

## **RESOURCES AND WAYS TO PRAY WITH SCRIPTURE**

### *Drawing upon the 'Bank' of our tradition*

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One of the advantages of having a 4000 year old tradition is that there is a wealth of ways to approach God. We have methods which are passed down, as well as the deposit in Scripture. The Word of God is communication with us from God, but always through the experience and spirituality of the people of God.

#### **Looking at the Psalms**

The Psalms were the 'songbook' at the Temple in Jerusalem. They were written over a period of time and for a variety of reasons. Within these 150 songs is the whole range of human emotion.

*Know that the LORD works wonders for the faithful; the LORD hears when I call out...* Psalm 4

*O LORD, our Lord, how awesome is your name through all the earth! You have set your majesty above the heavens! Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have drawn a defense against your foes, to silence enemy and avenger. When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place-- What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them?*

Psalm 8

*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why so far from my call for help, from my cries of anguish?*

Psalm 22

*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom do I fear? The LORD is my life's refuge; of whom am I afraid?*

Psalm 27

*Have mercy on me, God, in your goodness; in your abundant compassion blot out my offense. Wash away all my guilt; from my sin cleanse me. For I know my offense; my sin is always before me. Against you alone have I sinned; I have done such evil in your sight.* Psalm 51

*How lovely your dwelling, O LORD of hosts! My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the LORD. My heart and flesh cry out for the living God.*

Psalm 84

*LORD, hear my prayer; let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me now that I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly. For my days vanish like smoke; my bones burn away as in a furnace.*

Psalm 102

The church prays the Psalms daily in the Liturgy of the Hours. The Psalms are also sung in the Liturgy of the Word when the Eucharist and other sacraments are celebrated.

You can buy a four volume or one volume version of the Liturgy of the Hours. Or, you can access it on [www.divineoffice.org](http://www.divineoffice.org). (And you can download the app, as well!)

## ***Praying the Psalms***

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The Psalms are our richest treasury of prayer. They were originally thought to be written by David. They were probably compiled over a longer period of time, but most of them had their origins in the liturgy of the Temple in Jerusalem. They have been used in both Jewish and Christian worship for thousands of years. Pieces of them may be traced to the first Temple. The Psalms as we know them today, date from the period of the Second Temple on. (About 560 BC.) Besides being used in the Temple, the Psalms were kept alive in the synagogue tradition and were the songs sung there as the Torah was studied.

Jesus lived and breathed the Psalms as prayer. A look at the Passion accounts gives an indication of this. He and his disciples sang the traditional "*Hallel*" (praise) psalms as they walked to the Garden of Olives. His cry on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is a quote from Psalm 22.

The Christian church continues to use the Psalms not only in the Liturgy of the Word at mass and for other occasions, but also in the Liturgy of the Hours. The two major hours (morning and evening) and the minor hours (midday and night) use the all the Psalms in a four-week cycle.

## ***Types of Psalms***

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<b>Narrative Psalms</b>	<b>Community Laments</b>	<b>Individual Laments</b>	<b>Penitential Psalms</b>	<b>Community Songs of Thanksgiving</b>
78,105,106,135,136	12,44,58,60,74,79,80,83,85,89:38-51,90,94,123,126,129,137	3,4,5,7,9,10,13,14,17,22,25,26,27:7-14,28,31,35,36,39,40:12-17,41,42,43,52,53,54,55,56,57,59,61,63,64,69,70,71,77,86,88,109,120,139,140,141,142	6,32,38,51,102,130,143	65,67,75,107,124,136

<b>Individual Songs of Thanksgiving</b>	<b>Hymns to God who redeemed Israel</b>	<b>Hymns to God who created the world</b>	<b>Hymns to the creator and ruler of history</b>	<b>Covenant renewal</b>
18,21,30,32,34, 40:1-11, 66:13-20, 92, 103,108,116, 118,138	66:1-2, 100,111,14,14 9	8, 19:1-6, 95:1-7a, 104, 148	33,103,113,11 4,145,146,147, 150	50,81
<b>For the Temple liturgy</b>	<b>About the covenant with David</b>	<b>Royal Psalms</b>	<b>Song of Zion</b>	<b>Liturgies</b>
24,29,47,93,95, 96,97,98,99	78,89,132	2,18,20,21,45, 72,101,110, 144:1-11	46,48,76,84,87 121,122	15,68,82,115, 134
<b>Songs of Trust</b>	<b>Wisdom Psalms</b>	<b>Torah Psalms</b>		
11,16,23, 27:1-6, 62, 63, 91,121,125,13 1	36,37,49,73,78 , 112,127,128,1 33	1,19:7-14, 119		

