

## *Lectio Divina*

### **Part 13 – What to Read?**

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This gets down to person choice: what attract you? There is no right choice, but we must be prepared for going a long way with a long-term companion. We are seeking God, seeking salvation. In a real sense, we don't know the way, so we have to seek guidance and take it on trust — that it will lead us to where we wish to go and we must be willing to be led there. This means there is a risk involved, and we are vulnerable in this. Care needs to taken in the choice of what we read, to protect us in our openness, which is the openness of a disciple to a master. We need to be sure that it is God who is speaking to us, that it is God who is leading us.

#### **+ Bible.**

The Bible is sacred reading par excellence. Any book of Bible is God's Word, so all is suitable. Christ is found in the Gospels, in the Gospels in the context of NT, and in NT in context of OT. So every page of Scripture speaks of Christ. Then, Scripture reveals God's plan of salvation, and so all of it lead up to Christ. This means that we have to read all Scripture in the light of the resurrection, the Old Testament in light of the New. We need an Easter perspective, though not an Easter without a Good Friday.

Some use:

- Gospels are best, at least initially. We are attempting to get to know OUR Lord, Jesus Christ. Then perhaps NT => OT => NT =>.... Or, Gospel => epistle => Gospel =>....

- Favourite passages. But our familiarity with them may mean that we do not see anything 'new' in the text, and so we are not moved into unexpected territory. So we are not challenged to see, for we only see the same familiar landscape. Thus do not make any new links.

- Some Bibles suggest passages for different occasions, different moods. Here we might find the comfort we seek, e.g. if we are lonely or sad, but this is not what *Lectio* is about. It leaves us in charge — it is really we who speak first: "Give me a word of comfort." Sometimes, when we are feeling in some way vulnerable/in need, it could be that this might be just what is needed to let the Lord speak the Word we need to hear; it is better to let the Lord speak first.

- Some like a random *selection*. However, care is needed Here to avoid a temptation to superstition over 'God having chosen this Word for me'. Simply put: the Word is not an answer to some question. Then, too, the reading is taken out of context and so we may end up with the wrong message.

- Some use the readings for the day in the Liturgy. This helps to improve our participation in the Liturgy, and the passage chosen is not my choice (i.e., it is not me who speaks first). But again these *selections* are out of context, and we may need to supplement our reading here. A problem here can be that there is a new text every day — sometimes we need to sit with a word/phrase for some time to hear what it is saying; we need to be able to stay with a word for as long as our fascination remains. This is not to say that a text cannot/will not move

us. It is just to note that an element of *Lectio*, which might be at risk here, is that it is a slow, leisurely reading. Then, too, we need to be mindful that not all of Scripture is covered in the Church's Scriptural cycle.

- *Lectio Continua*: Reading the chosen Book through from beginning to end. Some like to choose a Book according to the liturgical season: Isaiah for Advent; Jeremiah for Lent; Lamentations for Holy Week; Epistle of John for Easter Time. This is probably the preferred method. Reading random *selections* takes the passage out of context. Often, due to the limitation inherent in translations, we only get a feel for the true meaning of the words as we expose ourselves to the whole message the sacred author is trying to convey. Reading the Book right through from beginning to end will thus help prevent the misunderstandings that can arise in taking parts of it out of context.

Similarly, in reading the whole book through, we open ourselves to the whole message — those bits we like and so which are not troublesome, AND, more importantly, those bits we don't like, those bits which challenge us, those bits which would move us to where we would prefer not to go. These challenge us to let go of our prejudices, our fixed beliefs, and our settled ways of behaviour. Thus do we grow; thus are we moved towards wholeness and holiness. Thus do we avoid the pitfalls associated with selectivity, which may allow us to avoid the challenges, allow us to stay where we are, through our choosing only those passages we like, those passages which support and confirm us in our set views and fixed ways.

Further, our reading is not to get to some core message — the guts of it, its essence — as though the rest of it is then of less value. All of it is God's Word; God can and does and will speak through any of it and all of it. We cannot afford to quickly pass over any of it just because we judge it to be not the essential message. *Lectio* is not skimming over the

text, reading bits, leaving out those which are obscure/difficult/unfamiliar — such a way of reading will not encourage us to stay with *Lectio*, for we will soon find ourselves bored. Not every text will speak, but this doesn't justify restricting what we read — we will surprise by just what will speak. Choice of a Book will get down to some personal attraction for that Book; once chosen, stick with that Book. If we come up against a brick wall, we need to stick with it in trust — the choice was made in good faith; it will bear fruit. Sometimes it may be that we're just not ready to hear at this moment and need more time to hear here. The Word works away on us steadily, softening our heart till at last it begins to open; then we will hear. This takes time; have to persist in faith.

#### **+ Other Material:**

- *Lectio*, and here we are speaking and *Lectio* and not a wider more general spiritual reading, need not be restricted to Bible. But we do recognise the Bible as THE inspired Word of God — it is here that we will most readily hear the Word of God. However, there is truth (the Word is truth) in other traditions, and in other spiritual writings. *Lectio* is a way of reading that suspends critical faculty; we need to read without discernment, without the need to verify the truth (it is more about relationship with the truth, than about finding the truth) of what we read. For this reason we need to be careful in our choice of what we read. We need to read that which is consistent with/contains the truth, that which expresses the perennial faith of our Church. A reading from such as the Office of Readings is quite suitable, or from liturgical texts, writings of the Fathers/mothers of the Church, Doctors of the Church, some mystics, official documents of the Church such as Council texts and encyclicals.

- God is also present in creation, in the beauty of the arts, and in people. It is possible to do *Lectio* via all of these media.