

Virtual Lectio: A Guide

Beta Version - Rev 2 Apr 2023

1. Preparation

Before you engage the Scriptures, take a moment to honestly assess, “How am I doing?” What burdens are you carrying in your heart, mind, and soul? What are you feeling in your body?

You may wish to spend some time praying an Examen, or taking a walk and talking these things through with Jesus. If there is something that “sticks” for you, you may wish to arrange a time to make a confession to a priest, or talk things through with a spiritual friend.

Stillness and silence are another form of preparation, as when we give ourselves over to extended periods of stillness – five minutes to twenty minutes is a good amount – we find things bubbling to the surface from our hearts, minds, and bodies that would otherwise exert pressure unconsciously upon the attention that we want to give to the text.

Finally, having a sequence of prayers, rituals, movements, etc, or some combination of these, to precede our quiet work as we enter into a time of prayer and meditation is a helpful queue for our body and soul to come into the posture of reverence and attention that maximizes our attunement to the divine voice, which often speaks to us in still, small tones.

2. Encounter

In faith that the Word of God is rich seed, that, when it has gone forth from the mouth of the Lord, will accomplish that which he has purposed, and prosper in that for which he has sent it, and will bear good fruit when it has germinated and matured in the ground of our hearts: listen to the virtual lectio recording with faith and expectation, giving your full attention, not only to the meaning of the words, but to the physical sensations of hearing them slowly pronounced. The following techniques may help you focus your attention, and prepare your for the work of reflection:

- Notice the words, phrases, or images that are standing out to you. You may wish to have a journal open before you as you listen, and mark these down.
- Which of the readings are most resonating with you this week? Take some time to read that lesson again in another translation, or hear it read by another voice.
- Are there any particular verses from the scope of the reading that speak to you especially strongly? Write those down. Do those verses bring anything to mind (art, music, life experience, etc?)
- What kind of response do these texts evoke from you? If you are so moved, give time and space to whatever kind of creative response you feel welling up within yourself.

3. Meditation - Reflection

As you meditate on the text, you may choose one or more of these modes and ask the associated questions (or ones like them) to deepen your engagement. (For the purposes of this exercise, I generally recommend that the dialectical mode be avoided, as our cultural bias is strongly towards critical readings, with which the dialectical mode easily becomes confused. However, it is an integral part of our humanity and processing of information, and so it is included here for reference!)

Heartful. The heartful mode prioritizes how Jesus by his Holy Spirit is personally and specifically speaking to us in these Scriptures. A Biblical image to help us understand what we are doing in heartful reflection is the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24), and Mary's heartful pondering (Luke 2:19). As you engage in this mode, you may find it helpful to spend some time in silence, take a few deep breaths, and experience the space around your heart expanding with your breath. Imagine the warmth and light of God's nourishing and lifegiving Word and Presence entering this space as you meditate on his Word.

- Consider the words, phrases, or images that stood out to you in the encounter above, as well as any verses that had special salience.
- What is stirring in your memory and emotions? Catalog what you are feeling, and where those feelings are situated in your body.
- How is God speaking to you through these texts? Dialogue with Jesus about what you are hearing.

Soulful. The soulful mode runs the fingers of our imagination across the various contours and textures of the passages, seeking to trace out their formal coherence and integrity – considered either separately or together – and to observe areas of tension or difficulty as we seek to conform our minds and imaginations to these patterns. It presumes and imposes coherence and consistency within and between the texts, and uses that consistency as a reflection, measure, and model of our own interior ideals. The Lukan Canticles give us a perfect image of soulful meditation, as each of the characters in turn regards the coming of the Messiah as the fulfillment of the story of Israel (Luke 2).

In considering the passages together, you might ask:

- What themes tie together this selection of readings?
- What kind of “prophecy-fulfillment” or “type-antitype” relationships do we see established in the passages?
- How are these themes resonating with the flow of the year? Of my sense of the community? Of the world around me? Of my life?

These questions are often better suited when considering the passages separately. However, they can also be asked of the full suite of readings, attending to the larger themes..

- What do we learn about God in this passage? What are the characteristics of God as he is described here?

- Who are the characters involved in this passage? What do we learn about humanity from seeing and hearing them?
- What words of wisdom, instruction, or admonition do we find?
 - What does that stir in us?
- What theological frameworks or categories help us to make sense of the text that is before us?
- What do you know about the significance that has been historically ascribed to this text by the Church, or the stream of your tradition within it?

Dialectical. The dialectical mode attends to the differences, challenges, and incongruities that the texts present us with, either taken separately or together. In engaging the text dialectically, we wrestle with it, as Jacob wrestled with the angel, seeking by our mental exercise to prevail upon the text to yield some blessing to us (Gen 32:22-32).

It is important to note the difference between the dialectical mode and the critical mode, with which it bears some similarities. Critical readings presuppose the text to be a dead artifact and product of human cultures and imaginations rather than the living word of God. While there is a place and use for critical modes, they are not conducive to the spiritual purposes that we are cultivating.

- What do I find vague, unsettling, confusing, or unsatisfied about these texts?
- What range of interpretive voices have I heard surrounding this text?
- Does one of these texts seem to contradict the other? Something that I have read elsewhere, or assumed the Bible teaches?
 - How do I resolve those contradictions?
- Imagine yourself in the position / perspective of another Biblical author who would have a different perspective than the one presented in the text. How might they respond to the claims being made?

Contemplative. The contemplative mode can arise out of one of the other modes, or out of the Encounter directly. Within the contemplative mode, all logical, reflective, and discursive operations fade into the background, and one is taken up into an immediate sense of the all-embracing Love and Compassion of God that defies all discussion or doubt. Feel and know ourselves to be nourished by the secret ministrations of the Holy Spirit, and delight in the hidden mana with which he feeds us.

Since this encounter is above and beneath all words, there are no thoughts or questions that can productively interrogate it. We name it here, not to define what it is or how we should engage it, but in order to identify that this is a state that can accompany our attention to the Word. It is permissible and entirely appropriate simply to enjoy this state of being: to settle into the embrace of silence with the inexpressible joy of the Mother of God, or the Bride of Solomon. In other moments, however, that sensation will continue while our minds are occupied with the work of tracing through the granular considerations pertaining to some other mode (heartful, soulful, dialectical, or something else).

4. Framing Proclamation and Action

Having given some space to meditate on the Word, turn to consider these questions, which form the core of Gospel proclamation.

- What is Good News am I hearing in these passages?
- What would it look like to embody and proclaim this Good News to others?

Summarize each “Good News” statement as pithily as possible (one sentence – 2 MAX). Rank them in terms of your own personal sense of their salience. (What is the BEST news here?)

If proclaiming, be mindful of the prompt questions we put before the Gospel proclaimer:

- In a brief, memorable sentence, *what is the Good News you will proclaim* to this people, at this time and place, from the text(s) selected or appointed?
- (For Eucharistic services) In a brief, memorable sentence, *how will you invite the people of God to participate in his mercies by feasting at his Table?*

In addition to workshopping this Good News Statement over the course of the week, Proclaimers should write this sentence down and send it to the Responder, if not to the whole Proclaimers Cohort, before Friday morning for a Sunday homily.

5. Giving Thanks and Moving Forward

Having completed these considerations, say a prayer giving thanks to God for the gift of his Word, and his Spirit working in us through it. Review the opportunities you will have in the coming week to reengage these Scriptures in the context of community, and commit to them. You might ask questions like these:

- How does my week and the activities before me look different in light of this Good News?
- How do the people I anticipate encountering and meeting in this upcoming week look different to me in light of this Good News?
- How might this process be improved for yourself and others?