

Lectio Divina: Come to Me and I Will Give You Rest

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Hi, my name's Ryan O'Hara and I'm a Catholic speaker from St. Paul, Minnesota. And we've been on this journey through the Pray More Healing Retreat where we've looked at the question of where is God in our suffering? Can our crosses that He gives to us actually be beautiful in our lives? And then how is it that we hear God's voice and establish a good routine of daily prayer, daily conversational prayer? And in this last session, we want to enter into this ancient practice of Lectio Divina or divine reading. It's a beautiful way of praying conversationally, of hearing God's voice and responding to His promises. Let's pray.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Lord, you have given us incredible tools and resources to hear your voice. Help us now to be attentive to you. May your word come alive in our mind and in our hearts. I pray that you would build in us great faith to know that you are near. Great hope that you will help us persevere all the way to the end. And through it all, great love for you and for your voice. We love you and we treasure you. We pray all of this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina or divine reading is an ancient practice that helps us to hear God's voice each and every time we enter into this practice. And today I want us to look at Matthew 11:28-30. As soon as we begin reading this passage, you'll be familiar with it. It's one that you've likely heard many times in your life. And there's a particular reason why I chose this passage for our final session. I want to lead us through a meditation, a reflection, some Lectio Divina with this special set of scriptures.

And the reason I did is that having experienced difficulty and suffering in life, firsthand, that I know it creates a certain restlessness in each of us. I don't know about you, but when you've experienced a challenge or a difficulty over many years, maybe it's related to your health, maybe it's a relational difficulty, it's in parenting, or it's in our work, whatever setting it may be, where there has been a certain kind of long-term difficulty, pain, or challenge, it creates a restlessness in our spirit. Or the experience that we have is sort of like hypervigilance. We're always on the lookout for potential danger.

We're always thinking, "How might this situation perhaps turn negatively?" And we're kind of on guard, perpetually watching and waiting for the other shoe to drop, if you will. And so this passage always helps to move me out of that hypervigilance, out of that kind of hyperaware state that I'm always kind of scanning the horizon for potential dangers. Again, I'm not sure if that's been your experience, but it certainly has been mine. And this verse, as we talk about the meaning of suffering, as we talk about where God is in the midst of our difficulties, as we talk about hearing His voice, I think this particular passage can be really helpful for us.

So what I'd like to do is I am going to read the passage slowly first. And after that, we'll take some time to meditate or reflect on the passage. You'll have time to do that. Then we'll have a chance to pray with and to respond to that passage. And then finally, we'll take some time to rest with that Word that God is speaking to us today. And so that's the four steps of Lectio Divina. Lectio, meaning read. Meditatio, to meditate or reflect. Oratio, meaning to pray or to respond. And then finally, contemplatio, which is this state of stillness and rest in the Lord.

Matthew 11:28-30

So as we begin this first step, I just invite you to take a deep breath and then to exhale. Take a deep breath in through your nose and a long exhale out of your mouth. To even close your eyes. Deep breath in, long breath out. Just encourage you to listen to the scripture. I'm going to read it the first time just for you to get a sense of the whole, just for you to get a sense of each of the words. You don't have to find a word that sticks out to you. Although if there's something that does, pay attention to that. But the second time around, I want to invite you to pay attention to what does grab your attention. Let's begin by reading Matthew 11:28-30.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and overburdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30. It's important to note as I read it the second time that these are Jesus' words. We're listening to Jesus speak to the people in His presence, to listen to the words of Jesus spoken to His disciples. These are His words spoken to you today. I'll read it again. And I hope that you'll pay attention to a word or phrase that sticks out to you. Which one of these words grabs your attention? Matthew 11:28-30.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and overburdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30. Was there a word or phrase that stuck out to you or that got your attention? Maybe it was just one word. Don't move to the next step yet. Imagine that word as an item on a shelf at the grocery. And imagine that that word or that item on the shelf got your attention. Take a look at it. Notice it. Notice that word. And then I encourage you to imagine in your mind that you're taking that word off of the shelf and carrying it with you into our next step. Do you have that word? Do you have that phrase? When you do, we're now ready to move on to the next step.

Meditatio

Meditatio, our meditation. And in this step, we have that word. We've taken it off of the shelf. We are carrying it with us. I want you to imagine not that you were putting it into a cart or you're putting it into a basket. I want you to imagine that you're holding that word. Maybe even holding it close to your heart, but you have it in your hands. It's the word that God wants you to take a look at today. The word that he wants you to reflect on and to meditate on. I will ask you a few questions and allow time for silence after those questions.

