



Methods for Praying the Scriptures

(Drawn from the work of John Veltri, SJ)

Devotional reading of the Scriptures has always been a wellspring of both Jewish and Christian spiritual life. In devotional reading we seek a deeper and more authentic relationship with the God in whom we live and move and have our being, rather than to learn information and master the content of texts. As we open ourselves to the words of Scripture, we provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to pray in us.

Because we are not trying to "cover ground" or "get through" a certain amount of text, it is best to select a short passage of Scripture with which to pray, and to read it slowly with an attentive and listening heart. As we make ourselves available for God to speak a word to us personally, we bring to our listening all of our faculties of "hearing" mind, emotion, memory, and imagination; hopes, intuitions, and visions.

Two simple methods of praying the Scriptures are described below. "Spiritual reading" (or, in Latin, *lectio divina*) is an ancient discipline that has a long history in both Roman Catholic and Protestant spiritual traditions, although most closely associated with the Benedictine tradition. The second method is one that involves imaginative visualization. Whereas spiritual reading can be done with any biblical or other devotional text, imaginative visualization is best suited for use with narratives or other passages that are story-like.

For either method, it is best first to find a quiet place and time where you will be free from distractions. Have your Bible open next to you, and your prayer journal, if you wish. Choose a comfortable sitting position, one that is relaxed, yet conducive to alertness. Many people find it best to have their feet flat on the floor, with hands resting lightly in their laps. You may wish to notice any sources of muscle tension and to consciously relax those parts of your body.

Close your eyes if you wish, and spend a few minutes simply settling into quietness. Attend to the gentle rhythm of your breathing, or repeat a simple prayer phrase such as "Come, Lord Jesus" as you settle into inner stillness. If distracting thoughts arise, simply acknowledge them and then let them go.

After a few minutes of centering, begin one of the prayer exercises that follow.

Spiritual Reading

(Lectio Divina)

- (1) Read a short passage of text that you have decided upon in advance. Read slowly, letting your awareness rest in turn upon each word, savoring it. As you read, be alert for any particular word or phrase that draws your attention in a special way.
- (2) Meditate on this word or phrase, allowing it to engage you fully. Does the word upon which you are meditating connect with some aspect of your own experience? As you hold this word or phrase in your heart, let yourself become aware of any answering words, images, or memories that arise in you.
- (3) Respond to the Word you have heard, simply and directly. Your heart may call out in thanks, or praise, or joy. If the Word has been painful, your response might be one of remorse, or anger, or supplication.
- (4) Rest in God's presence, content simply to be with God.



Imaginative Visualization

- (1) Read through your text two or three times, to become familiar with it.
- (2) Use your imagination to enter into the scene you are reading about. What is the setting of the story? What are the sights, the sounds, the aromas? Who else is there in the story? What do they look like? What expressions do their faces reveal? Explore the scene as fully as you can with all your imaginative senses.
- (3) Where are you in the story in relation to the other participants? Are you one of the religious leaders? a member of the crowd? in the foreground or the background? What is your role in this drama?
- (4) Let the story unfold and develop in your imagination. Does someone speak to you? What do they say? What do you say in reply? Is there other action, and do you play a part in it? What are your feelings as the scene evolves?
- (5) After the action has concluded, what do you do? Do you go somewhere or tell someone? What do you tell them about what you just experienced? How do you describe the meaning of what has happened?
- (6) Allow your attention to come back to the present, being open to any insights or questions that may have arisen.