

Leaders:

Below is the practice of Lectio Divina, sacred listening/reading.

This can be a wonderful practice to cultivate for your own time with Jesus as well as set up for your groups to learn how to really engage and enter into a passage of scripture.

When people learn that they can listen on purpose and hear God direct them in their time in scripture, the discipline of being in the Word can be brought to life for them in new and fresh ways, so that it is a joy and exciting instead of burdensome.

You do not need to be a theologian to facilitate this. The idea is that by inviting people into this together people can be encouraged in their own connection with God while engaging with how the Spirit speaks through others as well.

The second section is the original Latin wording and more liturgical instructions. The way I do this is by doing multiple readings of a text from different people's voices as follows.

1ST READING

Have group members close their eyes and listen for words or phrases that jump out to them. Tell them to remove their filters, to not be listening for meaning, only for what seems to stick out. They don't need reasoning yet.

* Have them share what they heard or stuck out between each of these readings.

2ND READING

Have group members close their eyes again and have them try to see themselves in the scene and see whose perspective, whose eyes they catch themselves seeing through: maybe it's Jesus, or his disciples, or the Pharisees, or someone in the crowd...who? What do they notice, or what catches them off guard from that perspective?

What do they feel by seeing through that person's eyes? Joy, frustration, confusion, exposure...? Who do they identify with? Whose reactions and responses seem strange to them, and whose reactions and responses seem like something they would do?

3RD READING

This reading is looking specifically at Jesus. What does Jesus do? What would they feel if they were in Jesus' position? How do they respond usually when they feel that way? What would they expect Jesus to do, and what does he do? What kind of facial expression do they think he has, what posture, what his volume and his tone? These questions tell us a lot about how we think of God and how he relates to us. Ask them if that seems to fit what they know of Jesus' character or not...and why?

4TH READING

Have group members look at the words or the thoughts on perspective they've written down and listen yet again. What seems to be the challenge or the invitation in this interaction? What would the people standing there feel like they need to go do differently, or go and feel encouraged to continue in? What actions or thoughts or ways of living are celebrated and what actions or thoughts or ways of living are discouraged? Why does Jesus encourage or discourage these things (it's never just because...morality, doing the 'right' thing, for Jesus, is always about participating in something much larger)?

3 Questions:

1 What does this teach me about God?

- What does he care about? What does he not care about?
- What makes him glad and joyful and what makes him angry?
- What does he think of you and me? What are some things we thought he felt about us that maybe aren't true?

2 What does this teach me about me?

- What does it mean to live fully as a human the way God created me?
- What does a half-hearted life look like?

- If I were living fully, what might I care about more/less? What would be on my mind? What would not be able to consume my mind?
- What things about life take life from me and what things give life to me?

3 So what?

- Why would they include this story/account in the Bible? What's the point?
- If these things are true, then how might I live differently today? As a son or daughter? As a friend? As a student? As an employee?...

Lectio Divina begins with cultivating the ability to listen deeply. St. Benedict spoke of listening “with the ear of our hearts.” When we read the Scriptures we should, like Elijah, allow ourselves to become women and men who are able to listen for the gentle whisper of God, which is God's word for us. This way of listening is an attunement to the presence of God in that special part of God's creation, which is the Scriptures. The practice of *lectio divina* requires that we quiet down in order to hear God's word to us.

LECTIO

The reading (or listening), which is the first step in *lectio divina*, is not like the speed reading which we apply to newspapers, emails, websites, 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 gentle whisper that will speak to us personally and 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

When we have found a word or a passage in the Scriptures that speaks to us, we must take it in and “ruminate” on it. As Christians we have an example of ruminating on a word from God, in the example of Mary, the mother of Jesus, “pondering in her heart” what she saw and heard of Christ. Like Mary, we must take in the word, memorize

it, allow it to interact with our thoughts, our hopes, our memories, and our desires. This is the second step in *lectio divina*. *Meditatio* or meditation. Through meditation we allow God's word to become His word for us, a word that touches us and affects us at our deepest levels.

ORATIO

The third step in *lectio divina* is oratio or prayer. Our engagement in prayer is the vehicle through which we learn to be still, to listen, to express dependence on God, and to move as He directs us. Prayer is our conversation with God, the method with which we enjoy intimate communion with Him. Through prayer we allow the word that we have taken in and on which we are pondering to touch and change our deepest selves. 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*.

CONTEMPLATIO

At the end, 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. Wordless, quiet rest in the presence of the One who loves us has a name in the Christian tradition: *contemplatio* or 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.