

Lectio Divina - Jesus Writing in the Sand

Fr. Ricardo Pineda

May the Lord grant you His peace. Hello to all my brothers and sisters in Christ continuing with us on this Pray More healing retreat. I am Father Ricardo Pineda with the Fathers of Mercy, and it is my joy to guide you in this reflection on Lectio Divina. This session will include a summary of what Lectio Divina is and how it works with a brief example, and then we will put it into practice with a passage from scripture that focuses on inner healing, renouncing lies, and declaring truths revealed to us by Jesus Christ, trusting His promise that the truth will set you free. Let's begin with a prayer.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Heavenly Father, we praise you as truth itself and infinite wisdom. We thank you for the gift of sacred scripture and for preserving for us all the inspired books of the Bible through your Holy Catholic Church. Humbly, we ask you to open our ears, our minds, our hearts to what you have to say to us today, especially through the method of Lectio Divina, divine reading. Help us to have a life changing encounter with Jesus Christ through your word. We ask this in the name of Jesus, through the intercession of Mary our mother, St. Joseph, our guardian angels and patron saints in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

My First Encounter with Lectio Divina

When I was in high school and I had the strong sense that God might be calling me to the priesthood, I remember the thought came to mind, I need to pray more. And sure enough, when I went to speak to one of our parish priests about my vocation, he asked me about my prayer life. Now, up to that time, I had not received much training in simply speaking to God from the heart and trying to listen and hear His voice. I mainly knew a lot of vocal prayers and I knew the rosary. I knew the rosary was powerful. I had learned that. So for a while, I was praying 15 mysteries of the rosary every day. And when I told the priest that, he said, "The rosary is very good, but it would also be very good and important for you to spend time just in personal conversation with God. Have you ever heard of Lectio Divina?"

I remember shaking my head thinking that didn't even sound like English. And he explained that Lectio Divina is Latin for divine reading. And it's when we take a passage of scripture or another holy writing, such as the saints, and we read it attentively and prayerfully to help us be able to hear God's voice more easily and be able to talk with Him, converse with Him. He gave me a handout that I could take home and he took some time to go over the steps. And as I tried to listen, I remember feeling dizzy, confused. It seemed complicated. I took that handout home and tried it maybe three or four times, but never really developed a habit. Years later, when I joined the Fathers of Mercy, I was reintroduced to Lectio Divina, according to the method of St. Teresa of Avila, but to be honest, throughout my time of

formation, it remained a challenge. What were the steps again? Select the material, consideration, conversation, contemplation.

The Rs of Lectio Divina

Well, today I am happy to offer you what I have found to be the easiest way to remember and practice Lectio Divina. I heard a father explaining it this way to his children. He gave them four steps beginning with R, read, reflect, relate, and rest. First, we read the passage attentively. Then, we reflect on it, we think about it. We see what strikes us, what God might be saying to us. And then we relate, relate to God. We grow in our relationship with God by talking to Him about what we were reflecting on. And then the fourth step to rest, to rest and rejoice in our relationship with God, to just be in relationship with Him, to know Him, to have reflected on some aspect of His love for us or His revelation and just rest in His presence. That would be the contemplative step.

Now at the Fathers of Mercy, we announce the end of our prayer periods with the announcement, "Let us make our resolutions." And so we can add to those four Rs, one more R, resolve, resolution. We think of some concrete act that we're going to do to live out what we were reflecting and talking with God about. And so with those five Rs, read, reflect, relate, rest, and resolve. I like to call this the "R" method of Lectio Divina. It's fun to say, makes me smile, and it gives me the sense of being swept off my feet by God with the scriptures. But perhaps if you're explaining this to kids and they might get more excited about pirates, then you can call it the "argh" method of Lectio Divina. Are you ready, kids? All right, so let's do a brief example here.

