

## *Lectio Divina*

### **Part 12 – Some Difficulties**

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Some days his word will speak, others no and the words remain just words. Sometimes we may experience his presence as a terrible absence. Some days he just doesn't show. So we speak of dryness and 'dark night'. This doesn't mean that God is not present — we might recall, for instance, the Footprints poem. Nor does it mean that we cannot try to understand — a danger here is that we turn *lectio* into an exercise in seeking meaning. If our spell of dryness continues for some time, it may be helpful, to break this cycle, to just jot down a word and try free association, especially with other Scriptural texts, and see where this leads — here the more familiar we are with Scripture, the better this will work. Or we may need to look at and renew our commitment: Yes, this is what I want to do. In any event, we need to remain faithful, hang in there; in time the desert will bloom.

Why does God not show? Why does the text not speak? We are searching for God. That means that we have not yet found him — thus there should always be a feeling of 'not-quite-yet'-ness about our endeavour. His seeming absence should remind us of our need to keep looking, rather than be entertaining temptations to give up. Then sometimes the text is just obscure; that it doesn't speak is not our fault — we may have to work hard to get the meaning out of some texts. Biblical texts were written long ago, by different people for different reasons using different styles and different languages: sometimes the meaning is just not clear. Then, too, it is not normal to experience God every time we read, where God seems to seize us/the blinding flash/moved to conversion/made new again.

Sometimes God is just silent. This could mean just that we are not ready yet to hear, and so we are left to ourselves for the moment. From time to time we need a new way of seeing, so we have to abandon our old way of seeing and we are 'blinded', so to speak, before we can put it together in a new way and see anew. In the transition we see nothing. Then again, as we grow we change, which will change the way we pray. What worked yesterday, may not work today. If this state continues, it may be an invitation to seek a new way to pray. Or it may just simply be because God is mystery – sometime we just can't penetrate. What all this means is that we will have periods of silence; expect them, and don't be discouraged by them.

Then sometimes it might be us. External noise can fill up all our inner space, shutting out any possibility for contemplation, for we do not/can not notice any inner movements of the heart. Even soft music can inhibit us here. We need to learn to sit quietly, without the radio on in the background. Sometimes we are not in a state where we can hear. We might be ill physically, which will restrict our ability to sit and listen. Here we just have to do the best we can. Or perhaps it is that we can't handle the silence, like children fear the dark. Here we need to learn to become comfortable in the silence; this can only be done by experience. Silence, when first experienced, can be troubling.

It can seem like just a vast void. Then our own dark/deeper thoughts emerge; this can be frightening. We need to become familiar with our self, see our self as we are, and so not have to run away scared or ashamed. In prayer we need to be able to be totally honest; we have to stand 'naked' before our God. If we cannot stand to be naked/honest with our self, we certainly won't be able to before God. Then our own internal noise might prevent us from listening. Here again there is a call to know oneself so as to free ourselves from our self-rejection and all that drives us. We have to learn how to set aside our thoughts, feelings, and other distractions.

Sometimes we are troubled with drowsiness. This may be physical. We need to recognise that there are limits to what we can do. We should choose a time when we're less tired, and have a well-aired space which is not too warm. Our posture should not be too relaxed, and we should have a limit to our time. But then our tiredness might be something else. Sleepiness can be a form of passive resistance — we need to ask the question. Odd occasions are OK, but if regular we need to look into it/do something about it.

Sometimes we will be unable to settle for any length of time; we can't sit still, and are restless, jumpy, unable to pay attention, unable to commit to any serious, sustained activity. If we can't settle, we can't hear. This the ancients called "acedia", and the remedy is to "stay in your cell" — just admit what's going on, and sit with the discomfort; it will pass. We might not seem to achieve anything by staying put, but in so doing we reassert control over ourselves so that WE determine what we are doing, rather than being driven by this 'spirit' of acedia.

Sometimes we can become oppressed by work. Yes, urgent things do need to be done, but for the most part they do not need to be done now at this moment and so can be deferred to a later time — perhaps we might just make a note of them if can't put them out of mind, with a promise to attend to them at a another more suitable time. And perhaps we need to remind ourselves that we have given *Lectio* a priority. We need to learn by doing not to budge too easily from this serious business (ie *Lectio*). The more we refuse to move, the less we are plagued by the other matters of lesser priority.

Aligned with this, we need to avoid turning *Lectio* into what it is not. It is not study time, so we refuse to let our *Lectio* become a time for Scripture study. It is not a time for preparing for homilies or teaching, so

we do not go off chasing down a good insight making it more marketable that may be useful elsewhere.

Then again, the reason that we are unable to pray may have to do with our neighbour. If we fall out with our neighbour, we can't expect to spurn God in our neighbour, and then expect to meet him in prayer. Our disharmony will impact on our prayer. Here we may find that, if reconciliation is not possible, we may just simply have to let go our grievance.