
HOW CAN SUCH A GIFT BE ENJOYED?



Among the most beautiful gifts of Vatican Council II was that of opening Holy Scripture to all the People of God. For the past forty years numerous editions of the Bible have been published, and most Christians now have their own Bible or at least a New Testament. Bible study groups have sprouted everywhere. The proclamation of God's Word in our liturgical celebrations are making us the Word more familiar to us. How can we enjoy such a gift? An answer to this lies in a method known as *lectio divina*, and its tradition goes back to the first centuries of the Church. The *lectio* consists in reading and listening to the Word of God, to meditate it, and use it for prayer and contemplation. Sister Marie-Thérèse Dugas, Superior of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters in Edmundston, has willingly accepted to tell us about this form of study and prayer; in their own convent the Sisters use *lectio divina* for their own benefit.

« PROCLAIM THE WORD »

The very first ministry of the Church, hence of its ministers, too, is to proclaim the Word of God. This is a wonderful ministry. According to the Québec Bishops in their document titled *Proclaiming the Gospel in Today's Culture*, [« Annoncer l'Évangile dans la culture actuelle »] it is a ministry which allows us to proclaim « a living and creative Word, a Word addressed to a freedom which calls forth a response, a Word which initiates dialogue and conversation, a Word which is first of all a witness, a Word which favours the storytelling style, a Word made flesh, a Word sustained by the Spirit, a Word which calls the Church together, a Word which follows a rite, a Word that has many servants. » Still, before bringing the Word to others one must respond to its challenge and let oneself be carried by it. St. Peter Julien Eymard stated: « The priest loses his day who has not read Holy Scripture. The more we listen to the Word, the better we shall be able to expound it. » Nevertheless, *lectio divina* is not reserved to priests, deacons, and religious sisters and brothers alone: it is directed at every baptised person who is searching for God in Scripture.

« PRACTICE LECTIO DIVINA! »

In order to enjoy *lectio divina*, one must be ready to apply oneself to it, thirty to sixty minutes, at least every Sunday. It is of the utmost important to prepare one's heart. The Word is sown in the silence of the heart. One begins with a prayer to the Holy Spirit, as each Word coming from God is accomplished by the power of the Spirit. In the Spirit, the Word of God is much more than a simple teaching: it becomes an Event. « For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it » (Isaiah 55:10-11). The Holy Spirit gives understanding of Scripture, enlightens the mind and touches the heart. If we desire to be quenched by the Spirit, all we have to do is to welcome the Word and let it penetrate into our deepest selves.

« READ THE WORD! »

The Bible comprises 72 books. So, what book should I read? Basically and ideally, one should begin with the Gospels, since they form the ground of our faith and are the main witnesses of the life and teaching of Jesus

the Incarnate Word. The books of the Bible are not all of equal importance, even though they are inspired by God. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Gospels form the heart of all of Holy Scripture. It is together as Church that we listen to Scripture: the Word of God is first meant to be heard.

« MEDITATE THE WORD! »

After having listened to the Word two or three times in a quiet place conducive to prayer, the one doing *lectio divina* takes time to meditate on the Word received, just as is done in liturgical celebrations, in the responsorial psalm. A single word from Scripture can lead directly into the depths of the very heart of God. Saint Ignatius said, « The soul is not satisfied or filled by knowing many things, but in feeling and tasting things deeply in the recesses of one's heart. » The Word which has been heard and made the object of prayerful meditation is not a human word but the Word of God. It is a seed of life which will grow and develop, a live coal which purifies and brings warmth, a spark of fire to set the heart ablaze. In meditation, a central message can sometimes be drawn from the text, not necessarily a sentence or phrase, but more like an intuition, like the taking in of something in one glance.

« PRAY THE WORD! »

The Word has been sown in our hearts, and grows in us as a prayer. This prayer of ours will take on the colour of the meditated Gospel, and its expression will stem from the Word heard. When the Word of God has truly taken hold of us at this time, we must keep away from every type of intellectual analysis, because we have reached the depths of our hearts, the very source of our being; we stand defenceless before the love of God, the power of the Spirit, and the all-consuming power of the Word.

« CONTEMPLATE THE WORD! »

Meditation creates the desire for God, within us, and God always fills this desire which He has placed in the human heart. « Make yourself capacity and I shall make myself torrent, » the Lord said to St. Catherine of Sienna. God becomes desire, He desires to come to the heart that listens and meditates on the Word. He desires to fill the hungry heart with His love, with His presence. Words no longer matter, but only the heart. Jesus speaks to the disciples of Emmaus, along the road, and their hearts burn within them, and when they reach their destination they say to Jesus, « Stay with us! » They desire his presence.

« LIVE THE WORD! »

The four moments of *lectio divina* can be summarised in this way: the reading strikes the bark, meditation touches the pith, prayer expresses the desire, and contemplation savours the sweetness of it all. *Lectio divina* is a school of life: the Word carries with it the grace which helps apply it throughout the days and day by day. *Lectio divina* is not escape in contemplation, nor is it flight from the world; rather, it serves to instruct us on how to live on earth in the spirit of the Beatitudes. In *lectio divina* are discovered secrets of the heart of God and from it we draw light for discernment in various situations. It is an extremely simple method which is strongly recommended to all who would undertake a life of prayer.

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