

***Lectio Divina***  
**Part 3 – *Lectio* a Skill**

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*Lectio* is an art, a skill. That means it can be learned, and that its practice can improve over time as we hone our skill. To understand the basic elements of this skill it is helpful to look at how reading/*Lectio* was done in more ancient times. Few in olden days were literate, yet they heard God's Word — in the liturgy, in refectory reading and Chapter talks. They would also receive a word, which was often a Word of Scripture, from Spiritual Fathers and Mothers. The wealthy, and so too their household, would pay people to read to them. Then those who could read would usually do so aloud. There was thus an aural aspect to *Lectio* in bygone days: the word was heard.

We should, then, endeavour to 'hear' in our minds what is said as we read. Here we will be aided if we sub-vocalise as we read, or perhaps even read quietly aloud to ourselves. This will have the added benefit of helping keep distractions at bay. Further, it will slow down our reading, helping us to remember. Memory in oral cultures is greatly valued and so we can expect memory to also have a great role in *Lectio*. Our slow repetitious reading puts the reading into our memory where it comes into play by working/challenging/influencing our behaviour — when it does this we can be sure that we have welcomed God's word into our hearts. We read to evangelise our lives — if our reading has no effect, then we are just indulging ourselves in some devotional self-indulgence. What does not enter is not retained cannot be recalled, what is not recalled cannot challenge/change.

In days long ago, books were rare and very expensive. Books were hard come by; gaining access to them was not easy. That monks spent so much on books, both in terms of time copying and money as well as all

it took to ensure their preservation, testifies to how essential they considered *Lectio divina* to be, which was the major use for their books. Because of the expense, only books considered to be of value were copied and so kept in circulation. Books were valued, then, not just because of their great cost but also because of what they contained. Books, then, were not read as some nice idle pastime, but were read because they were worthwhile. One read with purpose, expecting to get something out of it. One expected to learn something from a book, thus the person would read with openness. In our *Lectio* we need to read with just such open expectation; this is essential. This will guide our choice of what we read, for not all books are suited to being read so uncritically.

Books, being rare, were read and reread — so much so that people would know whole slabs by heart. As they read, this known and familiar material would readily come to mind as associations formed. Thus it would influence what was being read. This ability to recall other texts of Scripture and let it influence what we read is also an essential element in *Lectio*.

Because they had few books, readers had no access to any reference material which might help explain something they did not understand. Instead they had to ponder on and puzzle over the text as they read till at last they came to some understanding. This pondering of the Word is another essential element in *Lectio*, for as we have seen Scripture itself is not always straight forward reading, containing as it does words and phrases whose meaning have been lost in time. Further, Scripture is about God and so it is shrouded in mystery. If we are to understand we will have to ponder. This pondering will further cement the text into memory, making it available for later.

Our reading, then, has about it a physicality. *Lectio* is really a bodily experience involving eye, ear and lips, and memory. Coupled with this is

its calls for an open expectation by and through which we can encounter the God who speaks and to whom we can respond. There is a real sense in *Lectio* in which we do come physically into the Presence of God where a two-way conversation can take place: God speaks, we listen, and we respond — harking back to the Jewish experience on Mount Sinai, above.