

LECTIO DIVINA

The ancient process of *lectio divina* is a form of slowly reading under the eye of God, waiting for a quickening of heart and listening for the stirring of the Holy Spirit. This is not at all like the reading you do for acquiring knowledge and expertise. We are reading scripture for formation more than information. Using the Benedictine practice known as *lectio divina*, you will be listening deeply and responding creatively. For this practice, you will need to set time aside for a slow savoring of the Word. For the purposes of our class, we will be applying this practice to the text of the book. This is not meant to be done in a hurry, nor is it about reading a lot. It will be helpful if you can set aside a time when you can be both attentive and relaxed, and to practice this daily.

The practice of *lectio divina* includes the following steps:

Silencio: The practice begins with recollection. Become aware of your breathing. You may need to stretch your body. Sit in a comfortable position. Let yourself rest in God. Breathe gently and deeply for several minutes before beginning to read. Allow yourself to let go of other concerns.

Lectio: Begin to read the assigned scripture slowly, savoring the words. When a word or a phrase catches your attention, stop. Read no further. Let that word or phrase speak to you. Try to put the exegetical mind aside and read from your heart.

Meditatio: Repeat the word or phrase that has caught the attention of your heart. (In the imagery from the Benedictine commentators, this is a form of chewing, savoring, allowing yourself to receive the food of the scripture.) The repetition allows the attention to focus, and permits a deepening of awareness. The repetition of the sacred words stirs memory, images, associations. Note these as they come up. If you find distracting thoughts coming up, gently bring your attention back to the word or phrase. If the thought is something you need to remember, jot it down, then return to your meditation.

Oratio: Let prayer form from the phrase or word that has been given to you. The prayer may begin with your own hopes, desires, needs, pains. Then let the prayer expand to encircle increasingly larger circles of connection (For example, if

you had been praying “For God alone my soul in silence waits,” that could move to “I pray for all who wait for God, for those who make difficult decisions, for those who are in pain, for those who go without food, for those whose lives are in transition.”)

Contemplatio: This last phase is a time for resting in God, for simply being still and letting the deep formation of the prayer continue, in the tender silence of prayerful intimacy with God.

VISIO DIVINA

When we practice *visio divina*, we follow the same steps as with *lectio divina*, but with images, art, nature, photographs. Given that our text, *Forgive Everyone Everything*, is equally words and images, you may find that you are drawn as much (or more) to the images as to the words. Allow yourself to notice what draws you, what challenges you, what makes you stop and reflect. An image from the book may speak to you deeply.