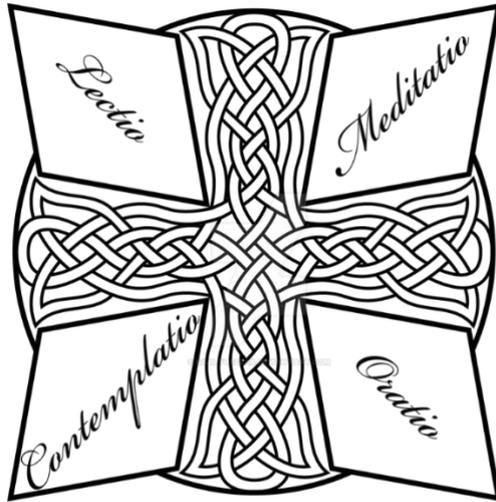


Lectio Divina



Pat Collins C.M.

Part One: Introduction

A number of years ago I accepted invitations, on two separate occasions, to speak to large gatherings of the Legion of Mary in All Hallows College, Dublin. It is worth mentioning that I was a member of the Legion as a boy, went on *Peregrinatio pro Christo* in Bristol and the Shetland Islands, met and spoke with Frank Duff and I continue to have great admiration for the Legion's efforts at evangelisation. However, on the two occasions I talked to Legion members in All Hallows, I asked those present to take out their bibles to look at designated passages. I was disappointed to find that out of a total of around 300 or so people only one or two had a bible with them. When I asked who had a rosary, there were only one or two who hadn't. I mention this to illustrate a point. Sadly, even the most committed Catholics, such as members of the Legion of Mary, still do not read or pray the scriptures on a regular basis. This is disappointing in view of the fact that ever since Vatican II, in the nineteen sixties, the Church has repeatedly urged Catholics to cultivate a spirituality which is scripture based, e.g., rooted in the liturgical readings read publicly at Mass, and prayerful reading of the scriptures in private. Apparently, St Teresa of Avila was of the opinion that,

“All the troubles of the Church, all the evils in the world, flow from this source: that people do not by clear and sound knowledge and serious consideration penetrate into the truths of Sacred Scripture.”

In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI, said that *Lectio Divina*, (i.e., divine reading),

“If it is effectively promoted, will bring to the Church – I am convinced of it – a new spiritual springtime.”



Origin of *lectio divina*

According to Jean Leclercq, OSB, while *lectio divina* had its roots in early Christianity, the founders of the mature medieval version were Saints Benedict and Pope Gregory I. Perhaps its most eloquent exponent in the medieval period was Guigo II (1142-1193) a Carthusian. In a letter on the contemplative life, entitled, *The Ladder of Monks*, he said,

“Reading seeks for the sweetness of a blessed life, meditation perceives it, prayer asks for it, contemplation tastes it. Reading, as it were, puts food whole into the mouth, meditation chews it and breaks it up, prayer extracts its flavour, contemplation is the sweetness itself which gladdens and refreshes. Reading works on the outside, meditation on the pith [soft inner part]: prayer asks for what we long for, contemplation gives us delight in the sweetness which we have found.”

In the 16th century St John of the Cross (1542-1593) described *lectio divina* even more succinctly when he said,

“Seek in reading and you shalt find in meditation; knock in prayer and it shall be opened in contemplation.”

Scripture on scripture

The New Testament authors often spoke about the importance of God’s word. Here is a sequence of things they said,

“All scripture is inspired by God...it is something alive and active....it is the sword of the Spirit....it can judge the secret

thoughts and emotions of the heart.....and is useful for teaching truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for living” (2 Tim 3:1; Heb 4:12; Eph 6:7; 2 Tim 3:1).

In 2 Cor 3:18 St Paul wrote,

“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

We contemplate God’s glory, first and foremost, in and through the scriptures. As we absorb their spiritual meaning, they reveal the presence and will of God in a way that brings about inner transformation which enables us to live in Christ all that he himself lived.

Church Teaching

The Church is very clear in its teaching about the importance of having a scripture-based spirituality. In 2001 St John Paul II published an apostolic letter entitled *At the Beginning of the New Millennium* in which he described, among other things, how to respond to the two universal calls to holiness and evangelisation. One cannot be holy without evangelising and you cannot evangelise effectively without being holy. In par. 39 *At the Beginning of the New Millennium* St. John Paul wrote,

“There is no doubt that the primacy of holiness and prayer is inconceivable without a renewed listening to the word of God.”