## **The Process of *Lectio Divina***

A VERY ANCIENT art, practiced at one time by all Christians, is the technique known as *lectio divina* - a slow, contemplative praying of the Scriptures which enables the Bible, the Word of God, to become a means of union with God. This ancient practice has been kept alive in the Christian monastic tradition, and is one of the precious treasures of Benedictine monastics and oblates. Together with the Liturgy and daily manual labor, time set aside in a special way for *lectio divina* enables us to discover in our daily life an underlying spiritual rhythm. Within this rhythm we discover an increasing ability to offer more of ourselves and our relationships to the Father, and to accept the embrace that God is continuously extending to us in the person of his Son Jesus Christ.

### ***Lectio* - reading/listening**

THE ART of *lectio divina* begins with cultivating the ability to listen deeply, to hear "with the ear of our hearts" as St. Benedict encourages us in the Prologue to the Rule. When we read the Scriptures we should try to imitate the prophet Elijah. We should allow ourselves to become women and men who are able to listen for the still, small voice of God (*1 Kings 19:12*); the "faint murmuring sound" which is God's word for us, God's voice touching our hearts. This gentle listening is an "atunement" to the presence of God in that special part of God's creation which is the Scriptures.

THE CRY of the prophets to ancient Israel was the joy-filled command to "Listen!" "Sh'ma Israel: Hear, O Israel!" In *lectio divina* we, too, heed that command and turn to the Scriptures, knowing that we must "hear" - listen - to the voice of God, which often speaks very softly. In order to hear someone speaking softly we must learn to be silent. We must learn to love silence. If we are constantly speaking or if we are surrounded with noise, we cannot hear gentle sounds. The practice of *lectio divina*, therefore, requires that we first quiet down in order to hear God's word to us. This is the first step of *lectio divina*, appropriately called *lectio* - reading.

THE READING or listening which is the first step in *lectio divina* is very different from the speed reading which modern Christians apply to newspapers, books and even to the Bible. *Lectio* is reverential listening; listening both in a spirit of silence and of awe. We are listening for the still, small voice of God that will speak to us personally - not loudly, but intimately. In *lectio* we read slowly, attentively, gently listening to hear a word or phrase that is God's word for us this day.

### ***Meditatio* - meditation**

ONCE WE have found a word or a passage in the Scriptures which speaks to us in a personal way, we must take it in and "ruminate" on it. The image of the ruminant animal quietly chewing its cud was used in antiquity as a symbol of the Christian pondering the Word of God. Christians have always seen a scriptural invitation to *lectio divina* in the example of the Virgin Mary "pondering in her heart" what she saw and heard of Christ (*Luke 2:19*). For us today these images are a reminder that we must take in the word - that is, memorize it - and while gently repeating it to ourselves, allow it to interact with our thoughts, our hopes, our memories, our desires. This is the second step or stage in *lectio divina* - *meditatio*. Through

*meditatio* we allow God's word to become His word for us, a word that touches us and affects us at our deepest levels.

### ***Oratio* - prayer**

THE THIRD step in *lectio divina* is *oratio* - prayer: prayer understood both as dialogue with God, that is, as loving conversation with the One who has invited us into His embrace; and as consecration, prayer as the priestly offering to God of parts of ourselves that we have not previously believed God wants. In this consecration-prayer we allow the word that we have taken in and on which we are pondering to touch and change our deepest selves. Just as a priest consecrates the elements of bread and wine at the Eucharist, God invites us in *lectio divina* to hold up our most difficult and pain-filled experiences to Him, and to gently recite over them the healing word or phrase He has given us in our *lectio* and *meditatio*. In this *oratio*, this consecration-prayer, we allow our real selves to be touched and changed by the word of God.

### ***Contemplatio* - contemplation**

FINALLY, WE simply rest in the presence of the One who has used His word as a means of inviting us to accept His transforming embrace. No one who has ever been in love needs to be reminded that there are moments in loving relationships when words are unnecessary. It is the same in our relationship with God. Wordless, quiet rest in the presence of the One Who loves us has a name in the Christian tradition - *contemplatio*, contemplation. Once again we practice silence, letting go of our own words; this time simply enjoying the experience of being in the presence of God.

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IN CONTEMPLATION we cease from interior spiritual *doing* and learn simply to *be*, that is to rest in the presence of our loving Father. Just as we constantly move back and forth in our exterior lives between speaking and listening, between questioning and reflecting, so in our spiritual lives we must learn to enjoy the refreshment of simply *being* in God's presence, an experience that naturally alternates (if we let it!) with our spiritual *practice*.

