



## LECTIO DIVINA – ON DISCERNMENT

### Presence of God

Colossians 1:9b-11

May you attain full knowledge of God's will through perfect wisdom and spiritual insight. Then you will lead a life worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him in every way. You will multiply good works of every sort and grow in the knowledge of God. By the might of his glory you will be endowed with the strength needed to stand fast, even to endure joyfully whatever may come.

### Lectio - reading/listening

THE READING or listening which is the first step in lectio divina is very different from the speed reading which modern Christians apply to newspapers, books and even to the Bible. Lectio is reverential listening; listening both in a spirit of silence and of awe. We are listening for the still, small voice of God that will speak to us personally - not loudly, but intimately. In lectio we read slowly, attentively, gently listening to hear a word or phrase that is God's word for us this day.

### Meditatio - meditation

ONCE WE have found a word or a passage in the Scriptures which speaks to us in a personal way, we must take it in and "ruminate" on it. The image of the ruminant animal quietly chewing its cud was used in antiquity as a symbol of the Christian pondering the Word of God. Christians have always seen a scriptural invitation to lectio divina in the example of the Virgin Mary "pondering in her heart" what she saw and heard of Christ (Luke 2:19). For us today these images are a reminder that we must take in the word - that is, memorize it - and while gently repeating it to ourselves, allow it to interact with our thoughts, our hopes, our memories, our desires. This is the second step or stage in lectio divina - meditatio. Through meditatio we allow God's word to become His word for us, a word that touches us and affects us at our deepest levels.

### Oratio - prayer

THE THIRD step in lectio divina is oratio - prayer: prayer understood both as dialogue with God, that is, as loving conversation with the One who has invited us into His embrace; and as consecration, prayer as the priestly offering to God of parts of ourselves that we have not previously believed God wants. In this consecration-prayer we allow the word that we have taken in and on which we are pondering to touch and change our deepest selves. Just as a priest consecrates the elements of bread and wine at the Eucharist, God invites us in lectio divina to hold up our most difficult and pain-filled experiences to Him, and to gently recite over them the healing word or phrase He has given us in our lectio and meditatio. In this oratio, this consecration-prayer, we allow our real selves to be touched and changed by the word of God.

### Contemplatio - contemplation

FINALLY, WE simply rest in the presence of the One who has used His word as a means of inviting us to accept His transforming embrace. No one who has ever been in love needs to be reminded that there are moments in loving relationships when words are unnecessary. It is the same in our relationship with God. Wordless, quiet rest in the presence of the One Who loves us has a name in the Christian tradition - contemplatio, contemplation. Once again we practice silence, letting go of our own words; this time simply enjoying the experience of being in the presence of God.

## LECTIO DIVINA – ON DISCERNMENT

### Reflections on Discernment

“There are moments when the grace of God stirs sensibly in the human heart; when the soul seems to rise upon the eagle-wings of hope and prayer into the heaven of heavens; when caught up, as it were, into God's very presence, we see and hear things unspeakable. At such moments we live a lifetime; for emotions such as these annihilate all time; they—

*‘Crowd Eternity into an hour,  
Or stretch an hour into Eternity.’*

At such moments we are nearer to God; we seem to know Him and be known of him; and if it were possible for any man at such a moment to see into our souls, he would know all that is greatest and most immortal in our beings. But to see us then is impossible to man; it is possible only to Him whose hand should lead, whose right hand should guide us, even if we could take the wings of the morning and fly into the uttermost parts of the sea.”<sup>1</sup>

When Our Lord had emerged from the wilderness he sought out his first disciples. And Philip having been chosen sought out his friend Nathaniel, exercising thereby the divinest prerogative of friendship, which consists in the communication to others of all that we have ourselves experienced to be most divine.

But to Philip's “Come and see, this Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth,” came the skeptic's reply “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

The fastidious reluctance of Nathaniel was very soon dispelled. Jesus, as He saw him coming, recognized that the seal of God was upon his forehead, and said of him, “Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him.” “How do you know me?” asked Nathaniel and then came that heart-searching answer, “Before Philip called you, I saw you under a fig tree.”

