

# Understanding the Lectio Divina or “Divine Reading”

Lectio Divina, or "Divine Reading," is a traditional practice of scriptural reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation intended to promote communion with God and increase the knowledge of God's word. The document "Scala Claustralium" by Guigo II, a Carthusian monk, outlines this practice through a metaphorical spiritual staircase with four rungs. Here's a summary to help you explain it to parents and their children:

Here's an enhanced guide that includes practical steps and examples to help parents lead their children through each part of Lectio Divina.

## The Four Rungs of Lectio Divina

### 1. Reading (Lectio)

- **Description:** This is the careful and attentive reading of the Scriptures. It involves understanding the literal meaning of the text.
- **Function:** Reading seeks the sweetness of a happy life and lays the foundation for deeper spiritual engagement.
- **Example:** *Putting food in the mouth.* Just as putting food in the mouth is the first step in eating, reading the Scriptures is the first step in Lectio Divina. It involves taking in the words of the Bible, much like taking a bite of food. This step is about gathering the raw material needed for spiritual nourishment.
- **Family Activity:** Choose a Bible passage together and read it aloud. Encourage each family member to read a verse. After reading, take a moment of silence to let the words sink in.

### 2. Meditation (Meditatio)

- **Description:** Meditation is the concentrated effort of the mind to understand the hidden truths within the Scriptures. It involves reflecting deeply on the text.
- **Function:** Meditation finds the sweetness sought by reading. It penetrates the surface to uncover deeper spiritual insights.
- **Example:** *Chewing and savouring the food.* Meditation is like chewing and savouring the food. It involves breaking down the words of the Scripture, pondering their meaning, and reflecting on their significance. Just as chewing helps to release the flavours and nutrients in food, meditation helps to uncover the deeper spiritual insights within the text. Savouring the food is akin to deeply enjoying and contemplating the richness of the Scripture.
- **Family Activity:** Use the following questions to guide the meditation:

- **Situation:** Where and when does the story occur?
  - **Action:** Who are the characters? What do they do and say? Why?
  - **Message:** What is the most important dialogue, teaching, or event? What is the most valuable phrase?
  - **Application:** What prevents you from putting that message into practice? Is there anything in your life to change, start doing, or do better? Who are you within the story? What is the Lord saying to you today in your current situation?
- **Interactive Element:** Encourage children to draw a picture of the story or act it out. This helps them engage with the text creatively and understand it better.

### 3. Prayer (Oratio)

- **Description:** Prayer is the fervent turning of the heart to God, asking for help to avoid evils and attain good. It is a personal dialogue with God.
- **Function:** Prayer asks for the sweetness found in meditation. It is a heartfelt plea for divine assistance and grace.
- **Example:** *Swallowing and digesting the food.* Prayer is compared to swallowing and digesting the food. After chewing and savouring, you swallow the food to begin the process of digestion. Similarly, in prayer, you internalize the insights gained from meditation, expressing your thoughts, feelings, and desires to God. This step allows you to fully integrate the spiritual nourishment into your being.
- **Family Activity:** Use the following prompts to guide the prayer:
  - **Confession:** "Father, I beg your pardon for..."
  - **Petition:** "Father, I ask you for..."
  - **Thanksgiving:** "Father, I thank you for..."
- **Interactive Element:** Encourage children to write or draw their prayers. This can help them express their thoughts and feelings more clearly.

### 4. Contemplation (Contemplatio)

- **Description:** Contemplation is the elevation of the mind to God, experiencing the joy of His presence. It is a state of being with God beyond words and thoughts.
- **Function:** Contemplation experiences the sweetness sought in prayer. It is the ultimate goal, where one savours the joy of divine communion.

- **Example:** *Assimilating and getting nourished and satisfied.* Contemplation is like assimilating and getting nourished and satisfied by the food. It is the culmination of the process, where the nutrients from the food are absorbed into your body, providing nourishment and satisfaction. In contemplation, you rest in the presence of God, experiencing the joy and peace that comes from divine communion. This step is about being fully nourished and content in God's presence.
- **Family Activity:** Spend a few minutes in silent contemplation. Encourage children to close their eyes and imagine being with Jesus. Use prompts like:
  - "Father, I praise you for..."
  - "Father, I adore you for..."
  - "Father, I love you for..."
- **Interactive Element:** Play soft, instrumental music to create a peaceful atmosphere. This can help children focus and feel more relaxed.