Then he went on to acknowledge that,

“Ever since the Second Vatican Council underlined the pre-eminent role of the word of God in the life of the Church, great progress has certainly been made in devout listening to Sacred Scripture and attentive study of it.”

Further on in par. 39 he wrote,

“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.”

Finally, the Pontiff noted:

“It is above all the work of evangelisation and catechesis which is drawing new life from attentiveness to the word of God.”

One characteristic of many pious Catholics is their propensity to quote seers that they have heard about. Sometimes there is validity in what they report. But what amazes me is the number of pious Catholics who rarely, if ever, quote what Popes have said in official and authoritative documents. John Paul II was a marvellous theologian and a saint. When he wrote *At the Beginning of the New Millennium* he strongly stressed the fact that Catholic spirituality had to be rooted in and energised by prayerful attentiveness to the word of God. At times I have been disappointed by how little attention some practising Catholics give to God’s word, in view of the Church’s repeated statements about its foundational importance.

The Word of God in the Liturgy

Recent Popes have also highlighted the importance of God’s word in the Christian life and mission. For example, in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI published the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *The Word of God*. In par. 86 he said,

“The privileged place for the prayerful reading of sacred Scripture is the liturgy, and particularly the Eucharist.”

Par. 10 of *The Introduction to the Lectionary* says that the Church
“Has honoured the word of God and the Eucharistic mystery with the same reverence.”

Often Catholics put the emphasis very firmly on the presence of the Lord in the Eucharist – and of course it is warranted – but often they overlook the fact that God is equally present in his word and therefore deserving of the same reverence as the consecrated bread and wine.

Speaking about the Biblical readings at Mass, par. 7 of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* says that Christ himself,

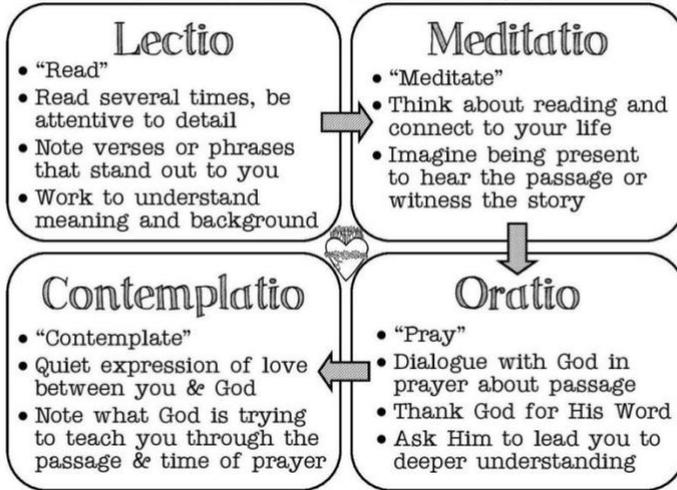
“Is present in his word, since it is he who speaks when Scripture is read in Church.”

People sometimes say that when they are praying they talk to God but God doesn't seem to say anything to them. I am inclined to respond, ‘how can you say that? when you listen to the Scriptures in the Church, God is speaking to you. God is present in his word and it is he who communicates with you in and through the readings. Of course, this is equally true when you are reading Scripture in private, God is speaking to you in and through his inspired and inspiring word. As par. 25 of the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* assures us,

“Prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and human beings may talk together; for we speak to him when we pray; *we* hear him when we read the divine sayings.”

It is worth noting that on Sundays and feast days there are usually three readings. On the ordinary Sundays of the year, the first and third readings are harmonized and highlight a particular point, e.g. the need for repentance. During Lent the three readings are usually harmonized. It is a good idea, if you are focusing on the gospel when engaged in *lectio divina*, to read the first two readings because they will give you a strong clue, especially in Lent as to what the main point is in the gospel reading.

Lectio Divina



Part Two: *Lectio Divina*

Not surprisingly, in its official documents the Church recommends different forms of prayer, but especially *Lectio Divina*. In par. 133 of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* we read:

“The Church forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful...to learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ, by frequent reading of the scriptures.”

In saying this the *Catechism* echoed something St Jerome wrote in the 5th century, ““Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ!”

