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How can you help your students encounter Christ in the classroom?

1. The Encounter Question

Here is a very simple habit that I encourage you to adopt. When you finish planning your lessons and then again when you finish your class, ask yourself:

Did I give my students the opportunity to encounter Christ in class?

It is so simple, yet so important to ask.

I'm ashamed to say that if I had honestly asked myself this question about classes I have taught over the years, many times the answer would be "No."

Did I teach them well during those lessons? Did they learn anything? Did I use effective teaching strategies?

The answers to all those questions could be yes, but that still won't guarantee that I gave them the opportunity to encounter the living God.

Which brings me to this:

2. *Lectio Divina* Lesson Planning

Use this five-step process of *lectio divina* in every class you teach and you will guarantee students have the opportunity to encounter Christ.

[What is *lectio divina*? It means "sacred reading." It is an ancient practice of prayerfully reading the Bible in the presence of God. We don't just read to understand what the Bible is saying; we read to understand what God is saying to us through the Bible. Here is an overview of the five steps of *lectio divina*.]

Now, I'm not saying you should guide your students through a process of reading the Bible using *lectio divina* during every class (though it wouldn't hurt!).

What I am saying is the process of *lectio divina* can be applied to anything we teach.

It turns educational opportunities into opportunities to encounter Christ in class.

Here are five questions your students will directly or indirectly ask in a *lectio divina* lesson plan:

Learn: What does this teaching mean?

Meditate: What is Christ saying to me?

Pray: What can I say to Christ in response?

Contemplate: What conversion of the mind, heart, and life is Christ asking of me?

Act: How will I make my life a gift for others?

When you sit down and plan your lesson, think about how you can create activities or find resources that encourage students to answer these five questions.

For example, imagine I am teaching a lesson on the first chapter of Genesis (the seven days of creation).

A normal lesson might have the students memorize the seven days and work on activities to help them remember what happened on each day and why it is important.

That's really just the first step in the *lectio divina* lesson planning process (Learn). This approach is good, but we can't stop there. We want our students to know what the seven days of creation mean, but we also want them to know what each day means to them on a personal level.

Meditation: Have the students draw pictures of themselves experiencing each day of creation in their lives. Put particular attention on the seventh day and have them draw how they rest on the Lord's Day. Or maybe just focus on one day of creation and have the students think of one way they experience that part of creation as a gift from God.

Prayer: Have the students compose prayers of thanksgiving for each day of God's creation. Or, have them read and reflect on prayers dedicated to God's creation by St. Francis (Canticle of the Sun) and others.

Contemplation: Go outside. Have the students observe God's creation. What days of creation do they see here? How do they see things differently knowing that God created all of this?

Action: Give the students some ideas for how to care for God's creation. As a homework assignment, have them do one thing to respect and preserve God's creation in some way and be ready to write and talk about it in the next class.

Teachers and catechists have done all of these things of course, but sometimes we forget to get past that first step.

Our students need to have an encounter with Christ in creation, not just an education about the creation story.

The *lectio divina* lesson planning process helps ensure we go through all five important ways of encountering Christ in class.