

Guiding *Lectio Divina*

It would be most helpful for you to read this outline thoroughly before leading your group reflection.

Lectio divina is an ancient prayer method that is most literally known as “divine reading.” It is meant to facilitate an encounter with God through an engaged reading of the Scriptures. In Lectio Divina, the scripture is meant to come more alive for a person as he or she pays attention to the phrases and words that they feel most drawn to sit with and reflect upon. This very act can allow for a greater attentiveness to God with the foundational faith that the Scriptures will speak to the most present reality, longings, concerns, joys, etc. of a person’s life.

The use of Lectio Divina is a very useful tool for any group and can be used consistently to help members connect with their inner realities, to God, to one another, and to Scripture. The use of Lectio Divina has been very useful in Spiritual Exercises: “There is also the possibility of using various Scripture texts to let God’s word enlighten the experience indicated in the exercises. In this way, scripture texts may so be chosen that the experience of just the first or second exercise may permeate the entire day for two or three days apiece.” (Fleming 63) When your community has been having a rich experience sticking with a particular theme, inserting a meeting focused on a Scripture passage related to that theme is a wonderful way to stay and rest awhile in that rich space. St. Ignatius encouraged people to stay where fruits emerge. If there are fruits being borne in your group and you do not want to move onto a new theme or topic, praying with Scripture will allow the community to deepen in what has already been emerging.

When guiding Lectio Divina, it is important to explain to the group what will take place, gently walk them through the prayer, and facilitating some time for sharing. The more your group prays with Scripture in this way, you will not need to voice the questions as frequently. With experience, a group will be able to sit in silence after the reading of the Scripture and know how to pray with the text.

For group members who are seeking advice about how to pray independently outside the meeting, Lectio Divina may be a good suggestion. People will often pray with the daily Lectionary readings, a particular passage that is meaningful, or even with sacred poetry or mystical writings. Even familiar passages can offer new insights when prayed this way.

Below you will find a sample outline for how a person might guide a community through a Lectio Divina of a Scripture passage.

Example of how a person might facilitate Lectio Divina in a group.

- **Introduce what *lectio divina* is and how it will take place.** Be sure to explain how much silence will be used and that you will guide them through the reflection. Example: *We will be using a type of prayer called ‘Lectio Divina’ to listen deeply to the Scripture passage. I will read the passage slowly once. Do not worry about taking in every part of*

the passage. Just listen for a word, image, or phrase that stands out to you. Try to not be too concerned with what the point is or what God is trying to say. Instead, let your imagination be grabbed by whatever it notices. There is no right or wrong! We will have a brief time of silence. I will read it again. Listen again, this time more deeply, and pay attention for that word or phrase. We'll have another period of silence and I will ask you some questions for reflection. Finally, we will have some time to share with one another about the experience of prayer.

- **Ease into prayer.** Invite people to take a comfortable position, pay attention to their bodies, and cultivate a space of quiet and openness in their hearts. Example: *As we enter into prayer, aware that God is here in our midst, let us sit in a way that feels comfortable. Close your eyes. Start to notice how you're feeling. Notice the ground beneath you, supporting you. Notice how the air feels on your skin. Exhale. As you breathe out, imagine that you are exhaling everything that feels stressful or burdensome. As you inhale, think of yourself as breathing in a sense of calm and peace.*
- **Communicate what people may want to consider while you read the text for the first time.** Invite them to simply notice a particular word or image. It is not important yet to understand that image or why it stands out to them. Example: *In a moment, I will read a passage. As I read it, listen for any word or phrase that stands out to you. You don't have to know why, simply notice it."*
- **Read the text the first time.** Be sure to read slowly, even more slowly than feels comfortable. Keep your voice calm and peaceful. Try to be neutral in your interpretation of the text, so that people's experience of hearing it isn't colored too much by your inflection of certain words.
- **Silence.** Allow two to three minutes of silence. You may want to bring a watch if it will help you keep track of the time. Some people will be very comfortable with silence, while others may be uncomfortable with it. As you gain experience with leading this type of prayer, and as you spend time in silence in your own life, you will grow in your ability to sense the feelings of the group and recognize when it is time to end the silence. Don't be afraid to ask God to help you notice!
- **Read the text again.** St. Ignatius relied upon repetition – or “re-petitioning” – as a way to deepen our prayer and harvest new meaning from something that has already been prayed. It is important to read the text a second time to allow people to deepen in their listening. Example: *I will read the passage again. Listen again for a word or phrase that catches your attention. Perhaps it is the same word or image as before.*
- **Offer a prompt for reflection.** Invite the community to spend the next period of silence deepening in their consideration of the word or image that stood out to them. Invite them to use their imagination to explore that image, and use their intellect to consider that image. Example: *Now, consider the word, phrase, or image that stands out to you. Think about it for a little while. For example, if you noticed the phrase “depths of the earth,” spend some time really wondering what those depths of the earth are like. Imagine you can see them. Spend time examining the image or word as though it were right in front of you. Then, consider what this image could mean to you or how it might be important for you in your life right now.*
- **Silence.** Again, allow two to three minutes of silence while people imagine and consider the image or word.
- **Colloquy.** For St. Ignatius, any imaginative prayer or consideration always concluded with a “colloquy,” which meant turning the focus directly to God and talking to God about what is on our hearts. This is a time to tell God how we're feeling, what we're wondering, ask God questions, or anything else that arises for us in prayer. We address God directly and try to listen for a response or insight that surfaces. Example: *Now, invite God into that exploration of this word or image. In your heart, speak directly to God and*

ask God what God is showing you with this image or word. Try to listen deeply to any new awareness about how this word or image is meaningful to you, or about anything else that arose in your heart during this time of prayer. What is God showing you, here today?"

- **Silence.** Spend another two to three minutes in silence.
- **Conclude.** Use this moment to let people know that the time of prayer will be concluding to help them transition into the time of sharing. Invite the group to offer thanks individually for this time of prayer. Allow another 30 seconds to a minute for people to conclude their prayer before gently inviting people to return their attention to the room and begin the time of sharing and listening. Example: *As we prepare to emerge from this time of reflection, spend a final minute thanking God for this time in prayer... [silence]... As you feel ready, let us return our attention to this space and one another by opening our eyes and shifting our focus to some time for sharing and listening.*
- **First round of sharing and listening.** Invite everyone to share briefly about their experience. They may have a word or image, or maybe it was difficult and didn't feel like anything happened. Let them know that it's OK to share anything. Also note that we will wait until everyone has had a chance to share once before we respond to one another. Example: *Now, let's spend some time sharing about our experience of listening to God through that Scripture. As you feel ready, please share about what surfaced for you in this experience. Maybe you want to share about the word or image that arose for you and, possibly, what you discovered in that. Maybe you had a difficult time with this passage. Feel free to share whatever your experience was. There is no "right or wrong" response.*
- **Responding, listening deeper.** If time permits, invite members to share with the group about anything that another member shared that they found meaningful. This is when we can respond to what we've heard in one another's experiences. Example: *Now we'll have an opportunity to share with one another what we heard, learned, or appreciated about another person's experience. If something someone said struck a cord with you, feel free to say so.*