And in these words under the gaze of Jesus came the epiphany to Nathaniel that his Lord had searched him out and known him, and comprehended his thoughts long before. “If you have ever known this spasm of divine change which annihilates the old and in the same moment creates or re-creates a new-born soul, such a one, at least, will understand the thrill of electric sympathy, the arrow-point of intense conviction, that shot that very instant through the heart of Nathaniel, and brought him, as it were, at once upon his knees with the exclamation, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel!’ ”<sup>1</sup>

1 - Frederick W. Farrar's, Life of Christ, 1874

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### DISCERNING A VOCATION TO OCDS

Fr. Aloysius Deeney has written very well about discerning a vocation to OCDS. His 6 main discernment points, summarized very briefly, are:

1. A Carmelite must be a practicing member of the Catholic Church, with capacity to participate fully in the Eucharist.
2. OCDS (as with other Carmelites) is under the protection of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, has a special devotion to Our Lady. "She attracts and inspires a Carmelite to a contemplative way of understanding the life of the mystical body of her Son, the Church." Like Mary, a Carmelite has "an inclination to 'meditate in the heart.'"
3. Teresian Carmelites are inspired by St. Teresa of Jesus (Our Holy Mother, foundress of our order), St. John of the Cross (Our Holy Father, cofounder of the order), St. Therese of the Child Jesus, and other Carmelite saints. A Carmelite would have a burning interest in learning from these saints, which would lead to "a deeper interest in Scripture, theology and the documents of the Church."
4. A Carmelite has a commitment to the Order and to his/her OCDS community, which "ought to be more important than other movements or groups" the person is involved in. The Carmelite takes on the identity of a Carmelite and "discovers that Carmel becomes essential to his/her identity as a Catholic."
5. The Carmelite seeks the face of God, engages in contemplation, "a wondering observation of God's word and work in order to know, love and serve Him." The Carmelite is committed to personal holiness and the practice of virtues, which flow from "a life of prayerful searching for God's will..." The Carmelite finds God in the various events of life.
6. A Carmelite leads a life of prayer and goodness not only for his/her own sake, but also "for the sake of the Church and the world." Secular Carmelites have individual apostolates to address the needs (especially spiritual) of others, and also a group apostolate. Each OCDS community "ought to answer the question as a community "What can we do to share with others what we have received by belonging to Carmel?"

The vocation of the secular Carmelite is summed up in our Carmelite rule's statement that SS. Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross teach us "the following of Christ and the life of prayer and self-denial in the service of the church and all humankind . . . through treasuring a deep sense of faith in God's love, fidelity to contemplative prayer with the spirit of detachment it entails, and generosity in the practice of fraternal charity and the apostolate."

Jude Langsam: The Discalced Carmelite Secular Order: One Member's View  
SPIRITUALITY TODAY  
Summer 1985, Vol. 37, pp. 130-139.

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### **Job 4:12-16**

12 For a word was stealthily brought to me, and my ear caught a whisper of it.

13 In my thoughts during visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men,

14 Fear came upon me, and shuddering, that terrified me to the bones.

15 Then a spirit passed before me, and the hair of my flesh stood up.

16 It paused, but its likeness I could not discern; a figure was before my eyes, and I heard a still voice...

### **Rev. 3:20**

20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, (then) I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me.

### **1 Kg 17:2-5**

2 The LORD then said to Elijah:

3 "Leave here, go east and hide in the Wadi Cherith, east of the Jordan.

4 You shall drink of the stream, and I have commanded ravens to feed you there."

5 So he left and did as the LORD had commanded. He went and remained by the Wadi Cherith, east of the Jordan.

### **1 Kg 19:9-14**

9 There he came to a cave, where he took shelter. But the word of the LORD came to him, "Why are you here, Elijah?"

10 He answered: "I have been most zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts, but the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to take my life."

11 Then the LORD said, "Go outside and stand on the mountain before the LORD; the LORD will be passing by." A strong and heavy wind was rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the LORD--but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake--but the LORD was not in the earthquake.

12 After the earthquake there was fire--but the LORD was not in the fire. After the fire there was a tiny whispering sound.

13 When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave. A voice said to him, "Elijah, why are you here?"

14 He replied, "I have been most zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. But the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to take my life."

### **John 13:34-35**

34 I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.

35 This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."