting Started

Prepare for Lectio Divina by sitting quietly in a still place and opening your mind to hear God’s message. Any passage from Scripture can be used for Lectio Divina, and the practice can be done individually although it is enhanced through a communal experience with others.

The first reading, called the “Lectio” (Read), is the chance to slowly savor the passage read aloud, while inviting the Holy Spirit to speak to you through this Scripture. Whatever phrase or word you are drawn to, you may begin to meditate on.

While listening to the second reading, the “meditatio” (Reflect), consider more deeply how the parts of the passage that caught your attention speak to issues and experiences in your own life. This meditation acknowledges the role of Scripture as the “Living Word” and begins the conversation with God that is at the heart of Lectio Divina.

As you engage actively with the third reading, or “Oratio” (Respond), let your heart form a prayerful response to the passage. Remembering that prayer is a dialogue with God, invite Him in to guide you in the ways this passage of Scripture might inform your own life.

During the fourth and final reading, the “Contemplatio” (Rest), open yourself more fully to the Holy Spirit and sit reverently in silence for any further message from God. In your final contemplation of the passage, reflect on what God has spoken to you and how you might take that growing intimacy with God into your daily life.

You may want to keep a ‘Lectio Journal’ to capture the thoughts that emerge during your contemplation of the Scriptures through Lectio Divina.

At Trinity

Lectio Divina was offered throughout the 2013 Lenten Season with members of Trinity’s pastoral staff taking turns leading the weekly sessions. Scripture that was on the liturgical calendar for the upcoming Sunday was used for Lectio Divina, which allowed participants an opportunity to reflect on those passages before encountering them in Worship.

Background

Advocated by John Calvin in the 16th century, the practice of Lectio Divina has roots back to the ancient Jewish devotional practice of “haggadah” and is likened to the 3rd century Christian named Origen who encouraged Scriptural reading as a way to draw closer to Christ, “The Word of God”. Christian ascetics living in the desert in the 4th century laid the foundation for the practice of contemplative prayer. The practice of Lectio Divina was embraced by St. Ambrose, St. Augustine and incorporated into the 6th century ‘Rule of St. Benedict,’ that prescribed specific times and manners for the monastic practice of Lectio Divina. The stages of Lectio Divina were described and titled by Carthusian Prior named Guigo II in the 12th century. Interest in Lectio Divina as a practice for lay Christians has flourished since the mid-20th century and the practice has many adherents in diverse Christian faiths.