### **Reciprocal Interconnection of the Four Rungs**

The steps of Lectio Divina are so intricately connected and mutually supportive that the initial steps are of little or no value without the subsequent ones, and the latter steps can rarely, if ever, be achieved without the former.

Consider this: What is the point of spending time in continuous reading (*lectio continua*), always having the lives and writings of saints in hand, if we do not also extract their essence by chewing and masticating them, and then ingesting them, sending them to the innermost part of our hearts? This process allows us to diligently reflect on our lives in their light and strive to perform the very deeds we enjoy hearing about.

But how can we reflect on these things, or ensure we do not overstep by meditating on vain and useless matters, unless we are first instructed by reading or listening? Listening is, in a way, part of reading. Hence, we often say we have read not only the books we have read ourselves but also those we have heard from teachers.

Similarly, what benefit is there in seeing through meditation what we ought to do, unless, with the help of prayer and God's grace, we are able to accomplish it? For meditation to be fruitful, it must be followed by fervent prayer, whose effect is the sweetness of contemplation.

From all this, we can deduce that:

- **Reading without Meditation:** Just as putting food in the mouth without chewing would leave you with unprocessed food, reading without meditation leaves you with a superficial understanding of the text.

- **Meditation without Prayer:** Chewing food without swallowing means you miss out on the nourishment. Similarly, meditation without prayer means you miss the personal connection and transformation that comes from communicating with God. The food of the Word of God only remains in your mind without changing your heart.
- **Prayer without Meditation:** Swallowing without chewing can be unsatisfying and even harmful. Prayer without meditation can be shallow and lack depth, as it misses the reflective process that deepens understanding.
- **Contemplation without Prayer:** Digesting and assimilating food without having swallowed it is impossible. Contemplation without prayer is rare and often miraculous, as prayer prepares the heart for deep communion with God.

By understanding the reciprocal interconnection of these steps, we can appreciate the importance of each one in the process of Lectio Divina and strive to engage fully in each part to achieve a deeper spiritual connection and nourishment.

## The Relationship Between Jesus' Teaching on Prayer and Lectio Divina

Jesus teaches us about the power of prayer in Matthew 7:7-8: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." This profound teaching can be beautifully related to the practice of Lectio Divina, illustrating the journey of spiritual nourishment and communion with God.

### 1. Hunger for the Word of God (Asking)

- **Explanation:** Just as we must have a physical hunger to seek food, we must have a spiritual hunger for the Word of God. This hunger drives us to be in His presence and ask Him to provide our daily spiritual bread.
- **Lectio Divina Step: Preparation and Reading (Lectio)**
  - **Action:** We come before God with a desire to hear His voice. We ask Him to speak to us through the Scriptures.
  - **Outcome:** By reading the Bible, we are asking God to reveal His truths to us. This is the first step in our spiritual journey.

### 2. Searching for Spiritual Meaning (Seeking)

- **Explanation:** After asking, we actively seek. This involves delving into the Scriptures, searching for deeper spiritual meanings and insights.
- **Lectio Divina Step: Meditation (Meditatio)**
  - **Action:** We reflect deeply on the words we have read, seeking to understand their significance and how they apply to our lives.
  - **Outcome:** Through meditation, we find the spiritual nourishment we seek. We uncover the hidden truths and insights that God wants to reveal to us.

### 3. Knocking on God's Door (Knocking)

- **Explanation:** Having sought and found spiritual insights, we then knock on God's door through prayer. This is our way of seeking a deeper connection and communion with Him.
- **Lectio Divina Step: Prayer (Oratio)**
  - **Action:** We turn our reflections into prayers, communicating with God about what we have discovered. We ask for His help, guidance, and grace.

- **Outcome:** By knocking through prayer, we are invited into a deeper relationship with God. Our prayers open the door to His presence and His response.

#### 4. Entering God's Presence (Being Opened)

- **Explanation:** When we knock, God opens the door and invites us into His presence. This is where we experience the fullness of His love and grace.
- **Lectio Divina Step: Contemplation (Contemplatio)**
  - **Action:** We rest in God's presence, enjoying the spiritual meal He has prepared for us. This is a time of deep communion and joy.
  - **Outcome:** In contemplation, we are nourished and satisfied by God's presence. We experience the ultimate fulfillment of our spiritual hunger.

