

'Lectio Divina' for Lent



Every year the Season of Lent provides us with the opportunity and the challenge to prioritise God in our lives. There are three pillars to making a good Lent: Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving. This year, as part of the Daughters of Zion experience of Lent, you will be taking on the great prayer discipline of praying with Sacred Scripture. For some this may be an entirely new way of praying. However, while it may be new to you, this is an ancient practice of prayer known as Lectio Divina – which could be translated as Holy Reading, Divine Reading or Spiritual Reading. Each day of Lent you will use the Gospel that will be read at Mass that day (see Chart overleaf) as the text of Scripture to be prayed with.

What is Lectio Divina?

Lectio Divina is a way of praying that involves reading a short passage of Sacred Scripture meditatively and attentively. This is the Divine Word of God and praying Lectio Divina with His Word aids us in our union with Christ. This is not, however, scripture study, as our objective is deeper prayer and transformation of the heart not filling the head with great learning and intellectual ideas. We engage with God's Holy Word so as to arrive at an encounter with the Lord himself in our prayer.

In Lectio Divina, the chosen biblical text is slowly read three to four times, giving an opportunity to think deeply about it and respond thoughtfully and prayerfully. When we practice Lectio Divina, we can imagine we're actually involved in the events of scripture – for example, hearing Jesus' teaching about the Beatitudes or experiencing some of his great miracles. It can be an intensely personal experience.

There are 4 classic stages to Lectio Divina, but nowadays a 5th stage is usual also (where we commit to put into practice what we have received in prayer). The five steps are: **Lectio** (Reading), **Meditatio** (Meditation), **Oratio** (Prayer), **Contemplatio** (Contemplation), and **Actio** (Action). Do not let these Latin terms frighten you off. They will be explained in due course.

During Lent you will commit to daily praying Lectio Divina with a particular passage from the Gospels. Opposite you will find the reading for each day of Lent – these are passages that you will hear each day of Lent if you were to attend daily Mass.

It is not necessary to take the whole text to prayer, a portion of it, a few lines, will suffice; especially as some of the Gospel passages in Lent are quite long. Read and then focus on a smaller portion of it that strikes you at first reading.

The prayer of Lectio Divina has been a tradition within the Church for many centuries, but unfortunately it often was not accessible to many who were either unable to read, or, (before the printing press), a bible manuscript was a luxury which only the very rich and the monasteries could afford. Thankfully, nowadays we have very little difficulty in having access to the Holy Word of God; and so, in our day, the practice of Lectio Divina is growing in popularity and fruitfulness in the lives of many lay people. And the Church encourages her people to pick up their bibles and pray in this ancient and beautiful way:

“It is especially necessary that listening to the word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient and ever valid tradition of Lectio Divina, which draws from the biblical text the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives.”
Pope St. John Paul II

“If this practice (Lectio Divina) is promoted with efficacy, I am convinced that it will produce a new spiritual springtime in the Church.”
Pope Benedict XVI

“There is one particular way of listening to what the Lord wishes to tell us in his Word and of letting ourselves be transformed by the Spirit. It is what we call Lectio Divina. It consists of reading God’s word in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us.”
Pope Francis

“And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the Divine Scriptures.”
St. Ambrose

Before you begin your time of Lectio Divina it is important to set aside things which will distract you, be on your own, and set aside a definite amount of time (20 – 30 minutes).

Always begin your time of prayer by becoming aware of and acknowledging the presence of God and thanking him for his words which he will speak to you during your Lectio Divina. It is also important to simply ask the Holy Spirit to help you to pray fruitfully and attentively – he is, after all, the author of the Scriptures you are about to engage with.

Lectio: Slowly read the passage for the first time. You can never be too slow. Pay attention to each word. Since you are on your own, reading the passage audibly might help. What words or phrases stand out? Pay attention – there is a reason why this word or phrase strikes you rather than the one before it or the one after it. Read the whole passage to the end. If it is long then choose a section. Then read that again slowly.

