



The Armor of Faith

Topic Summary: The Study and Discernment of Scripture *Part VII: Lectio Divina*



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Introduction

[Greeting:] → Welcome to “The Armor of Faith,” a show where we hope to bring our listeners closer to the Word of God and the blessings we receive through living in the fullness of the Catholic faith. My name is Doug and I will be your host as we discuss the blessings of the Church Christ built upon Peter.

I am joined today by my panel: [names]

Our panelists represent a rather broad background in catechesis gained in support of various parishes as well as a variety of age and spiritual interest groups. So, welcome to our panelists as well as to our listeners.

Let us open with a prayer:

Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts in thanks and praise for this opportunity to open and share your Holy Word this day. We pray that You are with us and all our listeners as we share with one another the blessings of faith. We pray You will grant us wisdom and understanding as we seek to learn Your Holy Truth.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we pray.

Discussion:

During our last discussion, we pointed out the importance of assessing the context of meaning. We outlined elements of the Catechism of the Catholic Church which leads us to also assess the “sense of scripture” from the perspective of not just the literal word, but also the spiritual forms which reveal the meaning of faith, morality, and destiny.

As we have mentioned, we are cautioned about going it alone in our attempts to comprehend what God intends for us to understand, but we are also encouraged to spend our time, in

abundance, with the reading of scripture. The challenges may intimidate us, but if God is with us in our endeavor, why would we not avail ourselves of the wisdom and instruction of His Holy Word?

Today, we will conclude our series concerning the study and discernment of scripture with a discussion concerning a means of reading scripture through the integration of reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. This means of sacred reading is known as *lectio divina*.

According to a thesis by Andrej Benda, S.J., (Benda, Andrej; “*Lectio Devina*, Abiding in the Living Word,” Weston Jesuit School of Theology, 16 May 1997, pgs 6-7), *lectio divina* can be traced back to Jewish methods of reading and interpreting scripture. Two important methods of Jewish reading included the literal or plain sense of scripture as well as a derived sense which establishes a moral or ethical explanation. These methods are applied according to a basic principle that “scripture interprets itself,” such that one element is compared to another from which to assess patterns of meaning from which we may learn. Jewish practice uses the Tora as the basis from which other elements of scripture may be understood or explained.

(Question 1: From our previous discussions, we mentioned the importance of the assessment of Positional, Linguistic, Historical, Cultural, and Spiritual context to our understanding of scripture. How might these forms of context be related to the Jewish methods of Plain and Derived senses of scripture?)

Andrej Benda noted that “the Fathers of the Church were the originators of *lectio divina*” (Benda, pg 8). Benda pointed out that the basis of comparison, however, was no longer the Tora, but the Gospels and life of Jesus. He also noted that each of the Church Fathers used slightly different methods, but as we examine his explanation of these elements, we might see that they are similar to what we reviewed during our previous discussion associated with the senses of scripture. If you remember, the senses of scripture as discussed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church included the Literal and Spiritual senses of which the Spiritual sense may be further subdivided into the allegorical (symbolic), moral, and anagogical (mystical) senses.

(Question 2: As we compare and contrast, we might notice a bit of a pattern. In what ways do the Literal and Spiritual senses of scripture compare to the Jewish methods of Plain and Derived senses of scripture?)

According to a United States Conference of Catholic Bishops article, entitled, “Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Art and Practice of *Lectio Divina*,” (Lawlor, Sr. Antoine; “Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Art and Practice of *Lectio Divina*,” USCCB, 2009) *lectio divina* is a form of meditation rooted in early monastic communities which progressed into religious orders such as the Benedictines and the Carmelites.

The first step of this process is called *lectio* or reading. This form of reading, however, differs from the way we read a novel or magazine article, in that the objective is not to read large segments in a single sitting, rather, to focus on select segments. In this manner, the reader may pause on words or phrases and allow them to simmer in the heart.

(Question 3: In this form of reading, we do not see a rush to get from beginning to end. Why might we want to approach scripture in small or select segments and examine how they resonate within our hearts?)

The second step of this form of reading scripture is *meditatio* or meditation. So, essentially, we read the Word, then, we meditate on its meaning. This process of meditation includes a focus upon what is read and reflection of what it reveals to our heart. It is not meant to be rushed, but, again, to allow the meaning to nourish our soul.

(Question 4: We often hear of the benefits of meditation. It is routinely mentioned as a means to reduce depression, anxiety, stress or pain as well as developing a sense of well being or peacefulness. What might we accomplish as we meditate on passages of scripture?)

The next step in the list is *oratio* or prayer. This is an opportunity for us to use our time with scripture as a form of prayer. After reading and meditating upon the scripture, or a particular word or phrase contained within the scripture, we may then take our thoughts and use them to converse with God.