#### Summary

- **Ask (Preparation and Reading):** We come to God with a hunger for His Word, asking Him to speak to us.
- **Seek (Meditation):** We delve into the Scriptures, seeking deeper understanding and spiritual insights.
- **Knock (Prayer):** We communicate with God, turning our reflections into heartfelt prayers.
- **Be Opened (Contemplation):** We enter into God's presence, experiencing the joy and nourishment of divine communion.

By following these steps, we align ourselves with Jesus' teaching on prayer and fully engage in the transformative practice of Lectio Divina. This journey not only deepens our understanding of God's Word but also strengthens our relationship with Him, leading to a richer and more fulfilling spiritual life.

## **Enriching Lectio Divina with the Celebration of Mass**

The practice of Lectio Divina can be beautifully enriched by drawing parallels with the celebration of Mass. Each part of the Mass corresponds to a step in Lectio Divina, creating a profound connection between personal prayer and communal worship. Additionally, we can add a final step, **Actio**, which emphasizes putting the fruits of our prayer into practice in our daily lives.

### **1. Preparation and Introductory Rites**

- **Lectio Divina Step: Preparation**

- **Mass Parallel:** The Introductory Rites of the Mass, including the Penitential Act, Gloria, and Collect, help us prepare our hearts and minds to enter into the sacred mysteries. Just as we prepare for Lectio Divina by making silence and invoking the Holy Spirit, the Introductory Rites prepare us to receive God's Word and grace.

### **2. Reading (Lectio) and Proclamation of the Word**

- **Lectio Divina Step: Reading (Lectio)**

- **Mass Parallel:** During the Liturgy of the Word, we listen to the proclamation of the Scriptures. This is akin to the reading step in Lectio Divina, where we attentively hear God's Word. The readings from the Old Testament, Psalms, Epistles, and Gospels provide the spiritual nourishment we seek.

### **3. Meditation (Meditatio) and Homily**

- **Lectio Divina Step: Meditation (Meditatio)**

- **Mass Parallel:** The Homily, delivered by the priest, helps us meditate on the Scriptures. It provides insights and reflections that deepen our understanding of the readings. Just as we meditate on the Word in Lectio Divina, the Homily guides us to ponder the meaning and implications of the Scriptures in our lives.

### **4. Prayer (Oratio) and Prayer of the Faithful**

- **Lectio Divina Step: Prayer (Oratio)**

- **Mass Parallel:** The Prayer of the Faithful, also known as the Universal Prayer, is a time when we bring our petitions before God. This corresponds to the prayer step in Lectio Divina, where we turn our reflections into heartfelt prayers. Additionally, the Eucharistic Prayer and hymns are moments of deep prayer and communion with God.

### **5. Contemplation (Contemplatio) and Receiving the Eucharist**

- **Lectio Divina Step: Contemplation (Contemplatio)**
- **Mass Parallel:** Receiving Jesus in the Eucharist is the pinnacle of the Mass and corresponds to the contemplation step in Lectio Divina. After receiving the Eucharist, we enter into a time of silent prayer and contemplation, resting in God's presence and experiencing the fullness of His love and grace.

## 6. Action (Actio) and Mission

- **Lectio Divina Step: Action (Actio)**
- **Mass Parallel:** At the end of the Mass, we are sent forth with the words, "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." This final step emphasizes putting the fruits of our prayer into practice. Just as the energy we get from food is used to live a good life, the spiritual nourishment we receive from Lectio Divina and the Eucharist should be used to live a holy life, serve others and spread the Gospel.
- **Explanation:** After being nourished by God's Word and Holy Communion, we are called to act. This involves living out the insights and graces we have received, serving others, and being witnesses of God's love in the world.

## Summary of the Enriched Lectio Divina

- **Preparation and Introductory Rites:** We prepare our hearts and minds to enter into God's presence.
- **Reading (Lectio) and Proclamation of the Word:** We listen attentively to the Scriptures, gathering the spiritual nourishment we seek.
- **Meditation (Meditatio) and Homily:** We reflect deeply on the Word, guided by the priest's preaching, to uncover deeper spiritual insights.
- **Prayer (Oratio) and Prayer of the Faithful:** We turn our reflections into prayers, bringing our petitions before God and seeking His grace.
- **Contemplation (Contemplatio) and Receiving the Eucharist:** We rest in God's presence, experiencing the joy and peace of divine communion after receiving Jesus in the Eucharist.

By integrating the steps of Lectio Divina with the celebration of Mass, we can deepen our spiritual practice and enhance our experience of both personal prayer and communal worship. This holistic approach helps us to fully engage with God's Word and presence, leading to a richer and more fulfilling spiritual life.