

Lectio Divina - Theory

From the Trappists of New Melleray Abbey in Iowa

What is *Lectio Divina*? Translating the two Latin words literally you get divine reading. The sense is sacred reading. We will use sacred reading as the English equivalent of *lectio divina*.

So we already have a first and immediate meaning of *lectio divina*: sacred reading. Since the main purpose of the Primer is practical, we will go on to examine the ways of practicing sacred reading. First, however, we want to show the theological connections of *lectio divina* with the Mystery of our religion, the revelation of the Word of God.

"God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." Every creature, and creation considered as a single whole, is created and sustained in being by the Word of God. God spoke, and it came to be. All that exists in creation is word, an expression, of God outside God's Self. It is of the nature of a spoken word to express the meaning of the speaker. God is love and all that God says, creates, bears the meaning of love. Original sin can be understood as the free creature's failure to express God's love. The entire physical cosmos culminated in the human person, intelligent and free. When human beings chose not to love, the whole of creation was diverted from expressing the love that God is. In the Original Sin, the word of God that is human and the universe, no longer carried God's meaning. They became alien to God and to their own nature.

God has Another Word, apart from all the words of creation, an Only-Begotten Word, a Son, generated by the Father from Eternity to Eternity. This is the Son, the Word who was with God in the beginning. And this Word was God. Not a creature, this interior Word of God inwardly expresses God's knowledge of God's Self. This Word is born eternally in the bosom of the Father. To redeem the world, lost in Original Sin, the Father sent God's Eternal Word into the womb of a poor maiden girl of Nazareth. The virgin's name was Mary; and her title will forever be the Blessed Mother of God. In her, a created word, the Uncreated Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Out of these reflections take special note of God's Plan of Salvation: God redeems the world by sending God's Word into it. The simplest expression of the essence of the Mystery of our religion is this: God sends God's Word and people receive It. This Divine Word restores to creature-words their lost meaning. More wonderful still, God bestows upon all who receive God an infinitely transcending meaning of love, beyond all the possibilities of a creature-word to bear the meaning of God. The Word of God does this by bestowing God's own meaning upon God's followers. "All that I have learned from the Father, I have made known to you."

Foregoing further theological speculation, lest us grasp the essentially practical point. We are saved, sanctified and glorified by receiving God's Word. This perception reveals the nature and orientation of all Christian spirituality:

† to **receive** the word

† to **become one with** the Word by receiving It

† to **be a sacrament of the received Word** for others, and, finally,

† in heaven, **to see and be assimilated to the Word-Son** eternally expressing all the Fullness of the Love that is God

...seeing, meaning, receiving and giving that Love, forever. Amen.

Receiving the Word of God - Theory

Since it all begins with the reception of God's Word, our first concern is to identify that Word in our lives. Where, then, is God's Word to be received?

God's Word comes to us in the whole of our existence and experience. Our existence is an expression of God's Word. Our temporal experience, moment by moment all through life, is a manifestation of God's Word. The ocean of being and experience reveals God's Word to us. The trouble is that we find ourselves unable to realize that our being and experience is the Word of God. We seem unable to grasp that "we live and move and have our being" in God at every instant. Doubtless, we have this blindness and deafness to God's Word because we are merely creatures and sinful creatures. God has undertaken to give sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. In God's mercy, God gives us a medicine and a therapy to enable us to see and hear God's Word.

He has given us Jesus, the Word Incarnate. We must receive Jesus in faith and love. We must grow all our life long in intimate knowledge and love of Jesus. Personal closeness to Jesus will gradually enable us to perceive God's Word always and everywhere.

We can meet Jesus and be transformed by Jesus in the Scriptures, in the Sacraments, in our loving relationships with other people, in our communion with nature and in our own hearts where God dwells. All of these "ways" deserve to be explained in detail. But this writing is only a Primer on monastic spirituality. Therefore, we will set aside the study of the Sacraments, love of neighbor and communion with nature. Union with Jesus through the Scriptures will be our present topic to be followed by a brief study of union with Jesus through prayer of the heart.