

LECTIO DIVINA

Many New Zealanders have a natural aptitude for and love of “do it yourself” projects. DIY is part of our cultural DNA which stretches back through generations.

We do DIY projects on our houses, in our kitchens, and in our communities. Shelves of magazines and books in bookstores encourage us to do personal DIY projects, in order to become better managers, parents, leaders, and happier people.

Our personal spiritual growth is essentially a DIY project, with the difference that we know God will be our partner in the project. Just as there are aids in the form of hardware stores and booksellers for DIY projects, there are many aids to assist us in our spiritual growth. For centuries Catholics around the world have worked on their own spiritual DIY projects, many developing their prayer life through the process of *lectio divina*.

Lectio divina is a Latin term meaning “reading with God”.

It has been practiced in the Church for centuries, and has its origins in

monastic life, but is being used now by lay people and religious alike. *Lectio divina* is a way of praying using Scripture, which if practiced consistently, gently leads us into a deeper relationship with Christ as we open ourselves to him. It is the ultimate DIY spiritual project.

The practice of *lectio divina* requires a quiet space, a passage of Scripture, and the willingness to give a little time to it each day (or even a couple of times a week). The passage of Scripture used should be short. It could be the gospel for the day or a piece taken by progressing through one of the gospels.

There are four steps in the traditional practice of *lectio divina*. The steps do not have to be followed in this particular sequence:

Lectio (reading): read the passage of Scripture slowly, more than once. If a particular word, phrase or sentence seems significant (even if you don't know why), you may want to write it down.

Meditatio (reflection): let the significant words fill your mind without straining to analyse them.

You are in God's presence and so let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding of the words.

Oratio (prayer): allow your heart to speak to God, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture or by the thoughts that have come to you while reflecting on it.

Contemplatio (rest): let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of God in simple and wordless contemplation.

Lectio divina can be used by groups as well as individuals. The steps are the same, except that a group may choose to share their thoughts in the meditatio or reflection stage, or voice their prayers in the oratio stage. The process of *lectio divina* leads us into silence and rest in the presence of God so when it is done in a group the spoken word should be sharing, not discussion. The process should lead the group into the silence of contemplatio.

*New Zealand Catholic Bishops
Conference 2011*

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*Truly I have set
my soul in silence
and peace.*

PS 130:2

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Lectio divina is a centuries-old form of prayer using Scripture. It can be used by individuals or groups, and has four steps:

Lectio (reading): read the passage of Scripture slowly, more than once. If a particular word or phrase seems significant (even if you don't know why), you may want to write it down.

Meditatio (reflection): let the significant words fill your mind, without analysing them. You are in God's presence – let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding.

Oratio (prayer): allow your heart to speak to God, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture or by the thoughts that have come to you while reflecting on it.

Contemplatio (rest): let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of God in simple and wordless contemplation.

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