Let's pretend that we just finished reflecting on the Gospel of Luke chapter one, where the angel Gabriel announces to the blessed Virgin Mary that she's going to be the mother of God. What could we reflect on? Well, one, we could reflect on the great privilege of Mary to be conceived without sin, which is expressed in that phrase, "Full of grace. The Lord is with you, full of grace," from the time of her conception to make her a fitting vessel, to be the mother of God, no sin at all. And then we could reflect on her great humility in calling herself the handmaid of the Lord and be it done to me according to your word. We could reflect on the great humility of God in becoming man, taking on human flesh, and our weakness becoming one of us. And then we relate to God. I talk to Him about that humility.

Lord, God, I praise you for your divine humility, for your Son becoming man. I praise you for your great work in the life of Mary and her soul to have her conceive without sin. I know that you're calling me to great humility. And I repent of the times where I haven't been humble, when perhaps, I've compared myself to others or looked down on them, thinking of my accomplishments or qualities. And then we can ask God, you know, please make me humble. Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like your heart. Then, comes the rest. Perhaps, imagine ourselves resting on that meek and humble heart of Jesus like St. John at the last supper. And then we resolve. Resolution could be, I'm going to pray the litany of humility. You can look that up if you're not familiar with that. Or we could pray the Angelus and offer it for our growth and humility.

We could resolve that when I recognize I'm comparing myself to others, thinking myself better than them, I'm going to make an act of humility. No, this or that does not make me better than them. We are both beloved children of God. We're worth every drop of the precious blood of Christ. Nothing is more important than that. So there's our brief example.

John 8

Now let's let's apply Lectio Divina to the encounter of our Lord Jesus Christ with the woman caught in adultery. This is found in the Gospel of John chapter eight. You can grab your Bibles if you have them near at hand so you can follow along. John chapter 8, beginning verse 2.

"Early in the morning, he arrived again in the temple area and all the people started coming to him and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now, in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say? They said this to test him so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her. Again, he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She replied, 'No one, sir.' Then Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go. And from now on, do not sin anymore.'"

Reflect

The Gospel of the Lord, praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ. Next comes the reflect step. So at this point, I invite you to pause the video to take some time to reflect on what struck you most from the reading. Perhaps, reread parts of the passage slowly, prayerfully. We can ask our Lord, "Lord, what do you have for me from this encounter with Jesus?" All right.

Now that you've had some time to do that what our Lord highlighted for me in that passage, several things, first is just the simple beginning that He sat down and taught them. And so I placed myself in the scene as one of the men in the crowd listening to Jesus or maybe one of His disciples, or even better, like to imagine myself as Saint John the apostle himself was likely closest to our Lord, like he was at the Last Supper.

And looking so attentively and noting everything that was taking place in this encounter of Jesus with this woman. The next thing that comes to mind from that passage is the word test. They said this to test Him. And that makes me realize that the Pharisees, the scribes, they don't care what happens to this woman. They're just using her to test Jesus to try to trap Him, and how sad a thought that how many times has this woman just been used, whether for pleasure or for utility?

Then, there's the aspect that our Lord got down on the ground and was writing with His finger. Just a very profound thought there that the same God who wrote with his finger the 10 Commandments on the stone tablets for Moses is now writing with His human finger on the ground. What might He have been writing? Some insight from Jewish rabbis here that He was likely writing some passage of scripture, or maybe a paraphrase of scripture, so it wouldn't be so long, that would justify the judgment He was about to make.

And then He stands up in His bold challenge. *"Let he who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."* That to me is an examination of conscience, a call to examine my conscience. This is something we should be doing on a regular basis. Not even just before confession, but perhaps every day, every night before we go to bed and finish with an act of contrition.

Then as they go away one by one and she is left alone before Jesus, this brings to my mind confession. Being alone with Jesus, with his representative the priest, and we're there with our guilt that we confess, and Jesus so ready to bestow His mercy upon us. May priests be good instruments of that mercy. But my favorite thing to reflect on in this passage is what the transformation of what she might have been thinking leading up to being in front of Jesus, and after seeing Jesus and the way he looked at her.