Here is a summary description of the 4 steps in *Lectio Divina* which is the form of prayerful reading of the scriptures most recommended by the Church. They are taken from par 87 of Pope Benedict’s *The Word of God*:

- 1) “*Lectio Divina* opens with the reading (***lectio***) of a text, which leads to a desire to understand its true content: *what does the biblical text say in itself?* Without this, there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas.
- 2) Next comes meditation (***meditatio***), which asks: *what does the biblical text say to us?* Here, each person, individually but also as a member of the community, must let himself or herself be moved and challenged.
- 3) Following this comes prayer (***oratio***), which asks the question: *what do we say to the Lord in response to his word?* Prayer, as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise, is the primary way by which the word transforms us.”
- 4) *Lectio divina* concludes with contemplation (***contemplatio***), during which we take up, as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality, and ask ourselves *what conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us? . . .* Contemplation aims at creating within us a truly wise and discerning vision of reality, as God sees it.”

We end up, as a result of contemplation, seeing the world as God sees it, no longer from a merely human point of view but from a divine perspective. In Prov 29:18 it says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish”. What the Pope is saying is that when you engage in *Lectio Divina* and particularly contemplation, that is where you get your vision, God’s vision for the world and that in turn will bring renewal, not only to the people who pray, but to the people they are in contact with. Now we will go on to look at each point in more detail.



Preliminary Prayer for Inspiration

Lectio Divina begins with a prayer asking for divine guidance. A document on evangelisation which *was* published by the Irish Episcopal Conference, contains the following prayer:

“Compassionate God, anoint me with your Holy Spirit, as I read your Word, and let me hear your voice speaking to me within. May your word be the joy of my heart and a lamp for my steps. I desire to build my life on your word. Give me the wisdom to understand what you are saying to me. May I rejoice in the blessedness of hearing your word and keeping it. Speak Lord your servant is listening.”

Another prayer taken from the Divine Office says,

“In the Scriptures by the Spirit, may we see the Saviour’s face, hear his word and heed his calling, know his will and grow in grace.”



1. *Lectio*/Reading of the Passage

Having said a prayer asking for inspiration, one begins by reading a chosen text. It could be any passage you choose, e.g., because of its relevance to you at a particular time. For instance, if a person was afflicted by fear and anxiety, he or she could read, Is 41:10,

“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

If one is praying on one’s own it is good to read the passage twice, firstly, to become familiar with what it literally says. St Anselm wrote:

“The scriptures are not to be read in a noisy situation, but where things are quiet, not superficially and in a rush, but a little at a time.”

Secondly, we seek to notice any word, idea or verse that stands out. It is important to listen to the text with self-forgetful attention. In Prov 4:20-22 we read,

“My son, pay attention to what I say, turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one’s whole body.”

It is interesting to note that not only did Jesus urge people to listen to Him but also to seek to understand what he said. In Mt 15:10-11 we read, "Listen and understand" and in Mk 7:14-15, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand." Another phrase he used on a number of

occasions was, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mk 4:9; 23, Lk 8:8; 14:35). There are a number of texts in the Gospels which talk about people listening to the Lord. In Lk 5:1 we read that, “the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God.” In Lk 15:1 we are told that, “the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.” In the story of Jesus’ visit to Mary and Martha, we are told that the former, “sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said” (Lk 10:39).

In the parable of the sower Jesus explained that while some people do listen to God’s word they do not understand it, as he said they have, “ears but fail to hear” (Mk 8:18). He explained, “When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart” (Mt 13:19). Surely, this is a very significant point. We can hear the word in a literal sense while failing to appreciate its spiritual meaning. As a result, the devil snatches it away before it has its intended effect (Cf. Mt 15:10).

Understanding scripture

Par. 12 of the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* says,

“Since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.”

What the Dogmatic Constitution on *Divine Revelation* of Vatican II is saying is that when the Scriptures were written down, it was two thousand years ago. They were written by Jewish people living in a particular culture. Their way of looking at the world was different from ours; their experience of life was also different in many respects. Pope Francis observed in par. 147 of *The Joy of the Gospel*,

“I want to insist here on something which may seem obvious, but which is not always taken into account: the biblical text

which we study is two or three thousand years old; its language is very different from that which we speak today. Even if we think we understand the words translated into our own language, this does not mean that we correctly understand what the sacred author wished to say.”

