

## **Lectio Divina: a way to deepen our prayer life and spirituality**

**By Father Andrew Wise**

**There are so many different ways to pray. For example, the Sacred Liturgy, the Divine Office, shared prayer, devotions, song, spontaneous prayer and our own private and personal prayer of the heart.**

Sometimes, however, I wonder if we approach prayer more as a type of monologue, or as our activity with God responding, rather than as a dialogue, with God acting and with our responding to Him.

One of the most important skills I believe we need in order to deepen our prayer life and spirituality is to learn to *listen* in prayer rather than doing most of the 'talking' ourselves. Prayer is about relationship and dialogue and the conversations of heart that serve to deepen this relationship with God.

We all know how we feel in a human friendship where the other person seems to do all the talking while we do all the listening. Whatever the qualities of the relationship, we know it cannot grow and mature in a mutually enriching or satisfying way.

### **Attentive silence**

At times I sense that Jesus says something like the following to us: "I deeply appreciate your time spent in prayer and all that you say to me there, but *please* try to be more quiet and still and learn to listen to me a bit more in your prayer time."

It is only in quiet and stillness that like the Blessed Virgin Mary we can ponder and reflect on the works of God in our lives and learn to treasure them in our hearts.

As a key aspect of our prayer time do we try to maintain a focus of attentive silence and stillness before God? A prayerful interior silence is not a useless emptiness or void but an available space for God's Word and inner promptings to be heard and to resonate within us. An inner silence gives us room to listen and be attentive to God.

Like the Blessed Virgin Mary we gradually become unconditionally receptive and open to the movement and action of God's Word and Grace within us. We will also become more open and co-operative in being "pruned" (Jn 15.2) by the Word. In this way the progress of a deeper conversion of heart gathers pace in our lives.

When do we finally trust ourselves and God enough to begin to enter the silent place within, we will often first encounter a more intense awareness of our usual relentless jumbled thoughts, feelings and inability to be still. If however we persevere, accepting ourselves and letting Christ accept us in all our confusion and anxiety, then we cross a threshold where we will begin to hear Jesus' word to us in a new and intensely personal way.

Gradually we will find ourselves listening with our heart to the words Jesus has been longing to be more deeply heard by us for so long - "I have loved you with an everlasting love ... Do not be afraid ... I am

with you, I have called you by name you are mine". In the stillness we will sense His loving gaze upon us. We will find the assurance of love we need to let go, quieten down inside and listen. Now in a new way we will learn from Jesus who is "gentle and humble of heart" and who offers "rest for our souls" (Mt 11:29-30)

A way of praying that wonderfully incorporates many of the aspects of prayer that I have been highlighting here is called *Lectio Divina*.

To slowly read and re-read (*Lectio*) and attentively listen to Holy Scripture as God's word to us in prayer is the first movement or stage of *Lectio Divina*. This can be described as a "reading in the spirit".

The second phase of *Lectio Divina* is the "meditatio" where we "ruminate, reflect on and digest" the word of God. With an inspired thoughtfulness we then seek to connect it to the reality of our daily lives. Next in the "*Oratio*" we respond to God from the heart in our own words and feelings of prayer in the light of what we have heard God speak to us.

The fourth movement of *Lectio Divina* is the "contemplatio". Having listened and understood all that the Lord wants to say to us through His word on this occasion and having said all that for the moment we want to say to Him; we now settle into a period of silent, loving closeness with the Lord. This is a time to simply be with God. A time to rest with the Lord in the embrace of His loving presence and acceptance of us.

It is also a quiet "resting in the truth" - the truth of God's love for us and our love for God. We also rest peacefully in the truth of God's Word, read, heard and responded to in our time of *Lectio*.

## **Everyday lives**

This leads to a fifth and final movement in our prayer, the "operatio". This involves the vital connection between interior prayer and exterior action in our lives. The reality and consequences of our prayer must flow through to be incarnated, (the Word becoming flesh) in our everyday lives.

In this way our whole life gradually becomes prayer and the word of God becomes alive and active in us and through us for the building up of God's Kingdom in the world. Without this dynamic connection to our daily way of living, our prayer is in a sense stillborn and does not produce the "appropriate fruit" (Lk 3:8).

*Lectio Divina* can be broadly described in these terms: God is listened to in the *lectio*, His words are taken to heart in the *meditatio*, they edify the community of faith in the *collatio*, they are changed into our words to Him in the *oratio*, become communion with Him and with the mystery of His love in the *contemplatio*, and they lead us to action in the *operatio* as a discovery of our responsibilities in life in the light and grace of the Spirit.

*Father Andrew Wise is a parish priest in the Sale (Vic) Diocese.*

[http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2003/feb2003p20\\_1255.html](http://www.ad2000.com.au/articles/2003/feb2003p20_1255.html)