

Lectio Divina

Part 7 – *Lectio* and Faithfulness

By Fr Steele Hartmann OCSO

There are a few other qualities we need to bring to our *Lectio*. We must be mindful that we do not know all about God. Thus we do need to sit and listen. Because we meet God in and through Scripture/God's Word, and because we have been exposed to the Scriptures over a long period — if nothing else, every time we attend mass they are read to us over and again in an unending cycle — we need to beware a boredom that say to us: "I've heard all this before." We must remember that we are not reading for information; that we have heard it before does not matter, for we are meeting a person, a person we are getting to know and with whom we are becoming familiar. We need to be open to meeting the person of Christ.

What deafens our hearing, what prevent us meeting, are all our old attitudes and prejudices (and which are masked by our boredom) — much in the same way as our prejudices prevent us from meeting people from other cultures and of other races. Our fears, our prejudices, our selfishness and our self-centredness will stop us from hearing God in Christ speaking to us. What we will find, though if we are willing to be a little open, is that God's word will start to challenge these very attitudes, opening us a little more, and we will begin to see in a new way. This we can find disturbing and unsettling, for it will move us out of our comfort zone demanding now that we do things differently. This is the Holy Spirit driving us. We do not always appreciate this, preferring to remain as we are (It's easier!).

Here our resistance to God's word may begin to appear: we might find ourselves beset by distractions, feel disappointed/discouraged, find ourselves cutting corners and investing less in reading, feel

bored/irritated/restless (want to be doing something else), find it all very tedious, feel God to be absent. This resistance can even contribute to the dry spells we experience in our prayer. Here it can sometimes be helpful to have the assistance of a spiritual director, someone to ask the awkward questions, which will help us come to recognise our fears, prejudices and all that block us and so to grow in self knowledge, and also to challenge us when we refuse to see that our behaviour is at variance with what we are saying in our prayer and so in need of reform. We need to be conscious of our shortcomings and therefore conscious of our need to change; this cultivates our desire for conversion.

There is much in us that resists God's word; this is part of our truth. When our resistance begins to surface we can feel we are drifting away from God, that we can't hear him anymore, and we are tempted to give it all away. It is only persistence that wins through here. It does not mean that *Lectio* is not a good thing to be doing. What it calls for is trust: that God knows what he is doing, that God will lead us to good times again, that we are growing in God.

We also need to bring fidelity to our *Lectio* because *Lectio*, as a skill, is something that gets better the more we do it. This means, as with learning any skill, that when we first start off we will do it poorly. We just have to go through this if we are to become proficient at it. It is only a commitment to doing it that will carry us through here. In contrast to this, in our first fervour we usually start off all enthusiastic. This enthusiasm is part of the lubricant that helps us get through the learning period. But this soon gives way to a more seasoned equanimity, where the emphasis is on faith and fidelity, where we just have to simply go with our belief that *Lectio* is a good thing to do and stick with it, trusting that God will do his part. Again the challenge here will be to remain faithful, to remain open to God's shaping word.

Then, too, life these days is very busy — there is any number of reasons why we should be doing something else. Prayer is very acquiescent: to any urgent request it will readily give way. Good excuses may absolve us of any blame, but they don't help us achieve our goal (this applies to anything: doing *Lectio* each day; seeking God; contemplation). Unless we give prayer a priority and commit to it, it will not happen. We need to define ourselves as one who meets the Lord daily in *Lectio*. This will keep us returning, even if we occasionally miss.

Further, we are aiming to learn how to live. We believe we will achieve this by following Christ's teaching, by conforming ourselves to the pattern of the Gospels. This presupposes some attempt to live it, to put it into practice. This doesn't just happen, but takes time as we come to understand and see more clearly. Our many attempts to reform, to do as the Gospel seems to demand, will fail. It is only when we come to see and understand what God's Word really means AND means to me — that is, to see and understand how I can embody the Gospel — that we will be able to take it on board.

Only a willingness to sit, and perhaps for along time, with the discomfort of the challenge will bring us to this clarity. This will only happen if we allow ourselves to be constantly exposed to God's Word and the call inherent in it; I must let God's Word address my situation continually; I must read regularly. Our faithfulness, then, becomes the concrete expression of our willingness to reform our lives, our ongoing "Yes!" to God's plan for us, our assent to being made anew in the likeness of Christ — though it may initially feel like being unmade, for we first need to be pruned and have our roots dug around before we can bear fruit.