So, there is a distinct danger that we would read the Scriptures from a 21st century point of view. What the Church is saying is that you have to get into the mind and point of view of the people who wrote the Scriptures. In order to do that you should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended. You have to do a certain amount of Scripture study in order to do this with a view to seeing what relevance their insights have for the people of the 21st century.

Pope Benedict XVI says in par. 87 of *The Word of the Lord*, that *Lectio*

“Opens with the reading of a text, which leads to a desire to understand its true content: what does the biblical text say in itself? Without this, there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas.”

Pope Francis observed in par. 152 of his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*

“The spiritual reading of a text must start with its literal sense. Otherwise, we can easily make the text say what we think is convenient, and useful for confirming us in our previous decisions, suited to our own patterns of thought.”

Without this kind of objective approach, there is always a risk that one interprets the text in terms of one’s own preconceived ideas. As George Bernard Shaw wrote,

“No man ever believes that the Bible means what it says: He is always convinced that it says what he means.”

Protestant scripture scholar D. A. Carson has written,

“A text without a context is a pretext for a proof text” (i.e., to say whatever you want it to say).

It is important to stress that when we talk about the literal meaning of a text, that does not imply that we adopt a fundamentalist approach. Fundamentalism is a religious movement emphasizing biblical literalism. Fundamentalists usually believe in the historical accuracy of the Bible and all of the events which are recorded in it, e.g., the world being created in seven days. Writing about fundamentalism, Pope Benedict said in par.44 of *The Word of God*,

“The literalism championed by the fundamentalist approach actually represents a betrayal of both the literal and spiritual sense and opens the way to various forms of manipulation.”

In order to avoid a fundamentalist approach, the Church recommends that Catholics learn how to interpret the scriptures.

The Vat II Dogmatic Constitution *Word of God* says in par 12.:

“Seeing that, in sacred Scripture, God speaks through human beings in human fashion, it follows that the interpreters of sacred Scripture, if they are to ascertain what God has wished to communicate to us, should carefully search out the meaning which the sacred writers really had in mind, that meaning which God had thought well to manifest through the medium of their words”

In 1943 Pope Pius XII drew scholars’ attention in pars 33, and 34 of his encyclical, *By the inspiration of the Spirit*, to the importance of distinguishing the variety of literary forms used in Scripture:

“Let the interpreter then, with all care and without neglecting any light derived from recent research, endeavour to determine

- the peculiar character and circumstances of the sacred writer,
- the age in which he lived,
- the sources written or oral to which he had recourse
- and the forms of expression he employed.

Thus, can he better understand who was the inspired author, and what he wishes to express by his writings. There is no one indeed but knows that the supreme rule of interpretation is to discover and define what the writer intended to express...”

In more recent years, St John Paul II said,

“Attention must be given to the literary forms of the various biblical books in order to determine the intentions of the sacred writers. And it is most helpful, at times crucial, to be aware of the personal situation of the biblical writer, of the circumstances of culture, time, language, etc., which influenced the way the message was presented....In this way, it is possible to avoid a narrow fundamentalism which distorts the whole truth.”

In par. 42 of the *Word of God*, Pope Benedict had this to say about difficult, problematic passages in the Bible,

“It must be remembered first and foremost that biblical revelation is deeply rooted in history. God’s plan is manifested progressively, and it is accomplished slowly, in successive stages and despite human resistance. God chose a people and patiently worked to guide and educate them. Revelation is suited to the cultural and moral level of distant times and thus describes facts and customs, such as cheating and trickery, and acts of violence and massacre, without explicitly denouncing the immorality of such things.”

In other words, there is an evolution of moral and religious consciousness evident in the Old Testament. Whereas in the earliest passages there is a tendency to project human characteristics on to

God, such as anger, retribution, and jealousy, in the later writings anthropomorphic tendencies are less in evidence. For example, whereas King David was a violent man, his descendant Jesus was opposed to violence.

Two or three resources can be helpful in discovering the literal meaning of the text:

- A Study Bible, with good explanatory footnotes, e.g., *The New American Bible: Revised Edition* or *The Catholic Study Bible: Third Edition*
- A Biblical Commentary, - this is more the 'honours course' and it is for people who are a bit more academic in their approach to life, e.g., *New Collegerville Bible Commentary*
- The help of a Scripture Scholar who can explain the background to the text.



