

LECTIO DIVINA

Feasting on the Word

BY REV. JOHN DUPUCHE



AN INTRODUCTION

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina has an illustrious past. St Ambrose (4th century) taught it to St Augustine; and St Benedict (6th century) made it part of monastic life. Guigo II (12th century), prior of La Grande Chartreuse, wrote "A Ladder for Monks", the classic text of *Lectio Divina*, which gives the Latin terms *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio* to the four steps of this 'ladder' of prayer. It went through a dark period in the 19th century, when the 'historical critical' approach of biblical studies made it unfashionable, but revived in the early 20th century and is now widely used.



FIRST COURSE

Lectio

Lectio is the first step of choosing and reading the text.

What text? The app called "Universalis" provides the Mass Readings for each day of the year, and also the Readings of the Divine Office. Or you may have your favourite passages. However, in the light of Pope Francis' suggestion, we have chosen to focus on the readings of Sunday 16 July (15th Sunday in ordinary time) which are provided in the following pages. Obviously, it is not possible to use all of these at one sitting. So it might be best to choose one or other, but these reflections will refer to all of them.

How do we read the text? This should be done with a calm and tranquil state of mind, with a sense of inviting the Holy Spirit to guide the *Lectio Divina*, and with a sense of Christ standing in the midst of those who seek him. Even done individually, its community element should not be forgotten, for the Sacred Scripture belongs to the Church as a whole.

It should be read slowly, even several times. It involves reading but still more listening to the inner message of the text.

READINGS FOR SUNDAY 16 JULY (YEAR A)

Isaiah 55:10-11

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Psalms 64:9-13

You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

Romans 8:18-23

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Matthew 13:1-9

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them

many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!'



SECOND COURSE

Meditatio

Meditatio means reflection, mulling over, and savouring the text, allowing it to resonate and move the heart. It is not an unintelligent reading, or just an emotional exercise. It doesn't mean analysing the passage like a scholar but allowing the Holy Spirit to show its inner meaning. It is savoured with a sense that it belongs to the whole community of Christ's disciples who, each of them, can discover further riches in the text.

**SOME REFLECTIONS
TO HELP 'MULL OVER' THE WORD**

- What is the rain that comes down from heaven; what is the seed that is being sown on the earth? It is many things, but it is also mercy.
- How pleasant it is to be treated with kindness, to be shown forgiveness and understanding.
- Mercy is always effective, much more than argument or law.
- The world is badly in need of mercy and forgiveness. Do we show it to all, even to those who seem to least deserve it?
- It is wonderful to be members of a faith that has mercy at its heart.
- We are happy to show mercy, but do we receive it? Are we like the hardened ground that does not really believe mercy should be shown to those who are guilty of destructive thoughts and words and deeds?
- Are we so caught up in the busyness of life that we don't take the time to show mercy to those who seek it with silent tears?
- Mercy comes from the highest heavens right into the very depths of our soul, where it may become fruitful so that in turn we could be called a 'house of mercy'.
- The whole of creation is groaning in its need for mercy: the environment that is so badly damaged; the creatures that are constantly exploited; the species that are being annihilated in great numbers. The whole of creation seeks to be set free.



THIRD COURSE

Oratio

Oratio means 'prayer'. St Ambrose says: 'And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture; for "we speak to him when we pray; we hear him when we read the divine sayings".' In *Lectio Divina* it refers to that moment where the heart is stirred to either praise God or to petition God in relation to what has been deeply felt.

A FEW SUGGESTED PRAYERS

- *I thank you* for the unbounded mercy you have shown us in Christ Jesus, who gave up his life for us all.
- Have mercy on this world, which is so angry, so vengeful and callous.
- Thank you for the many wonderful people who serve others, here in Australia and abroad, in places of great danger and despair.
- Let your mercy spread like a refreshing breeze over me and my family.
- Give me a merciful heart so that others can find their rest in me.
- Purify me from the desire to hurt others and get even with them.
- Please stop me from being demanding and intolerant, harsh and judgmental.
- Forgive me for reacting mercilessly to those who have harmed me.
- Thank you for those who have shown me mercy during my childhood and later years, being patient with me as I struggled to reach Christian maturity.

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FINAL COURSE

Contemplatio

Contemplatio is the purpose and high point of *Lectio Divina*, where we are 'lost in the wonder' of what has touched us deeply. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: 'Words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love'. There is no need to think or reflect or to say words. We dwell in stillness, simply aware of the boundless expanse of mercy that surrounds us. Our heart rests, in joy and admiration, in great peace and assurance. This can continue for a long time. It is the high point of prayer.

FEAST OFTEN, FEAST WELL

A Final Note from the Chef



There is a value in setting aside a definite amount of time, not too long and not too short. There is even more value in making this a regular practice so that the heart is moulded by the Word and communicates Christ's love in radiant stillness.

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VIDEO RESOURCE

These short video clips explore the richness of meditation in the Christian tradition. They can be used for personal or group reflection and formation, and explore meditation in everyday life, meditation in the tradition, the practice of meditation and the practice of *Lectio Divina*.

The clips can be viewed online at www.cam.org.au/evangelisation.



Meditation in Everyday Life



Meditation in the Tradition



The Practice of Meditation



The Practice of *Lectio Divina*