The first thing to consider as we meditate on that word is what do the words mean? Or what does the word mean? Just the definition. What do you understand of that word? What does it mean? How might you define it?

Second, and maybe it's helpful to write down these questions. How might those words or that word connect to your life today? Is there a synonym of that word that also comes to mind? Can you think of two or three synonyms? What does the word mean? How might it connect to your life? And is there a synonym, two or three synonyms, that also come to mind? Why do you think that it was important to God to bring this word or phrase to your attention? And finally, what is God trying to say to you? What do you think His message is for you today? During this next minute or so, we're using the gift of our minds. We're using our reason, but not just as an intellectual exercise. We're engaging our whole self in this word. What emotions are connected to this word for you? How does this word or phrase make you feel? Let's take a minute or more to consider the answer to these questions.

Oratio

The third step of Lectio Divina is oratio, which means to pray or to converse, to speak with God. We start by hearing his voice as we read. We notice a particular word that jumps out to us. And then we think about it. We reflect on it. We meditate on it. You've spent a little bit of time looking at this word and considering what it might mean in your life. And now the appropriate next step is not to leave God hanging, but to respond, to respond in prayer, to speak to God. You can do so in your mind silently, or you can do so out loud. Sometimes that's the best way to talk to God. Just write out loud as though he is in the room with you, which he is. He is present to you even now.

So let's take a moment, a minute or more to pray, to respond to God. Given the word that He spoke to you, given how it stirred up a greater sense of God's presence, what do you want to say to God in response? What are you inspired to talk to Him about? What do you want to say to Him after He spoke this word to you? I'd encourage you not to be afraid or timid or to hold back in any way. Speak honestly, vulnerably. Tell Him how this word makes you feel. Tell Him what it stirs up inside of you. Be as forthcoming and forthright as you can. He's big enough to handle whatever it is that we may say to Him. Don't hold anything back. Let's take a minute to speak and respond, to pray in response to this word.

In addition, is there a way in which you need to respond to Him? Not just with questions or what it might mean for your life, but if you have a sense that God is inviting you into something new, make a response, a resolution. Speak that resolution of love and of hope and of faith directly to Him. Now that we've read, reflected, and responded, the last piece is one of God's greatest gifts. It's the gift of rest. It's what He spoke to us about in this particular scripture. So I have no doubt that He desires to give you, weary and burdened, He desires to give you rest.

Rest for your bodies, sure, but even more for your soul. And how I want to invite you to enter into this and to enter into each time at the close of your prayer is to allow what I'd call an unwavering or satisfied stillness to settle upon you. Allow it to be given to you as a gift. A mantle, if you will, that is placed upon you, but not in a way that is burdensome or heavy, of course. The gift of rest, it actually lightens the load just as it says in the scriptures.

So this scripture can be such a great model for us, certainly in this moment, but in every moment that we desire rest for our souls. It's a gift that Jesus promises to give to us. And this silence, this stillness, this contemplation is one where we don't have to produce anymore. We don't have to strive anymore. We don't have to work anymore. We just have to be, to be with God, to be before God, with attention, with love. I know it often brings a smile to my face. Maybe it'll bring a smile to your face. I have a feeling that will be one of the first things that happens when I see God. There will be a certain smile in my spirit. And certainly when He has given us our resurrected bodies, the joy on my face that will come will be remarkable. So even now, I would encourage you to rest, to be still, satisfied, and quiet. Let's now turn our hearts and minds to God. Let's now turn and keep our heart and mind attentive to God. And we'll close with a prayer.

Closing Prayer

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Lord, we give you thanks. Your presence is an unmatched gift in our life, that you desire closeness to us more than we could ask or imagine. I pray that we could find rest in you each and every day of our life as we read, reflect, respond, and rest in you. May your scripture come to life in each of our lives. And may this pattern of prayer bring healing and restoration and rest to our souls. We pray all of this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Loves You

The Lord loves you. He loves you with an everlasting, age-old love. A love that knew you before you were even conceived and knows you until the end of time. That will go on without end in Him. His love is an everlasting love. And it also says in the scriptures that it's new every morning. Even today, I hope you have experienced it. God's love has been renewed for you. God's love heals you and brings you hope that is unmatched here on earth. It's been a joy to walk with you through this Pray More Healing Retreat. I hope and pray that you would only draw closer and closer to Jesus through the gift of His grace and through the gift of daily prayer.