Meditatio: The word ‘meditation’ can conjure up many exalted notions for people. Here it simply means to reflect prayerfully. On your 3rd reading of the text, pause at those words and phrases that have struck a chord. Ponder their meaning, perhaps put yourself in the scene. Apply your mind to what you have read. What questions, challenges or consolations does the text present to you. Does this word resonate with any life experiences you have had? Read the text again – slowly. Pondering on the word of God, mulling it over will naturally lead you to the next stage in this time set aside for prayer.

Oratio: Here you begin to converse with God, in the silence of your heart, about the things you were pondering in your time of meditation. Do not talk to yourself. Talk to God. Begin by thanking him for his words to you. Keep the conversation focused on what has come up in your meditation. It came up because it is what God wants to have a conversation with you about. And remember this is meant to be a dialogue, not a monologue. So speak to God, but allow time to quieten your heart – so that God can communicate to you in that silence. And here we move to the next stage in the Lectio:

Contemplatio: Here you simply spend time quietly resting in the loving presence of God. At this stage we are not trying to meditate, nor even to communicate something, we are simply trying to enjoy the fact that the Lord delights to be with us and that to be near God is a joy. In this quiet the Lord may well ‘speak’ in the inner depths of the soul. (This is not to be thought of as expecting to receive an apparition or interior locution, which are extremely rare, even in the lives of the great saints.) The Lord communicates in many ways to us. As a mother cradles her sleeping child in her arms and gazes with immense love upon that child – so God’s eyes are upon you. In this time, rest in that look of love and try also to return that interior gaze of love.

Actio: It is now time for you to bring your Lectio Divina to a close. At this stage it is once more important to give thanks to God. It is time now, also, to make a resolution. I have met with God, heard his word and spoken with him about it. Now what will I do? How will I put into practice the Word in my daily life today? Be specific in your resolution(s) – even if it is only something seemingly small.

Lectio Divina for the Lenten Journey

Gospel passages for each day (as per Mass of that day)

ASH WEDNESDAY	Matthew 6:1-6	Saturday March 29 th	Luke 18: 9-14
Thursday March 6 th	Luke 9: 22 – 25	Sunday March 30 th	Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32
Friday March 7 th	Matt 9:14-15	Monday March 31 st	John 4:43-54
Saturday March 8 th	Luke 5:27-32	Tuesday April 1 st	John 5: 1-16
Sunday March 9 th	Luke 4: 1-13	Wednesday April 2 nd	John 5: 17-30
Monday March 10 th	Matt 25:31-46	Thursday April 3 rd	John 5: 31-47
Tuesday March 11 th	Matt 6: 7-15	Friday April 4 th	John 7: 1 – 2, 25-30
Wednesday March 12 th	Luke 11: 29-32	Saturday April 5 th	John 7: 40-52
Thursday March 13 th	Matt 7: 7-12	Sunday April 6 th	John 8: 1-11
Friday March 14 th	Matt 5:20-26	Monday April 7 th	John 8: 12-20
Saturday March 15 th	Matt 5: 43-48	Tuesday April 8 th	John 8: 21-30
Sunday March 16 th	Luke 9: 28-36	Wednesday April 9 th	John 8:31-42
St. Patrick 17 th	Matt 13: 24-32	Thursday April 10 th	John 8: 51-59
Tuesday March 18 th	Matt 23:1-12	St. Gemma Galgani 11 th	John 10: 31-42
St. Joseph 19 th	Luke 2: 41-51	Saturday April 12 th	John 11: 45-56
Thursday March 20 th	Luke 16:19-31	Palm Sunday 13th	Luke 19: 28-40
Friday March 21 st	Matt 21: 33-46	Monday April 14 th	John 12: 1-11
Saturday March 22 nd	Luke 15: 11-32	Tuesday April 15 th	John 13: 21-38
Sunday March 23 rd	Luke 13: 1-9	Wednesday April 16 th	Matt 26: 14-25
Monday March 24 th	Luke 4:24-30	Holy Thurs 17th	John 13: 1-15
Annunciation 25th	Luke 1: 26-38	Good Friday 18th	John 18 & John 19 (any short section)
Wednesday March 26 th	Matt 5: 17-19	Holy Saturday 19th	Luke 24: 1-18
Thursday March 27 th	Luke 11: 14-23	Easter Sunday 20th	John 20: 1-9
Friday March 28 th	Mark 12:28-34		