

## Incorporating Lectio Divina & Contemplative Prayer into a Curriculum

Depending on the age and the time that one is able to dedicate to Lectio Divina, I would recommend anywhere from 20 minutes to 45 minutes for one session. The first objection a person might raise is that children of any age are not able to spend lengthy time in silence, and this objection is very valid. Thus, to accommodate children, a variety of different adaptations should be used.

Before starting Lectio Divina with a particularly difficult passage, a teacher can briefly go over the passage and identify with the students any difficult concepts or words. This should be kept to a minimum, not taking more than 5 or 10 minutes. If a passage is very complex (say the writings of St. Paul) teachers should reconsider using it for Lectio Divina. The goal is not Bible study, but prayer.

First, I have found that incorporating writing and journaling into Lectio Divina is very helpful. The best way to do this is by having the students write their meditation. This can take from 5 to 10 minutes. The important thing is that students should be directed to write their meditation to Jesus as if he was present (mindful of mentioning that Jesus is, in fact, always present).

Second, incorporating opportunities for students to share what they have written and/ or meditated on. What is important for this kind of tool is that teachers should avoid evaluating or analyzing what students share. In using this tool, I have never found a student who shared something erroneous, blasphemous, or something that might cause concern. If this happens, I would suggest that a teacher gently correct the error, but mindful that the goal is to foster in the student a dialogue with God. In offering feedback, the teacher should limit what they say to simple affirmations. The teacher should be mindful that often the most profound meditations are the simplest.

For example, a student might meditate on Jesus' love for them. They might say that they imagine Jesus telling them how much he loves them, and they in turn respond by telling him how much they love him. On the surface this may not seem interesting, but for prayer this can be huge. See the previous discussion on value of simplicity and the theological virtues. But I should also add a caution. Children are often very sensitive to adult's expectations. We should be careful of respecting their interior life and not try to be their spiritual directors. Of course, there is the normal guidance that our roles as educators and parents involve, but we must be sensitive to not overstep our role. The goal is simply to affirm when students are communicating with God (no matter how imperfect it may seem).

Also, a teacher should never force a student to share what they wrote.

**A lesson using Lectio Divina might follow one of the following formats.**

### 1) Extended Session (20-45 minutes)

- Introduction, explanation, and lectio (10-15 minutes)
- Meditation and Oratio, students pick a word, phrase, or image and write a meditation
- And simultaneously write their response to Jesus (10 -25 minutes)
- Afterwards, student can share what they wrote.
- Contemplation (1-2 minutes, maybe more in some circumstances)
- You can have either silence or classical music playing. Students should be encouraged to "talk with Jesus about what they wrote." Also, as to avoid distractions, students should close their eyes.
- The teacher can close with a brief spontaneous, vocal prayer and a formal prayer with the students such as a Glory be, Hail Mary, or other appropriate prayers.

### 2) Short session (5-10 minutes, to be used at the beginning or end of class)

- a) Read the passage and have students pick a word, phrase or image (1-2 minutes).
- b) Ask a couple of students to share what they picked (1-2 minutes)
- c) Then a brief silence (1 minute) and then a vocal prayer to end (1 minute).
- The short form could be used throughout the day as a focus activity to begin class.

## Lectio Divina: The Ancient Art of Meditating on Scripture<sup>1</sup>

### Step 1: Read (Lectio)

- In this step, try to draw your attention on one word, phrase, or image that stands out in the scripture passage.
- It does not have to be complex or original. It can be as simple as the word love. Whatever you feel most drawn to.

### Step 2: Reflect (Meditatio)

- After picking your word, phrase, or image, now think and reflect on that word.
- God speaks to you through his scripture, by meditating on his word, you are learning to listen to how he speaks to you.
- Ponder the word, phrase, or image you chose and feel free to connect it with aspects of your life.
- Formulate questions based on the word. What does the word mean? What does it mean for me? How does this word apply to my life?
- For example, let us say I am praying with the Our Father. I am drawn to daily bread. I question it by asking, "What is my daily bread?" This might make me think about my job. I might then ask, "How is my job going?" I think about how I am worried about my job. I think about how Jesus is speaking to me through this word, daily bread (I will come back to this example later).

### Step 3: Respond (Oratio)

- Now I respond to how God has been speaking to me through this word, phrase, or image.
- I talk to Jesus about what I have been meditating on.
- My response should be from the heart, and should include my feelings.
- For example, having meditating on the word daily bread. I respond to this word by asking the Lord to help me with my job. I ask him to give me the strength I need to do my job well.

### Step 4: Rest (Contemplatio)

- Now I listen to the Lord by resting with him for a set amount of time. This can be a little time or a longer time.
- I listen to how the Lord is speaking to me through the word, phrase, or image and I can imagine Jesus talking to me.
- For example, having responded to the word "daily bread," I now hear the Lord calling me to greater trust. I hear him saying that he is with me always, and that I should deepen my trust in him.
- Or, I can simply rest with the Lord. However I feel called to spend time with the Lord.

## DEFINITIONS

### 1) LECTIO

Lectio is Latin for "reading." Reading within the context of lectio divina moves beyond simply understanding a text. It involves listening to how God is speaking through the text. Thus lectio is a deeper kind of reading and listening.

### 2) MEDITATIO

Meditatio is Latin for meditation. "Meditation is above all a quest. The mind seeks to understand the why and how of the Christian life."<sup>2</sup> In other words, in meditation we seek Jesus Christ and his will. We do this through using our mind to think about and ponder God speaking through Scripture.

### 3) ORATIO

Oratio means prayer. In this step, we respond to God's word and speak to Christ from the heart. This can take a variety of shapes and sizes. It can be words that express our deepest desires, or it can be as simple as thank you.

### 2) CONTEMPLATIO

In contemplatio, or contemplation, we learn to simply rest with the Lord. This is a mystery and a gift from the Lord. It can be described as a simple gaze of love. A simple peasant in France described it as follows, "I look at him, and he looks at me."<sup>3</sup>

1. The titles for each stage of Lectio Divina are taken from Contemplative Outreach [www.contemplativeoutreach.org](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org)

2. CCC 2705

3. CCC 2715