Perhaps beforehand, this flood of emotions. First of all, fear. Just this flood of anxiety and fear and panic and realizing that they're going to kill me. They're going to stone me. This is it. My life is over. And perhaps bracing herself, like it's coming. A mixture of confusion and anger at the thought that, why didn't they seize the man?

Or perhaps just the image of that man running off. How many times might he have said, "I love you. Oh, I can't live without you," and now he just runs off and leaves her for dead. Perhaps a mixture of despair and even possibly self-loathing at that thought, the lies that, "I'm dirty, I'm shameful, I'm despicable. I might as well die." All of those negative thoughts and lies shattered and driven away by the loving gaze of Jesus, when she finally was able to see how Jesus was looking at her, different from the way any other man had ever looked at her before. What was that gaze of Jesus like?

Imagine it was something like this gaze of Mary in this image, one of my favorite images of Mary. When I saw this in a gift shop, I couldn't help but buy the biggest one. It conveys this peace, this warmth, this security, this sense of everything's going to be all right because I see you, I know you, I care about you. I love you so much. I am here for you. You are so worth loving. You belong to me.

And seeing Jesus look at her that way and the way His tone of voice and calling her woman and saying, "Neither do I condemn you." Perhaps this loving smile on his face to be able to say that, "Neither do I condemn you," and in her mind and heart, this infused knowledge and this fire building up with the truth, this litany of truths about her dignity, seeing it in Jesus' eyes, you are worth saving, you are worth protecting, you are worth defending. You are so worth caring about. You're worthy of forgiveness. You are worthy of mercy. You are worthy of another chance. You are worth waiting for. You are worth fighting for. You are worth sacrificing for. You are worth dying for. You are so worthy of respect, of honor, of kindness, patience, gentleness. You are my beloved. And with that, we can imagine all those lies that

she's able to renounce, realize they've always been lies, that I'm shameful, dirty, that I'm not good for anything, or I'm only good for one thing.

No, they've always been lies. They've never been true, and I don't have to live by those lies anymore. She was free. That command, I imagine only after our Lord saw in her eyes that she believed in her dignity now, he gave the command, "Go and sin no more. From now on, do not sin anymore." Now, she was empowered to be able to fulfill that command because seeing how Jesus loved her, recognizing how sad He would be if she was to return to sin. No, how could she ever do that again? No, now in a relationship with Jesus, knowing His love, everything is different.

From the perspective of the man, Saint John off to the side watching how our Lord looks at this woman, how He boldly challenges those who are accusing her, how He speaks to her with such tenderness, and perhaps how He lifts her up if she might have fallen to the ground, once He mentioned stoning that, "He who is without sin cast the first stone." Maybe she thought it was going to happen, and she's rolled up in a ball, but He helps her up, helps her rise to live her dignity.

And the gaze of Jesus, Saint John observing this and the realization, that is how I am meant to look at all God's daughters. That is the way God wants me to love His beloved daughters with a pure love to see them as worth dying for. And I like to imagine Jesus for a moment looking at Saint John like kind of the sense, do you see?

And Saint John maybe nodding his head and the thought comes to mind of Pope John Paul II, his quote, "God entrusts the dignity of every woman as a task to every man." God entrusts the dignity of every woman, every woman as a task to every man.

Relate

Then, the relate step. Lord God, help me to live this out. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for revealing to me the great dignity of women by your interactions with them in the Gospel. Forgive me, Father. Forgive me for all the times that I fail to see women as your beloved daughters, that I fail to see them as persons worthy of love, any times where I have looked at them only for pleasure or for utility. Lord God, have mercy on me. Thank you, Jesus, for winning for me on the cross, your grace to be able to love your daughters purely. Help me, Lord Jesus, flood me with your chastity or purity. Daughters of God, my sisters in Christ, and perhaps, the ladies conversing with our Lord, thank you Lord Jesus for revealing to me my great dignity as a woman. Forgive me for any of the times where I fail to live up to that great dignity in my thoughts or actions. Help me to settle for nothing less than true love and respect in my relationships.

