

Practicing Silence – Lectio Divina

During this time we are going to practice a method of reading the Word called *lectio divina* (pronounced lex-ee-oh dih-vee-nuh).

“Lectio Divina is a slow contemplative praying of the Scriptures that allows them to become God’s personal communication to me in word and God presence to me in silence.” LA Myers

Over 300 years ago Madam Jeanne Guyon wrote a book entitled, Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ. (Also titled, A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer). It is comforting to me to see that there is a relationship between these two titles.

To experience the depths of Jesus Christ is a very simple process. It takes discipline but it is available to all of us. This method of reading the Word has been practiced since the mid-sixth century as developed by the Rule of Saint Benedict of Nursia. During the Reformation and Enlightenment this older process of reading the Bible (or other spiritual works) devotionally was set aside for more *rational study* of God’s Word. Since that time we have tended to approach reading the Word from this more rational mindset. We think of Bible study as the preferred method, this more rational mindset. We think of Bible study as a preferred method, reading the text with our minds engaged and our study resources at the ready. While this is important for our growth, we have left behind the *devotional* reading of God’s Word, this lectio divina.

Silence is something to which we are not accustomed. We tend to fill up our days with noise and busyness, important and unimportant tasks. Be prepared at first to feel somewhat uncomfortable with this new experience. As you do the work of being silent before Christ, know that *this please Him greatly*. It is a tithe of your time to Him and extended time with just you and your Lord will bring a new depth to your faith.

The purpose of this extended time is *not to get through the material, but instead to ‘get into His presence*. So, you may read one passage and go no further. Others will read these passages and then go back and focus on one or two. The format is open-ended to let you interact with the Spirit.

Here are the guidelines for this exercise, which will take about one hour.

1. Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit.
2. Calm your mind from the busyness of the day. Breathe deeply and focus on Jesus Christ. A short phrase from Scripture may help (i.e., *the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want*) or just a short prayer of your own, whatever allows you to set aside the world’s clamor and concentrate on your desire to be with the Lord and His great desire to meet with you. Plan on at least 5-10 minutes for this time; often it will take longer to ‘get centered’ in Christ. We are in no rush here. Jesus has all of eternity – so he isn’t in a hurry.

Pray asking the Lord to meet you during this time, to guide you and help you to hear his message for you through His Word.

3. Read the passage through once; to get familiar with it (see attached suggestions).
4. Now re-read the passage much more slowly. During this reading ‘listen’ for a word or phrase that stands out and catches your attention. Write it down. It can help to read the passage softly out loud, you will often hear the passage in a different way by doing so.

5. Be quiet and listen for a few minutes. Then slowly repeat the word or phrase. As Madame Guyon says, “You should always remember that you are not doing this to gain some understanding of what you have read; rather, you are reading in order to turn your mind from outward things to the deep parts of your being. You are not there to learn or to read, but you are there to experience the presence of your Lord.”
6. Read the passage again being aware of the passage as a whole and how your word or phrase fits into it. You may at this point discover that another word or phrase stands out to you: write it down. Let the Lord guide you. You may find that you will move to the new phase and perhaps the tension between the two has a meaning to be considered.
7. Meditate on your words for a while. What is your response? Is there a physical response (tightening of the stomach or jaw; an opening of yourself in some area that has been closed; a relaxing of your muscles)? How would you describe your emotional response? Anger, joy, frustration, hopes, curiosity, or peace? What life experiences does it bring to mind? What thoughts or pictures or images come to mind? Remember you are not alone, the Lord is with you interacting with you through His Word and your response to it. Write it down.

Note: Perhaps the word or passage brings to mind someone you know. Try as you might, you seem to be led to think of that person or a specific situation. This is an invitation from Christ to intercede on that person(s) behalf.

8. Read the passage slowly a fourth time. Again let your word or phrase be a starting point for your conversation with the Lord.
 - Tell Him what you have noticed.
 - Ask Him what you don't understand.
 - Ask what it is that He would like you to do as a result of this time.

Note: This may or may not be a powerful time. He may just want to affirm His love for you. That's GREAT. He may bring up something He has mentioned in the past; or someone. He may want you to call or visit someone. He may want you to pray for someone.

9. Use this word or phrase as a reminder through this next week and beyond as a way to refresh your day and to recall the reality of the Lord's presence with you. Let it encourage you as you step out to *live out* what you have learned this day.

If you have set this time aside and are reading this. ***Congratulations!*** You have won the first battle.
Many others this day did not.

Expect the Lord, Himself, to meet you during this time.