(Question 5: As we look at this process, we begin with reading, then, transition to a focus upon elements of the reading (perhaps focus on a particular word, phrase, or verse) in a way that we try to eliminate the distractions of the world as we discern the message of the passage. After we reflect upon this message, we then take it to prayer. In what ways may we lift scripture up in prayer and why would we want to do this?)

The final step is *contemplatio* or contemplation. This step takes our reading, meditation, and prayer beyond reflection of meaning to consideration as to how the scripture applies to how we lead our lives or how it might inspire us.

(Question 6: If we look at the definition of the word meditation, we find within a reference to contemplation. If we look in a thesaurus, contemplation is listed as a synonym to meditation. Within the context of *lectio divina*, though, what might we think the difference is between meditation and contemplation and how might these methods work together within our study and discernment of scripture?)

(Question 7: As we take this process and put it into practice, we need a starting point, which is a selection of scripture. How might we go about making our selection?)

(Question 8: Of course, when we think of things such as reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation; we are tempted to look at the process as a rather private one. Indeed, it is an excellent opportunity to incorporate into our private time. We might wonder, though, is this something which can be done in a group or as part of a Bible study? How might we engage this process within a group?)

(Question 9: When we think of reading scripture, using *lectio divina* as a means to study and discern scripture may sound like something which is an advanced form of Bible study. We might be tempted to believe this is a process which is only for adults. How might we go about engaging *lectio divina* with our children or grand-children?)

Quotes:

Assiduous reading of sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer makes that intimate dialogue possible in which, through reading, one hears God speaking, and through prayer, one responds with a confident opening of the heart.

– *Pope Benedict XVI*

Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you by contemplation.”

– *Guigo the Carthusian Monk*

The *lectio divina*, where the Word of God is so read and meditated that it becomes prayer, is thus rooted in the liturgical celebration.

– CCC: 1177

Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. This mobilization of faculties is necessary in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen our will to follow Christ. Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in *lectio divina* or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him.

– CCC: 2708

If this practice [*lectio divina*] is promoted with efficacy, I am convinced that it will produce a new spiritual springtime in the Church.

– *Pope Benedict XVI*

Final Thoughts:

During our discussion on the study and discernment of scripture over these past seven weeks, we discussed several means by which we may gain an ever growing understanding of what is revealed to us through the Holy Word of God. We discussed the importance of assessing the context of the message, considering such forms of context as Positional, Linguistic, Historical, Cultural, and Spiritual. We also discussed the criteria by which the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls us to approach scripture, which includes; attentiveness to the whole content and unity of the scripture, consideration of the Tradition of the whole Church, and attentiveness to the analogy of faith. We also reviewed the senses of scripture, which includes; the Literal and Spiritual senses of which the latter may be subdivided into the allegorical (symbolic), moral, and anagogical (mystical) senses. Finally, we mentioned the components of *lectio divina*, which includes; *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation).

While all these concepts sound rather complex and that they are considerations only for priests, religious, theologians, or Bible scholars, we should not allow them to intimidate us. It is like anything else, we are able to become more accomplished in what we practice. At first, it may seem complicated, but the more we spend time with scripture, the more we consider these

concepts, the more time we spend in prayer over what we read, the more we open the door to our relationship with God.

The beauty of scripture is the wisdom and love which it reveals. It is the love letter of God to the children of His creation. It can guide us, it can inspire us, it can instruct us, it can instill peace within us, but more importantly, it allows us to have a conversation with our Creator. The more we explore scripture, the more we get to know God and the wisdom and blessings He offers to us.

The reading of scripture need not always be private. We have the opportunity to listen during the course of the Mass. We have the opportunity to learn through consideration of the homilies of our priests and deacons. We have the opportunity to read, meditate, pray, and contemplate within groups. We also have the opportunity to read scripture to and discuss it with our children. Let us, then, take the time to open the words within and allow them to reveal to us the wisdom of God. Let us let His Word nourish our hearts and our soul, not only for the blessings of our time with one another and those who God sends across our path, but also in preparation for the day He will call us to His kingdom.

Wrap Up: Well, our time has come to an end. We hope you will be able to join us next week as we spend some time with some special guests and discuss bringing faith to our children.

Let us conclude with a prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to open and discuss Your Holy Word. We pray that as we go our separate ways, You will continue to walk with us and help us to see how we may put on the armor of **truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation**, and the **Word** of the gospel not only for the benefit of our lives, but also the lives of all who cross our path. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Thank you all and God bless.

Next Session: Bringing Faith to Our Children.