

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: BOOK OF GLORY

Aim: This class is intended to be a communal journey of meditation and *lectio divina* (sacred reading), in which we allow the Word of God to unveil before us its inner richness, so that through it we may encounter God's tender love for us and allow this love to penetrate and transform our lives.

Lectio divina: This is the most ancient and solidly established approach the praying with Scripture, which has endured throughout the centuries of the Church's life. It has been strongly recommended by the Church in our own day as well, as we are invited to drink deeply from the same wellsprings as our fathers in faith.

Benedict XVI described the "stages" of this prayer as follows:

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?* ... 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). ... 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.

In summary, *lectio divina* consists in:

1. Reading (*lectio*).
2. Meditation (*meditatio*).
3. Prayer (*oratio*).
4. Contemplation (*contemplatio*).
- [5. Action (*actio*).]

If you want a simple way to remember them, you can think of 5 (or indeed 6) "R's".

Read – Reflect – Relate – Receive/Rest – Resolve

+ For further reading and reflection, I share here an excerpt from my own "Rule of Life" which speaks about *lectio divina*:

Further, the monk should take care that not a single day passes without his spending time in *lectio divina*, in the prayerful reading and meditation of Holy Scripture, for it is precisely God's Word, God's initiative, which will gradually lead him into the fullness of silence. And his silence itself, indeed, is always filled with the ineffable echoing of the Word.

Drinking deeply from the Wellspring of the Word of God, eating, slowly and reverently, the bread of Sacred Scripture, is an essential part of the heartbeat of his life. Indeed, with the Holy Eucharist, it truly is the inmost heartbeat of his life in the desert. In receiving the Word of God the monk learns to accept God's love more deeply, to be irradiated by his truth, and in this reception his own response, his own prayer, is spontaneously awakened; indeed, it is fashioned and perfected by the grace of God himself.

This movement of *lectio divina* is fourfold, according to the tradition of the Church and as explained by the Fathers. It is an entire movement of prayer in itself, rising and falling throughout a particular time of prayer, through each day, and throughout the entirety of life itself. It is a movement of: 1) *lectio*, 2) *meditatio*, 3) *oratio*, and 4) *contemplatio* (reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation)—passing from reading to ‘ruminating’ thought, then to dialogue with God and the reaching out of the heart to him, and finally to the silence of repose in his ineffable beauty, in the personal touch of his presence which grasps the heart in silence. This repose in turn returns to the simplicity of attentive reading, allowing the heart, filled with this presence, to remain attentive to God throughout the day, filling the entire day with prayer and the longing for him.

This dialogue of love occurs in great simplicity and leads into ever deeper simplicity, along the path of faith, hope, and love, so let the monk never be concerned to “measure” his own experience of or immersion in God, but rejoice simply to walk the path of a “little one,” with his gaze fixed trustingly upon the Beloved. The Lord will direct him on the path that he knows to be best. In this way, he will be able to allow his own life, the lives of others, and the whole creation, to be more deeply irradiated with the light of God. This light, in its perfect purity, illumines all things so transparently that its gentle touch often goes unnoticed, while transforming the heart’s vision and experience, the heart’s love, from deep within.