2. *Meditatio*/Meditation

Having read the chosen passage a couple of times, one goes on to reflect on its *spiritual* meaning and implications. Two questions are helpful in this regard.

- Firstly, what was the inspired author trying to say in this passage?
- Secondly, has the passage any relevance in my life and in the lives of the people around me? Pope Francis says in par. 153 of *The Joy of the Gospel* that we can ask questions like these:

“Lord, what does this text say *to me*? What is it about my life that you want to change by this text? What troubles me about this text? Why am I not interested in this? Or perhaps: What do I find pleasant in this text? What is it about this word that moves me? What attracts me? Why does it attract me?”

There are two ways of carrying out this advice. If you are reflecting on a doctrinal point, it can be helpful to repeat a chosen word or sentence, over and over again, while letting its meaning sink into the heart. It is rather like sucking a lozenge. You savour its meaning. If you are reflecting on a scriptural incident, e.g., one of our Lord’s miracles, it can be helpful as Ignatius of Loyola suggested, to imagine the incident as if you were making a mental video.

- ◆ *See* the scene and the people who are mentioned. You may choose to see yourself as one of the characters involved.
- ◆ *Hear* what is said. You may want to add to the dialogue that is recorded in the text.
- ◆ *Notice* what the characters do.
- ◆ *Sense* what the people feel.

I have found that if the story is about Jesus, I can try to empathise with him. I try to get inside his skin so to speak, in order to sense in an understanding way what he felt.

A text is coming to mind, Mark 6:30-34, where Jesus wanted to take a break with the apostles and so they went to a lonely place where they could be on their own. But the people had anticipated where they were going and they were waiting for Jesus when he arrived. Instead of being angry with them, Jesus had compassion on them for they were sad and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus senses their confusion, their longings and he has compassion on them. I find this verse 34 very powerful because I think it is the compassionate basis for our evangelisation and ministry in the power of the Spirit.



3. *Oratio*/Prayer

Pray from the heart, allowing rational reflection to express itself in the form of a conversation with the Lord when you tell him about your personal reactions to the text. St Vincent de Paul once wrote:

“The soul is like a sailboat equipped with oars. The oars are not used unless the wind fails, and then progress isn’t as rapid or as pleasant as when the ship is moving along under a fair breeze. Similarly, we have need of reflection in prayer when special assistance from the Holy Spirit is not forthcoming, but when the heavenly breeze blows upon the heart, we must yield ourselves to its influence.”

We do this when we tell the Lord about our feelings such as love, joy, gratitude, sorrow, desire and the like, which were evoked by reflection on the text. In this regard, St Benedict said: “Let the prayer be brief and pure.” Once distractions occur go back to reading and reflecting, in the way already described, until you can pray again

Interim Summary

Lectio Divina is a two-way activity. In the first three steps the emphasis is on what the person does

- 1) reading
- 2) meditating
- 3) praying

Once that has been completed it is time to attend in a contemplative way to what God does by revealing the

- 1) Divine presence which we savour

- 2) A spiritual understanding of revealed truth, e.g., “the length and breadth, the height and depth of the love of Jesus,” (cf. Eph 3:18).
- 3) An inspired sense of the will of God.

In the Contemplative phase, the emphasis is on what God communicates, namely the divine presence, the divine word and the divine will.



4. *Contemplatio*/Contemplation

The word contemplation is derived from Latin and means, "to gaze attentively, to observe." Perhaps the best definition of contemplation I have come across is to be found in par. 51 of John Paul II's encyclical *Lord and Giver of Life* where he says that in its deepest essence it,

“Is the openness of the human heart to the gift: to God's self-communication in the Holy Spirit.”

Pope Benedict XVI says in par 87 of the *Word of the Lord*,

“Contemplation aims at creating within us a truly wise and discerning vision of reality, as God sees it, and at forming within us “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16).”

When they get to this fourth stage of *Lectio Divina* people can say to Jesus,

“Reveal your presence, words and will to me as I rest before you.”

By way of preparation, I have found that two things are helpful.

Firstly, I quieten my body by sitting with my back straight and my arms either folded or resting gently on my knees. Once I have assumed my prayer pose I try to remain completely still without moving a muscle. I find that if my body is quiet, my mind also tends to become quiet. As Psalm 46:10 says:

“Be still and know that I am God.” (i.e., focus on God's presence and attributes).

