

Lectio Divina

Sacred reading, meditation and prayer

This is a form of praying with sacred texts popularised by St Benedict of Nursia, that is still used in Benedictine orders today. The basic idea is to spend time listening deeply and intently to what God might have to say to you through the text as if the sacred text were a much-cherished love letter from God.

The earliest Christians were Jews who were very used to praying with Scripture. St Benedict (480–543) was the first to use the term *lectio divina* (“sacred reading”) when he included it in the rule of life for all of his monks. Other spiritual masters such as St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Guigo the Angelic, and St. John of the Cross continued to develop the practice over the centuries, until it reached the form most people know today. Guigo, a Carthusian monk, first set out the four steps or movements of *lectio divina*. Here they are, with their Latin names in parenthesis.

The Psalms and Gospels lend themselves to this way of praying, especially the narratives about Jesus’ encounters with people and the parables.

Method

Reading (*lectio*)

Read the text several times, leaving room for the Holy Spirit to call your attention to a word, phrase, or line that God wants you to hear.

Meditation (*meditatio*)

Think about the word or words that the Holy Spirit has called to your attention, holding them in your mind and considering them from different angles.

Prayer (*oratio*)

Respond to the sacred words in prayer, either silently or out loud, or in writing.

Contemplation (*contemplatio*)

In the contemplation step, you rest in God’s presence

Prayer Review

It can be helpful to record our experiences during prayer to heighten awareness of how God has been present. In a journal or notebook after each prayer period record the date and passage and answer the following questions:

- Was there a word or phrase that struck you particularly?
- What were your feelings? What do these say to you?
- How are you more aware of God’s presence?
- Is there a point to which it would be helpful to return in your next prayer session?

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