### **The Practice of *Lectio Divina***

CHOOSE a text of the Scriptures that you wish to pray. Many Christians use in their daily *lectio divina* one of the readings from the Eucharistic liturgy for the day; others prefer to slowly work through a particular book of the Bible. It makes no difference which text is chosen, as long as one has no set goal of "covering" a certain amount of text: the amount of text "covered" is in God's hands, not yours.

PLACE YOURSELF in a comfortable position and allow yourself to become silent. Some Christians focus for a few moments on their breathing; other have a beloved "prayer word" or "prayer phrase" they gently recite in order to become interiorly silent. For some the practice known as "centering prayer" makes a good, brief introduction to *lectio divina*. Use

whatever method is best for you and allow yourself to enjoy silence for a few moments.

THEN TURN to the text and read it slowly, gently. Savor each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the "still, small voice" of a word or phrase that somehow says, "I am for you today." Do not expect lightening or ecstasies. In *lectio divina* God is teaching us to listen to Him, to seek Him in silence. He does not reach out and grab us; rather, He softly, gently invites us ever more deeply into His presence.

NEXT TAKE the word or phrase into yourself. Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories and ideas. Do not be afraid of "distractions." Memories or thoughts are simply parts of yourself which, when they rise up during *lectio divina*, are asking to be given to God along with the rest of your inner self. Allow this inner pondering, this rumination, to invite you into dialogue with God.

THEN, SPEAK to God. Whether you use words or ideas or images or all three is not important. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. And give to Him what you have discovered in yourself during your experience of *meditatio*. Experience yourself as the priest that you are. Experience God using the word or phrase that He has given you as a means of blessing, of transforming the ideas and memories, which your pondering on His word has awakened. Give to God what you have found within your heart.

FINALLY, SIMPLY rest in God's embrace. And when He invites you to return to your pondering of His word or to your inner dialogue with Him, do so. Learn to use words when words are helpful, and to let go of words when they no longer are necessary. Rejoice in the knowledge that God is with you in both words and silence, in spiritual activity and inner receptivity.

SOMETIMES IN *LECTIO DIVINA* one will return several times to the printed text, either to savor the literary context of the word or phrase that God has given, or to seek a new word or phrase to ponder. At other times only a single word or phrase will fill the whole time set aside for *lectio divina*. It is not necessary to anxiously assess the quality of one's *lectio divina* as if one were "performing" or seeking some goal: *lectio divina* has no goal other than that of being in the presence of God by praying the Scriptures.

## *Lectio Divina*

**Read.** Don't skim. Read slowly. Chew on the words. Read it over a few times. Let your mind and eyes 'sink' into the text.

**Meditate.** What caught your eye? What word or phrase really stood out for you? Let your mind wander with that word or phrase. Where does it lead you? What might God be wanting you to hear, or to do?

**Pray.** Let the next step happen. Just speak quietly to God in your heart.

**Contemplate.** This means just 'being with God.' You don't have to 'talk.' Let God be with you.

# ***IGNATIAN MEDITATION - USING YOUR IMAGINATION AND SCRIPTURE***

*Excerpted from J. Veltri, Orientations for Spiritual Growth*

The point of departure in Gospel Contemplation is the imagination. With this method, one primarily uses the active imagination upon a particular event in Jesus' life. The gospel story is the guided imagery context for the imagination. Gospel Contemplation differs from our present-day, psychological, guided imagery techniques in that the person at prayer actively keeps oneself more or less within the gospel framework. In Gospel Contemplation, one does not let the imagination roam as freely as one might do with guided imagery techniques.

Secondly, Gospel Contemplation differs from Contemplative Prayer Forms precisely because it involves images, feelings, and thoughts. Therefore, a rule of thumb is this: To the extent that images, feelings, and thoughts are absent, the prayer more closely approximates the Contemplative Prayer Forms explained above than it does Gospel Contemplation. Certainly as one makes use of Gospel Contemplation, as with many other methods, one is frequently led into moments of prolonged imageless, wordless, faith-filled experiences of God.

## **Importance Of Imagination**

Since the point of departure in Gospel Contemplation is the imagination, it is important to consider the difference between the words imaginary and imagination. When we use the word imaginary about anything, we generally mean that it is not real, not true, and that there is no objectivity in it. In our Western culture people tend to confuse these two words and so they consider the work and activity of imagination with suspicion. Nineteenth-century rationalism and our twentieth-century scientific method with its penchant for attempting to achieve objective knowledge contributed to a separation between the work of imagination and the work of reason. As a result, we often fail to appreciate that imagination is very "rational," though not necessarily analytical. Great inventions of human history and discoveries of science owe their initial inspiration to the work of imagination.