Rest

And then we rest. We rest in the loving gaze of Christ, purifying us, purifying our hearts, purifying our memories. Perhaps, we can imagine God the Father looking like Jesus Christ with these massive, strong, loving arms, wanting to protect us so much. Perhaps, rest in His embrace.

Resolution

And then the resolution. I resolve to pray three Hail Marys for humility, for, rewind. Resolve, I resolve to pray three Hail Marys for purity every night. I resolve to pray for a boyfriend or a girlfriend that you might have, or for purity in your marriage, purity on someone you might have a crush on. Holy Spirit, inspire me to pray for every woman that I meet, that beloved daughter of God, my sister in Christ. Help me keep that phrase in mind, especially when temptations to lust come. I will resolve to repeat daughters of God, my sisters in Christ.

Closing Prayer

At this point, I'd like to pray an extended prayer over all the participants in this retreat in light of this Lectio Divina, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Heavenly Father, we praise you for inspiring Saint John to include in his Gospel this beautiful, merciful, healing encounter of our Lord Jesus with the woman caught in adultery. We thank you for the ability to encounter you through your living word. We thank you for the grace to repent of our sins and to respond to your mercy with great faith and trust. Lord and Jesus, in light of this Lectio Divina, this meditation, we ask you in your holy name, the name of Jesus, to drive away any spirits of lust, any spirits tempting to impure thoughts, masturbation, pornography, fornication, adultery, any other disordered desire.

I ask you, Lord Jesus, to block and erase any images, any impure sights we have seen, imagined, or read about. For anyone on this retreat struggling with addictive behaviors, Lord, we ask you in the name of Jesus to break any brain patterns, heal any neural pathways that might have been formed through past sins. Break all that in your holy name.

Grant them healing. May they be empowered to no longer return to those sins at all with mind renewed and strength from on high. Ask you to open up the floodgates of heaven with graces of chastity and purity flowing down upon them, graces of self-control together with a deeper spirit of penance and self-sacrifice and service of true spousal love. Especially Lord, in the name of Jesus, by the power of your precious blood, the power of the cross, I ask you to bless those who have been taken advantage of by others.

Console them in their pain, grant them the grace to entrust their wounds to you, that those wounds might be sanctified, healed, and incorporated into your plan of mercy. For those who have been bound by unforgiveness, I ask you, Heavenly Father, to grant them the grace to close that door to the enemy by the grace of praying for those who sinned against them, praying for that person's repentance, for their conversion, and ultimately their salvation.

Lord God, we thank you for bringing to light any lies about ourselves that has kept us bound in sin, to be able to renounce them through our authority in Christ, to be able to proclaim our great dignity in your sight as men and women made in your image. The image of the Trinity called to noble love, divine love, total self-giving, life giving love.

May this truth radiating from the loving gaze of Christ shine ever brighter in our minds and hearts that we might be able to walk as children of light and show forth to the world the great

beauty of pure chaste love according to our divine vocations. All this we ask in Jesus' name, Amen. And I have here a relic, first class relic of Saint Maria Goretti, virgin and martyr. And even though this is prerecorded, I believe the graces will be flowing. Ex corpore of Saint Maria Goretti. Through the intercession of St. Maria Goretti, virgin and martyr, may almighty God bless you, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

I hope you have been blessed by this practice of Lectio Divina, and I hope you will continue to practice it to engage in conversation with God, be able to hear him speaking to you, to your heart. This can be daily meditating on the Gospel of the day, or perhaps, just going through the Gospels from start to finish, one passage at a time a day. Lectio Divina, read, reflect, relate, rest, resolve. It's been a joy to share this with you. If I don't get to see you or meet you here on earth, I'll see you in heaven. Till then, with you in the Eucharist as you continue towards the end of this Pray More Healing retreat.