Also psalm 37:7 says,

“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.” (i.e. wait on the revelation of the divine word and will).

So, in Contemplation I am trying to focus on the presence of God, the word of God and the will of God.

Secondly, I try to quieten my mind. To do this some people pray in tongues under their breath. It enables them to express their yearnings for God, while at the same time being passive in the sense that tongues do not involve images or concepts originating from their own minds. As St Paul observed,

"If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful."
(1 Cor 14:14).

I have found that praying in tongues is rather like a farmer ploughing his field in readiness to receive the seed. As I pray in the spirit, my soul is prepared to receive inspiration and revelation. As we read in Jeremiah 33:3,

“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”

That is clearly a reference to revelation. I am going beyond what I know from a natural point of view. God is going to reveal something of the divine nature to me, of the divine word (i.e., the mysteries of faith) and God is going to reveal the divine will to me.

St. Vincent de Paul on Contemplation

In the 17th century St Vincent de Paul said,

"The thoughts and considerations which come from our own reflections are feeble lights, showing us only the outside of things, and nothing else. The lights of grace which the Son of Justice shines into our souls penetrate to the very depths of our heart,

bringing forth marvelous fruits. We must ask God to enlighten us himself and to inspire in us what pleases him."

In saying these things Vincent was describing contemplation. If you read between the lines of what St. Vincent de Paul is saying, he is describing inspiration and even revelation of a prophetic kind.

- When you are inspired by God's grace, ideas that you already had can be transformed in such a way that they have new spiritual meaning. That is what can be referred to as an inspiration.
- But if person receives a revelation, God imparts something into your mind that has not occurred to you at all from a human point of view. A prophet is somebody who speaks on God's behalf because he or she reveals to others what God has revealed to him or her in prayer. Prophecy does not depend on your knowledge, your intelligence or your experience.

Speaking about this subject to Daughters of Charity St Vincent said,

"The other sort of prayer is called contemplation. In this the soul, in the presence of God, does nothing else but receive from him what he bestows. It is without action, and God himself inspires it, without any effort on the soul's part, with all it can desire, and far more."

He added,

"God communicates many and excellent lights to his servants. In prayer, he enlightens their understanding with many truths incomprehensible to all save those who give themselves to prayer."

No doubt the truths which Vincent referred to included not only truths about the divine mysteries, but also about the purposes and will of God. Toward the end of his life St Vincent said to a young priest who he had appointed to be the superior in a seminary:

"Contemplation is the reservoir in which you will receive the instructions you need to fulfil the duties on which you are now about to enter. When in doubt, have recourse to God and say to him: 'O Lord, you are the Father of light, teach me what I ought to do in this circumstance. I give you this advice not only for those difficulties which will cause you pain, but also that *you may learn from God directly* what you shall have to teach, preach and share.'"

Like Jesus who said to the apostles and disciples, "I only say what the Father has told me to say," (John 12:49), Vincent is saying that the Christian should say 'I only teach and preach what God has revealed to me' – that really is what 'anoined' teaching and preaching is, not a person giving book-learning but heart-knowledge which they have learned in their prayer time, as a result of contemplation.

How Inspirations and Revelations can be received

During restful periods of contemplation, a person can have:

- ◆ A heartfelt sense of the presence and attributes of God. It is not just believing that God is present, it's having a heartfelt sense of the divine. It is not just believing that you are loved by God, it is an experiential sense of that love.
- ◆ A new understanding of a Christian mystery, or scripture truth
- ◆ A meaningful image
- ◆ A meaningful inner vision
- ◆ A word of knowledge about a person
- ◆ A prophetic message which would reveal God's attitude to current and impending events in the world.

As Isaiah 48:6-7 says,

"From this time forth I announce to you new things, hidden things that you have not known. They are created now, not long ago; before today you have never heard of them, lest you should say, 'Behold, I knew them.'"

Resolution

Make a Resolution

Once a person has a revelation of God's presence, word and will in prayer, the fruits of *Lectio Divina* should flow out into his or her daily life. Pope Benedict XVI said in par. 87 of *The Word of God*,

“We do well also to remember that the process of *lectio divina* is not concluded until it arrives at action (*actio*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity.”

