

The Church's respect for the word of Scripture?

Which do you think more important – the word of God or the body of Christ?

If you want to answer correctly, you must tell me that the word of God is no less important than the body of Christ!

How careful are we, when the body of Christ is distributed to us, not to let any bit of it fall to the ground from our hand!

But we should be just as careful not to let slip from our hearts the word of God that is addressed to us, by thinking or speaking of something else.

He will be no less guilty who listens negligently to the word of God than he who by his negligence allows the Lord's body to fall on the ground.

Caesarius of Arles

A simplified form of *Lectio Divina* for a group

1. Opening prayer

2. **The reading is read**, and there follows five minutes of silence, as each person takes the word to heart and ponders on what they hear.

Group members are asked to put their papers down and listen, not read, when the reading is read.

Is there a word or phrase that strikes you? If so you might like to focus on that and quietly repeat it to yourself as a mantra.

3. The reading is read again.

This time, if you wish to follow it in your bible, please do

After a brief pause, the members of the group are asked 'What word or phrase strikes you and why?'

Group members are asked to share BRIEFLY. Simply the word or phrase, not an explanation or commentary..... Other members listen, without responding.

4. The reading is read again.

There is another five minutes of silence for personal prayer. You may stay with what first struck you, maybe you will be moved to focus elsewhere by what someone else has been struck by.

5. After the further time of silence members of the group have the opportunity to share what they have been struck by.

This is not a time for discussion, but respectful listening. Questions about the 'right' meaning of the scripture don't have a place here. It's a time for prayerful reflection not scripture study. What is important is our response to what we have heard.

Lectio Divina

On the next page is an account by Pope Benedict of the ancient practice of *Lectio divina*, ‘divine reading’. It repays careful reading.

At Mass we profess our belief that scripture is ‘the word of the Lord’. This is the inspired word of God, suited for its purpose of sharing the message of salvation, that we might believe, and believing hope and that hoping we might love.

We are invited to hear and read the scripture and take it to heart, that it may win us for Christ, the only-begotten Son, the Word of God..

To hear that living word we need not just to read, but to ponder in our hearts what we read. We read to encounter Christ and to hear his word to us - not just to read lots of words, but to read even a few words but read them more deeply, more reflectively. Indeed it has even been said that the purpose of reading scripture is less for us to read it, but to know that it reads us! And for us to listen to what it says about us, about our lives, their meaning and their purpose.

It takes time to become used to the full process of *Lectio*. But even in a relatively short time of prayer, say ten minutes, there will be an opportunity for the first three and the last stage - and the fourth stage may well be something one returns to during the rest of the day, as the reading and its import come to mind.

In the pages following are a number of passages which Pope Francis refers to in *Misericordiae Vultus*. They certainly repay the careful attention and prayer commended by Pope Benedict. And so too the readings we hear on Sundays - you might like to read and pray with one a day over the four days leading up to Sunday, and then return to them again on the three days following the Sunday.

Alternatively, return to a single passage daily over a number of days. You are likely to find that a particular word, phrase, sentence suggests itself to you for your pondering. Again, don’t rush it. Repetition and patience will earn their reward.

Lectio divina, which is truly ‘capable of opening up to the faithful the treasures of God’s word, but also of bringing about an encounter with Christ, the living word of God’. I would like here to review the basic steps of this procedure.

1. It opens with the READING (*LECTIO*) of a text, which leads to a desire to understand its true content: what does the biblical text say in itself? Without this, there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas.
2. Next comes MEDITATION (*MEDITATIO*), which asks: what does the biblical text say to us? Here, each person, individually but also as a member of the community, must let himself or herself be moved and challenged.
3. Following this comes PRAYER (*ORATIO*), which asks the question: what do we say to the Lord in response to his word? Prayer, as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise, is the primary way by which the word transforms us.
4. Finally, lectio divina concludes with CONTEMPLATION (*CONTEMPLATIO*), during which we take up, as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality, and ask ourselves what conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us? In the Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul tells us: ‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect’ (12:2). Contemplation aims at creating within us a truly wise and discerning vision of reality, as God sees it, and at forming within us ‘the mind of Christ’ (1 Cor 2:16). The word of God appears here as a criterion for discernment: it is ‘living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart’ (Heb 4:12).
5. We do well also to remember that the process of *lectio divina* is not concluded until it arrives at ACTION (*ACTIO*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity.