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The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. Lectio divina is an ancient Catholic prayer method for reading and praying with the Bible. Don't let the Latin scare you away from learning to do it yourself or from sharing it with your students. It is an essential practice for all Catholics to learn and certainly not something we should avoid teaching young people to do. In the eBook, Lectio Divina for Children and Teens, I provide a number of handouts and activity suggestions to help teach young people the skills they need to fully experience each of the lectio divina steps described below. How important is lectio divina to catechesis? Check out what the bishops of the Church have said in the General Directory for Catechesis: "The Church desires that in the ministry of the word, Sacred Scripture should have a pre-eminent position. In concrete terms, catechesis should be "an authentic introduction to lectio divina, that is, to a reading of the Sacred Scriptures done in accordance to the Spirit who dwells in the Church." (General Directory for Catechesis, 71) How to Pray Lectio Divina in Four (+1) Steps When you introduce lectio divina to your students, I invite you to share with them this short video as an explanation for how to pray lectio divina: The text version of this video can be read, copied, and shared below. The Lectio Divina Steps According to Pope Benedict XVI in the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Verbum Domini (nos. 86-87), lectio divina is broken down into the following steps named in Latin: Lectio (reading), Meditatio (meditation), Oratio (prayer), and Contemplatio (contemplation). Then, as a result of the encounter with God in Scripture, we are also called to Actio (action). Each of these steps together form a process by which we encounter God in his sacred word and respond to his grace. They form parts of a larger whole, but each one comes with a certain set of skills for our us to master. Let's look briefly at each step. Lectio (Reading) In the first phase of lectio divina we understand what the passage we are reading says in itself. This is the literal meaning of the Scripture passage and the lessons everyone should recognize in reading it. At this stage we do not yet consider our own lives in connection with the Scriptures. We do not let our opinions influence our reading, but seek to understand the message of the passage as interpreted by the Church independently of anyone's opinions. This phase is summarized with the question: What does the text say that everyone should understand? Meditatio (Meditation) In the meditation phase of lectio divina, we ask, what does this text say to me, today, and to my life? We allow God to pull up certain memories of people, places, and events in our lives that relate to the passage we are reading. Meditation is also an opportunity to see ourselves in the text. We can consider our own feelings as if we were a participant in the text or try to understand what it would be like to be one of the people represented in the text. In this way we come to a deeper appreciation of how God is working in our lives through the sacred word. Having entered into the story ourselves, we can return to the present and consider the areas in our own lives that God is calling us to contemplate. Oratio (Prayer) Through a meditation on Scripture, we experience an intimate encounter with God that leads us to respond in prayer. Having met our Lord in his holy word, we courageously speak to him in our own words. In this way we consider prayer to be a simple conversation with God. It is a conversation that comes in various forms: we ask petitions (or requests) of him, we give him thanks, and we give him praise. We might also ask for the intercession of Mary or the saints represented in the passage we read. At this phase we can ask ourselves: What can I say to the Lord in response to his word? Contemplatio (Contemplation) A true encounter with the Lord always leads to transformation. Indeed, the Lord God proclaimed, "Behold, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). Through contemplation we come to an understanding of the parts of our lives that need to be transformed by God's grace. We humble ourselves and open our lives up to his transformative power. This step comes with the willingness to change, an openness and trust in God, and the decision to follow God's will rather than our own. With this decision comes a fear of losing what we find comfortable and safe. At the same time we feel the excitement of a call to heroic adventure and a hopeful future of living the life we are meant to live. At this step in the lectio divina process, we ask ourselves: What conversion of the mind, heart, and life is the Lord asking of me? Actio (Action) Finally, although this phase is often not considered to be a part of lectio divina proper, it is an essential result of the encounter with God in Sacred Scripture. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in Verbum Domini, "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" (no. 87). Having received God's love and grace, we go forth to serve others out of the love we have been given. Our transformation calls us to witness to others; it calls us to selflessly serve our brothers and sisters in Christ. These acts are done not so much out of a sense of duty, but out of the inspiration we receive from the acceptance in faith of God's love. If you are interested in teaching your students how to pray lectio divina, check out Lectio Divina for Children and Teens, a collection of handouts and activities for young people to learn to pray with the Bible. First, we always advise you to take "Step 0" and start by deciding what you're going to pray with. A go-to suggestion is the day's Gospel reading. As well, it's a good idea to open in prayer and ask God for the grace to hear Him, stay focused and open your heart in this practice. Here's an example of a preparatory prayer to use: Father, Thank you for the gift of this day. Thank you for the gift of faith and the grace you've given me to respond to you. Thank you for revealing yourself in Sacred Scripture. Thank you for revealing yourself in your Son, Jesus. Help me stay focused in this time of prayer. Please grant me the grace to hear your voice and respond, Amen. Step 1: Eyes to See Start with your prayer for this step; it's an example of what these can sound like. Father, Your Word is alive and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing between joints and marrow. (Hebrews 4:12) Pierce my heart today with your Word. Allow me to be attentive to how you are speaking to me today through this passage. As I read this passage for the first time, may I be open to hearing a word or phrase you wish to show me. Amen. Next, you'll read the passage. Be on the lookout for a word or phrase that jumps out at you. Ask yourself: What is God highlighting for you today? What from this passage strikes you? Feel free to read it once or twice more if needed. Then, take some time in silence to sit with the word or phrase God has shown you. Mute it over, and allow yourself to think deeply about what is being said. Step 2: Ears to Hear Begin again with a quick prayer, an example for, "Ears to Hear," goes like this: Father, Your Word is living and active (Hebrews 4:12) that it goes forth from your mouth and does not return to you empty, but accomplishes that which you intend (Isaiah 55:11). Send your Word into my heart now. Give me the ears to hear your voice. As I reread this passage, may I hear what you wish to tell me today. Amen. Carefully read the passage a second time: Be on the lookout for what God is telling you. This could build on top of the word or phrase from the first step. Then, talk with God in prayer, "I find myself going back to this word; what are you trying to show me by this?" "You're telling me (fill in with the passage or word) through this passage, help me understand why." Having a small conversation about what He's telling you allows you to go deeper into the Scripture. Be silent and allow the Lord to speak. Step 3: Grace to Change Any encounter with God should change our lives. Praying with Scripture is no different. In this step, we ask God to show us what to change. It could be something big or small, something we need to start (or stop) doing or a change in perspective. Pray a quick prayer for this third step, use this example: Father, You've told us that in the beginning, the Word was God, and the Word was with God, and the Word was made flesh and dwell among us (John 1:1, 14). May my encounter with your Word be as strong as if I see you face to face. Allow me to recognize how you are changing my life and the strength to do what you want. Next, you'll read the passage a third time. During this time, pause to think, reflect, and pray on the change you recognize from this passage. Ask yourself: What is God inviting you to change? Where are you being asked to take a step closer to Him? Take some time in silence, and allow the Lord to speak. Take it in, and respond to Him. Have a conversation. Ask Him questions about it: What will this change mean for me? Give God your "yes," and ask him for the grace to stick to your new resolution. Conclusion: Follow this example: Father, Thank you for revealing yourself to me in prayer today. Thank you for touching my heart, speaking to me, and showing me how to change my life. May any and all seeds you have sown in my heart today, by your grace, grow to maturity and bear fruit for you that will last. I ask all these things in Jesus' name and by his blood. Amen. After closing, take a few extra minutes to reflect on how your prayer went. Consider the environment, your experience, your prayers, your posture and any distractions. Allow this to help you the next time you pray Lectio Divina, replicate what was helpful and adjust what wasn't. Ultimately, this practice of praying Lectio Divina with Scripture passages can significantly influence how you communicate with God. You can share and teach these steps to others and even engage within a group or Bible study to read God's Word together and hear what He has to say. Additional Resources For a more in-depth teaching on Lectio Divina, watch Fr. Scott Traynor's session from FOCUS Summer Training. For other resources on prayer, check out Jeff Cavin's talk from SEEK on praying and hearing God's voice in Scripture. Check out our other guides to: the Rosary, Consecration to St. Joseph, and intercessory prayer. Join the entire FOCUS community every month online in praying the rosary. Sign up via this link. "Lectio Divina," a Latin term, means "divine reading" and describes a way of reading the Scriptures whereby we gradually let go of our own agenda and open ourselves to what God wants to say to us. In the 12th century, a Carthusian monk called Guigo, described the stages which he saw as essential to the practice of lectio divina. There are various ways of practicing lectio divina either individually or in groups but Choro's description is fundamental. He said that the first stage of lectio (reading) where we read the Word of God slowly and reflectively so that it sinks into us. Any passage of Scripture can be used for this way of prayer but the passage should not be too long. The second stage is meditatio (reflection) where we think about the text we have chosen and ruminate upon it so that we take from it what God wants to give us. The third stage is oratio (response) where we leave our thinking aside and simply let our hearts speak to God. This response is inspired by our reflection on the Word of God. The final stage of Lectio Divina is contemplatio (rest) where we let go not only of our own ideas, plans and meditations but also of our holy words and thoughts. We simply rest in the Word of God. We listen at the deepest level of our being to God who speaks within us with a still small voice. As we listen, we are gradually transformed from within. Obviously this transformation will have a profound effect on the way we actually live and the way we live is the test of the authenticity of our prayer. We must take what we read in the Word of God into our daily lives. These stages of Lectio Divina are not fixed rules of procedure but simply guidelines as to how the prayer normally develops. Its natural movement is towards greater simplicity, with less and less talking and more listening. Gradually the words of Scripture begin to dissolve and the Word is revealed before the eyes of our heart. How much time should be given to each stage depends very much on whether it is used individually or in a group. If Lectio Divina is used for group prayer, obviously more structure is needed than for individual use. In group prayer, much will depend on the type of group. Lectio Divina may involve discussing the implications of the Word of God for daily life but it cannot be reduced to this. The movement of the prayer is towards silence. If the group is comfortable with silence, more time could be spent resting in the Word. The practice of Lectio Divina as a way of praying the Scriptures has been a fruitful source of growing in relationship with Christ for many centuries and in our own day is being rediscovered by many individuals and groups. The Word of God is alive and active and will transform each of us if we open ourselves to it. The Word of God is powerful enough to change our hearts. Lectio Divina is a process of reading, reflecting, responding, and resting in a piece of scripture. It's a way to engage God in a conversation and listen for His words to you. Lectio Divina has become one of my favorite forms of prayer. I love the intimacy of choosing a small step of the scripture and diving deep into it. Soaking in each word and then listening for what God wants me to hear. Sometimes He speaks something related to the scripture and sometimes the scripture is a spark for something else He wants me to hear. Lectio Divina is a meditative prayer, allowing God to speak through his living Word. 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A short passage or even a single verse or two is sufficient.As you get started, find a comfortable and quiet place to sit.Begin to quiet your mind and body, setting aside all the thoughts and to-do lists running through your mind.Open your time of prayer by calling upon the Holy Spirit to guide your reading.In this first step, we're "taking a bite" of the scripture (lectio) by reading a passage of Scripture.Read the verse slowly, several times, listening with the "ear of the heart."Some methods of Lectio Divina recommend reading the verses at least four times. It may even help to listen to the verses read either from an audio Bible or by another person.Is there a word or phrase that begins to stand out to you?The word or phrase that grabs your heart may not be the main idea of the passage. Listen and be open to how God wants to use his Word to speak to you just had with Him, you contemplate Him and let your heart be transformed with His Word.8. Final prayer and Consecration to MaryWe've reached the end of our Lectio Divina prayer time. As we said at the beginning of this post, it's not a rigid structure. We can finish the Lectio with a prayer of thanksgiving. Another beautiful way to close it is by consecrating ourselves to Mary and asking for her intercession. We suggest you pray an Our Father, a Hail Mary, and a Glory Be.9. Sign of the Cross Having finished our meditation and after doing a consecration to Mary, we end the same way we started, with the Sign of the Cross. To conclude these instructions, here are a few websites where you can find each day's Gospel, as well as commentaries and resources that will help you during your next Lectio Divina. We hope they will be of great use! Order of Carmelites: What is Lectio Divina? USCCB on Lectio DivinaBenedict XVI on Lectio Divina Weekly Lectio Divina with the Order of Carmelites Daily Mass Readings and Lectio from St. Louis Parish, Clarksville, MD This post, ¿Cómo se reza la Lectio Divina? El Papa Francisco te lo enseña, pasor por paso was written for Catholic-Link Spanish by Silvana Ramos, and was translated into English by Maria Isabel Giraldo. More Lectio Divina Resources A Step-By-Step Guide To Not Read The Bible Like A Robot: Lectio Divina How To Pray Lectio Divina Have you ever had a Bible verse jump off the page at you? As you're reading, a phrase or words just seem to speak to your heart, unlike any others on the page? I was taken aback the first time this happened, couldn't understand how these words seemed to speak so profoundly and personally to me. 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Reflect:Sit back and close your eyes.Think about the word or phrase that seemed to catch in your heart as you read through this passage.Turn just those words over and over in your mind.Listen for what God wants to speak into your heart through these words.Respond:After you've reflected on these words and God's whispers to your heart, respond to him in prayer.Discuss with God what you've heard and how your heart feels led to respond.Rest:Keeping your eyes closed and body relaxed, sit in the silence with God.Spend time in his presence, allowing his words and your responses to sink deeply into your heart.While you can experience Lectio Divina prayer on your own with any scripture, it can be helpful to read with others. The Prodigal Father, including several guided Lectio Divina prayers. You can also find many examples and guides online. About Lectio Divina: A Contemplative OutreachLectio Divina Resources BibleGateway.comPray as You Go! These are affiliate links and my own books – so any purchases help grow and sustain this blog.) Lectio Divina is one of the earliest forms of prayer. It was practiced by the monks as they prepared for Liturgy and as an extension of the Eucharist in The Liturgy of the Hours. Lectio Divina gives you a good experience of all three levels of prayer: Vocal, Meditative, and Contemplative. It is also encouraged by the Catechism of the Catholic Church as a way to meditate! (CCC 2708) What is Lectio Divina?The goal of this guide is to make Lectio Divina more accessible, memorable and doable for anyone interested. In this ultimate guide, you'll learn how to prepare for the prayer, the steps involved, Scripture examples to follow, and when to take some time in silence as well as when is a good time to journal. Lectio Divina is a Latin phrase meaning Divine Reading. It dates all the way back to the 3rd Century. Over the years, it was developed by some of the early Church Fathers, Saints of the Church, and religious communities such as: Origen, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Saint Benedict, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, the Desert Fathers who formed the first monasteries in the Eastern Church, the Carthusians, the Cistercians, the Benedictines, the Carmelites... it has even been introduced to the Protestants by John Calvin.It was not until Vatican II, in 1965, that one of the Church's most important documents emphasized the use of Lectio Divina. That document was "Dei Verbum" and is a dogmatic constitution or teaching on the Word of God. In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI, reaffirmed the importance of Lectio Divina on the 40th anniversary of "Dei Verbum": "I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of Lectio Divina: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God, who is speaking, and in praying, responds to Him with trusting openness of heart [cf. Dei verbum, n. 25]. If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church – I am convinced of it – a new spiritual vigor." Saint John Paul II, when he was the pope, described how to enter into this ancient form of prayer. One condition for Lectio Divina that the mind and heart be illuminated by the Holy Spirit, that is, by the same Spirit who inspired the Scripture. That the Scripture is approached with an attitude of "reverential hearing."As is often said about Scripture, this type of prayer is itself "Ever Ancient, Ever New." The practice of Lectio Divina is best when it is experienced. The best way I can explain it is that it is an experience of prayer where you read Scripture in a prayerful and reflective way until God speaks to you through his Word. As we "hear" it over and over, meditate upon it, and contemplate it, the Word of God takes flesh in us. We become one with Christ. We experience this wonderful union with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As with all prayer, the "way" that we do prayer is not important, butsometimes, especially for beginners, it is really helpful to have a structure and a routine to "get us into" prayer. Lectio Divina consists of four steps:Lectio (reading), Oratio (praying), Meditatio (meditation), and Contemplatio (contemplating).Let's use the analogy of eating for it. When I found your words, I devoured them; your words were my joy, the happiness of my heart (Jeremiah 15:16). I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (John 6:51). Now let's apply the four steps of Lectio Divina to eating. Lectio (reading) is like looking at the meal that is placed before you, deciding which part you want to eat first, which looks the best, what you want to save for last, and taking that first bite.Meditatio (meditation) is chewing on the food, tasting it, deciding whether you like it or not or if you want more of it or want to try another part of the dish. This is often related to "chewing". Sometimes we eat our food so fast we don't even know what it tastes like, and we can do the same with Scripture. For us to really meditate we need to take it slow and notice all the textures and flavors of the Scripture.Interesting enough, my last name "Denk" is a German word that means to think deeply or to ponder. This part comes naturally to me! The important thing though is that we are not doing any of these steps on our own, but rather reading with God and pondering with God. If we do it alone that is when it can become a rather dark and frustrating experience. This is where it is important to pray with God, with Scriptures, and always have Christ at the center. So "chew" until your heart's content, but just remember you are "chewing" Scripture and not your own thoughts!Oratio (pray) means speech, discourse, or dialogue. It is kind of like when we share a meal with anyone, especially with God, conversation tends to flow naturally. During this step you not only savor the food but you savor the company and your heart naturally wants to say something and hear something in response. This could be various spontaneous prayers or a more formal vocal prayer that you write out or say to God.Contemplatio (contemplation) There is nothing better after having a good meal than "resting" in the company you are with. Think about an Italian dinner where nobody gets up from the table right away. Or a Thanksgiving meal. You have tasted the food. You drank the wine. You have talked, laughed, and loved. Now you just spend that last moment in silence, completely content, taking it all in, savoring it, enjoying it, just "being" there with the people that you love, with the God that you love. The Catechism emphasizes that "Contemplative Prayer is silence... or silent love..." (CCC 2717) in which the Father allows us to dwell in His Son, to become one with His Son, to be infused with the Holy Spirit and experience the closest thing to heaven that we can on this earth. Preparation: It's important to take some time to prepare before you pray so that when you do enter into prayer you can be as focused and undistracted as possible. 5 P's of Prayer (Blog post "Coming Soon") Prepare - Know your passage ahead of time and meditate on it throughout the day. When you transition into prayer, take time to breathe, relax, slow down, and just rest. Place - go to your prayer place, room or chair. 90% of prayer is just being there. Posture - we pray using our bodies. Try one of the four postures: standing, sitting, kneeling, or prostrating. Presence - make the Sign of the Cross and invite the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit into this time of prayer. Invite God the Father to hold you, the Son to be the Good Shepherd to you, and the Holy Spirit to be Christ in you. Passage - hold the Bible in your lap and realize: "The Word of God is alive." The Father will speak to you! Have you already signed up for Pray40Days? Review Lectio Divina in the Prayer Exercises section of "Types of Prayer" in Appendix I in your book or eBook.Want to grow your prayer life and try Pray40days for yourself? Sign up here Now You're Ready to Begin Pray40! 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