One of the ways in which this can happen is by making a resolution at the end of prayer. In the words of St Thomas Aquinas, *contemplata aliis tradere*, i.e., "hand down to others the fruits of contemplation." As Vincent de Paul wrote,

“Sentiments of love of God, of kindness, of good will, praiseworthy as these may be, are often suspect if they do not result in good deeds. Our Saviour said that his Father is glorified in our bearing much fruit. We should be on our guard, for it is possible to be well mannered exteriorly and filled with noble sentiments toward the Almighty in our minds and stop there. When the occasion for action arises, such people fall short.”

This is typical of Vincent's practical, down to earth approach to the Christian life. The person contemplates the Lord in order to express what he or she has sensed, understood or heard in the form of loving acts of evangelisation and service. Not surprisingly, he stressed the importance of making practical resolutions at the end of one's prayer time. They flow from one's contemplation of the presence and purposes of the Lord. Vincent said,

“The main fruit of prayer consists of personal resolutions strongly and firmly made. They should be resolutions which you

are convinced of and which you are prepared to undertake, taking into account the obstacles to be overcome.”

He also said they should be ‘single, precise and possible’. Saying at the end of your prayer that I am going to convert the whole of Dublin or Cork just isn’t realistic, so instead if I say that I am going to convert one person within the next month, that would be a good resolution to make.

Postscript on homilies and *lectio divina*

Needless to say, bishops, priests and deacons, like all other Catholics need to engage in *lectio divina*, whether based on the liturgical readings or private prayer. Unlike lay people, however, clerics participate in the proclamation of the word in the Eucharist as a result of such things as study, reflection and prayer. Speaking about the characteristics of good homilies, par. 65 of *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* says,

“The homily is part of the Liturgy and is strongly recommended, for it is necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life. It should be an exposition of some aspect of the reading from Sacred Scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or from the Proper of the Mass of the day and should take into account both the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners.”

Speaking about the content of genuine homilies, Par 6 of the *Homiletic Directory* says,

It is not a sermon on an abstract topic; in other words, the Mass is not an occasion for the preacher to address some issue completely unrelated to the liturgical celebration and its readings, or to do violence to the texts provided by the Church by twisting them to some preconceived idea . . . The time for the homily should not be taken up with the preacher’s personal witness. There is no question that people can be deeply moved by personal stories, but the homily should

express the faith of the Church, and not simply the preacher's own story.”

Writing about the would be homilist, whether he is a bishop, priest or deacon, Pope Francis said in par 151 of *The Joy of the Gospel*,

“If he does not take time to hear God’s word with an open heart, if he does not allow it to touch his life, to challenge him, to impel him, and if he does not devote time to pray with that word, then he will indeed be a false prophet, a fraud, a shallow impostor. “



Part Three: Weekly New Springtime Community's online Lectio Divina

For many years now the New Springtime Community has been conducting courses on different topics with a view to training people so they may play their part in the evangelisation of others. We not only recommend that all our participants would attend a Life in the Spirit Seminar, afterwards we urge them to join some group that would provide them with ongoing fellowship and faith formation. To this end the leadership of our community decided that we would conduct an online *Lectio Divina* for anyone who would like to participate. In order to do so, please register by sending an email to janeforde@gmail.com. She will send the link you will need to join each session.

- They will be conducted on Monday night, at 7.30 PM, beginning in September 2022. Their aim is to finish the meeting within an hour.
- Each meeting will focus on the Gospel reading for the following Sunday's liturgy.

Proposed format for the weekly sessions

Each online session will follow the following methodology:

- 1) A welcome extended to all attending.
- 2) Opening prayer asking for divine inspiration.
- 3) The gospel reading for the following Sunday will be read while all listen attentively.
- 4) There will be a period of ten minutes silence during which everyone will prayerfully reflect on the reading.
 - What struck you about it?
 - Was there anything you didn't understand?

- What was the inspired author wanting to say to you?
- Has the reading any relevance in life today?
- Did you receive any inspiration or revelation?

Breakout rooms.

Share for about seven minutes about what occurred to you during your prayerful reflection.

General session, some feedback from the groups.

Commentary segment involving two points:

- Some comments on the feedback
- What scripture scholars have to say about the gospel reading.

Final comments and a prayer of thanksgiving to conclude the *Lectio Divina*.

