



## Praying with Scripture – *Lectio Divina* in Parish Meetings

As a key aspect synod implementation, it is proposed that parishes and other groups pray with Scripture – the practice known as *lectio divina* – at the beginning of meetings. This is something new for many and will raise questions. Some may ask: “Why take up valuable meeting time to pray with a Biblical text? How does it help us address the matters on the agenda?” Others will ask, “How do we do this?”

Below is a brief answer to both these questions – Why and How.

### **Why use *lectio* in parish meetings? In describing how pastoral plans are made at a synod, Pope Francis says:**

The first thing is to listen to God’s Word. This is what the Church is...it is the community that listens with faith and love to the Lord who speaks. The pastoral plan that you are living out together insists precisely on this fundamental dimension. It is the Word of God that inspires faith which nourishes and revitalizes it. And it is the Word of God that touches hearts, converts them to God and to his logic which is so different from our own. It is the Word of God that continually renews our communities.

Although the Bible seldom directly addresses the agenda items of parish meetings, it can help us to see these problems and questions in a different light. As such, it is not time taken away from the agenda of a meeting but helps to set the right focus for a meeting. Without this focus, we are likely to take a problem-solving approach to the agenda. While this is a necessary part of our meetings, it can easily dominate our discussion.

Praying with the Word of God opens us to the active presence of the Spirit in our midst. Making decisions with the help of the Spirit yields many good fruits – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

We often think of prayer as speaking to God about what is on our hearts. A richer understanding of prayer shows us that it begins with God speaking to us while we listen attentively. In turn, we speak to God and God listens to us. The whole dynamic of prayer involves all these elements.

“God speaks in the silence of the heart, and we listen. And then we speak to God from the fullness of our heart and God listens. And this listening and this speaking is what prayer is meant to be.”

- St Teresa of Calcutta

If prayer begins by listening to the word of God and if we desire to begin our meetings with prayer, what better way than by letting the Word of God speak to us? This way of prayer, known as *lectio divina* (literally “reading God”), has been a common practice throughout the history of the Church. In more recent years it has been rediscovered and is now widely used in personal and group prayer. You can learn more about *lectio* from the Archdiocesan website ([www.archwinnipeg.ca](http://www.archwinnipeg.ca)).

## How to Use *Lectio* in Meetings

Here is a simple step by step approach to *lectio* which can be a good way to get started. Depending on the size of the group, allow at least 20 to 30 minutes for this prayer; a little longer for the first time when more explanation and instruction are required.

1) **Quiet yourself, come into the presence of God and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer** (Preparation) - This is very important for it helps to turn our attention to God and put aside what we bring with us to the meeting that may be an obstacle to listening to one another and to God

2) **Read** (God speaks to us.) - Have someone read the text aloud. Read slowly to allow the words to sink in. Often the text is read twice by different readers with a brief silence in between readings. In the first reading people are asked to simply listen to the whole text. With the second reading they are asked to listen for something in the text which speaks most strongly to them: a word, a phrase, an image.

3) **Meditate** (We listen.) - Take time in silence to reflect on what the text says to you here and now. How does it speak to me? What does it mean for me?

4) **Share** (We speak and listen to one another.) – Share briefly about what spoke to you in the text and how you responded to it. Pope Francis often uses the phrase, “what touched me.”

5) **Pray** (We speak to God.) – Speak to God or Jesus about what you heard and how you received it: e.g. give thanks for what you received, ask God’s help to live what you have heard more fully, etc.

6) **Conclude** (God listens.) – *Our Father* is prayed together in confidence that God hears our prayer.

*Note:* There are many variations and forms of *lectio*. Additions and adaptations can be made as the group becomes more familiar with this form of prayer.

### ***Lectio* Leader Guide:**

- A leader is needed to guide the group. The leader does not need to be the pastor or meeting chairperson, although in the beginning they may be the ones best able to lead. As a group progresses, others will learn to lead and a team can be formed who will take turns leading at meetings.
- The leader is responsible to choose a text, and have a Bible or printed copy of the text available for each person. The best texts to use are from the Gospels, e.g. the Gospel for the coming Sunday or feast day.
- The leader's task is to explain and guide the people through the steps of *lectio*. As it takes time to become comfortable with this way of prayer, this is especially important at the beginning.
- Explain the importance of listening to the Biblical text, to our own response to the text, and to what others share about how they have been touched by the Word of God.
- Many people are hesitant to share their thoughts because they have not studied the Bible. Encourage all to share and remind them that *Lectio* is not a Bible study, but "my response to what I have heard in the Biblical text."
- Encourage but don't try to force. It is important to maintain an atmosphere in which people are free to share as they choose. Remind the group that each person is asked to share only on what he or she has heard in the Scripture text and not to comment on what others have shared.
- Many are also hesitant to pray aloud in a group. Always invite people to voice their own prayer but be prepared to offer a prayer yourself. It can be simple: giving thanks for all that the group has received from the Word of God and from each other.