Without imagination, we would not be able to understand what another person is saying to us. For instance, if I asked you to list and describe for me the things that you did during the past two weeks and you began to tell me, the key way you would be able to access them from your memory bank would be through the function of your imagination. Furthermore, the only way I could truly appreciate and adequately take in your descriptions would be through the function of my imagination. Imagination, just as much as analytical thinking, is rational. Even though imagination primarily functions through narrative discourse with a logic different from analytical logic, it deals with the understanding and communication of meaning. Let me give this working description of the word imagination:

Imagination is that power within each of us which equips us *to make present what is not present*. Imagination is intimately connected with our senses which take in the data coming to us from our environment. Imagination is linked intimately also with our memory by helping the memory access data from within us. Enmeshed with our cognitive powers, imagination is essential to our grasp of meaning and to the communication of the same. With our power of memory, imagination can be a gateway to the unconscious and to deep feelings. The imagination is key to our ability to use and to create symbols that are so important to us as rational beings.

## How does this method proceed?

This is how you can enter into the life of Jesus through prayer:

1. Select a short concrete/action passage.

First, from one of the Gospels, select an action passage, preferably fast-moving and colourful in detail.

When you first begin to use this method do not attempt to pray a parable or a sermon.

2. Relax and settle into God's presence.

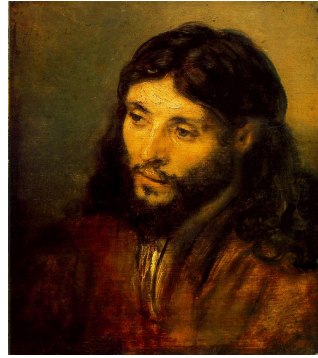
Ask for a particular grace that you are seeking or the particular gift you need at this time - perhaps to know Jesus more intimately, or to become more compassionate, or to be healed in a particular area of your heart etc.

3. Read aloud the passage several times, pausing half a minute or so between each reading while the gospel episode takes hold of you. Slowly read the passage once - aloud, if circumstances allow. Then for 30 seconds or so look up from the page and let the scene sink into your imagination. Do a second oral reading, noticing details which you missed in the first reading. Again look up from the page for 30 seconds or so, until these new details fit into the total scene in your imagination. In the third reading, you will see more details for the first time, also insights, questions and interpretations will begin to occur to you. Use a half-minute to let them settle into your memory. Then read a fourth or even a fifth time until almost all the distractions have disappeared, and the Gospel scene totally saturates your imagination.

4. Now place the bible aside and let the scene happen.

Do nothing to promote it except to stay alert to its developments. As you let yourself sink into the scene, you will tend to lose the sense of yourself and to identify with the situation. Suppose, for example, that you have read about Jesus quieting the storm on the lake. You may imagine the wind howling, the boat pitching, the apostles struggling at the oars. If this identification deepens, you will find yourself in the boat, e.g., at the oars, or you may find yourself to be in Peter or Philip. Sometimes you will discover yourself drifting in and out of the scene, in and out of various people of the scene.

5. Allow yourself to take part in the scene which is now present to you.



**Pick Passage**  
**Prepare**  
**Place and People**  
**Pray**



Be as passive as possible while being as alert as possible. In fact, let everyone else control the event: Jesus, Peter, Mary, Martha, John. You merely interact with the persons, listen and reply to their words, take part in their activity - conversing with them, accompanying them, helping them in their occupations, in whatever ways you find yourself as part of the event that is present to you.

6. Do not moralize or try to make applications.

Don't moralize (for example, "I should be more spontaneous like Peter when I am with my friends ...") or draw theological conclusions (for example, "Notice how the three temptations of Jesus parallel the temptations of the Israelites ...") or try to make clever applications ("It's amazing how the Pharisees are so much like the people I am working with ...") By losing yourself in the persons, words and activity of the gospel event your whole being is affected and influenced. You won't need applications because you will notice what happens to you either in the period of reflection after your prayer or, more subtly, in the effects in your life as almost by osmosis you begin to put on the mind and heart of Jesus's Spirit.

7. After your period of prayer comes to an end, make a review for a few minutes by reflecting upon what took place during the prayer.

What happened in you during this prayer exercise? What did you notice as standing out even slightly? Is there something you should return to in a later period of prayer? Give thanks to the Lord for being with you during this time.