

Benedict XVI Promotes Biblical Meditation

Ancient Practice Could Bring Renewal to Church

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy, SEPT. 16, 2005 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI believes that the recovery of the practice of "lectio divina," prayerful meditation of Scripture, will bring a "new spiritual springtime" for the Church.

When meeting today with more than 400 experts attending a congress in Rome on "Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church," the Holy Father recommended this ancient practice which literally means "divine reading."

"Assiduous reading of sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer makes that intimate dialogue possible in which, through reading, one hears God speaking, and through prayer, one responds with a confident opening of the heart," the Pope said.

Over the past 40 years, this proposal has received attention throughout the Church after the publication of the Second Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution on divine Revelation, "Dei Verbum."

"If this practice is promoted with efficacy, I am convinced that it will produce a new spiritual springtime in the Church," stated the Holy Father.

To promote "lectio divina," Benedict XVI suggested "new methods, attentively pondered, adapted to the times."

"One must never forget that the Word of God is a lamp for our steps and a light on our path," he said.

The first to use the expression "lectio divina" was Origen (circa 185-254), who affirmed that to read the Bible profitably it is necessary to do so with attention, constancy and prayer.

Later on, "lectio divina" became a mainstay of religious life. The monastic rules of Sts. Pacomius, Augustine, Basil and Benedict made the practice of diving reading, together with manual work and participation in liturgical life, the triple base of monastic life.

The systematization of "lectio divina" in four steps dates back to the 12th century, explained the Holy Father.

Around 1150, Guido, a Carthusian monk, wrote a book entitled "The Monks' Ladder," where "he set out the theory of the four rungs: reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation," according to the Pope. "This is the ladder by which the monks ascend from earth to heaven."

The Steps in Detail

Statio

First, we arrange a place so it is restful, warm, and non-distracting. This may involve the lighting of candles, the burning of incense, the shutting of doors and drawing of curtains -- whatever makes one feel calm and at peace. Then we assume a bodily posture that is conducive to prayer and reading. We breathe slowly, focusing on the Holy Name of Jesus and nothing else, until we are relaxed and able to focus our attention solely on Scripture. If our minds wander, we gently bring our attention back to the Holy Name of Our Lord, breathing in and out rhythmically. Note that, unlike in Eastern prayer which seeks to empty oneself to be open to some great "Nothing", in Lectio Divina we are ever mindful of the One Almighty Triune and Transcendent God, and are trying to calm ourselves so that what He might reveal to us through His Word may more easily be perceived.

It is good if the place chosen for Lectio Divina is a comfortable area chosen just for this and other prayerful activities. The presence of relevant icons and other visual aids to meditation can be of great benefit. Now pray a prayer to the Holy Spirit, such as this one:

A Prayer Before the Reading of Any Part of the Holy Scripture

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts and minds of your faithful servants, and inflame them with the fire of Your divine love.

Let us pray: O God, who by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of your faithful servants; grant us in the same Spirit, to discern what is right, and enjoy His comfort forever, through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns, one God, with You and the same Spirit, world without end. Amen.

Lectio

When we are relaxed and in a contemplative mode, we make the Sign of the Cross and begin to read.

We should always keep in mind Peter's admonition that "no prophecy of scripture is made by private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20) and that Scripture can be difficult to understand, something "which the unlearned and unstable wrest...to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

If you come to a verse you don't understand, or that you understand in a way that is contrary to Catholic teaching, seek traditional Catholic commentary on it. Any apparent contradiction between Scripture and Catholic teaching is just that: *apparent*, and not real.

At any rate, in Lectio, we are reading for the literal sense of the words, trying to understand *the reality the writer of the text intended to convey*. When you have finished reading, sit for a moment and reflect on a sentence, phrase, or word that stood out and caught your attention.

Repeat it mentally over and over. What does it mean?

Meditatio

Now we meditate on what we have read as we read the passage a second time, visualizing it and listening for the aspect of it that reveals the Divine Mysteries. Place yourself into the reading, the place, the time, the setting. We want the *deeper, spiritual meanings* of the words now in order to understand *the deeper reality the Holy Spirit intends to convey by arranging nature and history as He did, thereby inspiring the writer of the text to write as he did*. When you are finished, silently contemplate the passage. What is it the Spirit is teaching?

Oratio

As we read the passage for the third time, we ask God to for the grace to be changed by what we have read, to come more fully into being what He wants us to be, and to help us apply the moral sense of the Scripture to our lives. Meditate on what God is saying to you, now, through this scripture. What is it He wants you to do?

Contemplatio

We rest in gratitude for God and His Word. We thank Him for his truth. We promise to do what He wants us to do.

Collatio

If we are engaging in Lectio Divina with others, we discuss what we've learned. All in the group are given the opportunity to share or not share. Commentary from others is not required, but allowed if the group agrees.

Actio

We live what we have learned.

Consider engaging in Lectio Divina with your family, perhaps on the Lord's Day each week (if not daily). Discuss Scripture together, encouraging even the littlest ones of your family to participate (the very small can draw pictures of the stories you are reading). Make the Bible a familiar and integral part of their lives.