ORIGEN (C.185-254)

The Spiritual Senses
Quotations from Scripture and Tradition

**Song of Songs 1:2-4 (Septuagint)**
Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,
For your breasts are better than wine,
and the fragrance of your perfumed unguents is better than all spices.

**The First Letter of John 1:1**
We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life; this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us...

**Origen, Commentary on Song 1:2-4**
...inflamed by desire for her bridegroom and afflicted with the internal wound of love—[the bride] pours out her prayer to God...and thinking of her bridegroom says, *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*...*(Origen says,) let us see [about] the inner meaning...*(the bride speaks) in order to set me on fire with love of [the Son of God] and desire for him, [the prophets] portrayed his beauty as well as his attractiveness and gentleness, with the result that I was set on fire with an unbearable love for him...*(Origen comments) when, apart from any human or angelic ministry, her mind is filled with divine understandings and thoughts, she has the right to believe that she has received the **kisses** of the Word of God...*(In Richard

**Origen, Contra Celsum**

We know that the holy Scriptures make mention of eyes, of ears, and of hands, which have nothing but the name in common with the bodily organs; and what is more wonderful, they speak of a diviner sense, which is very different from the senses as commonly spoken of. For when the prophet says, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Ps. 119:18) or, “the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps19:8), or, “Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death” (Ps. 13:3), no one is so foolish as to suppose that the eyes of the body behold the wonders of the divine law, or that the law of the Lord gives light to the bodily eyes, or that the sleep of death falls on the eyes of the body. When our Savior says, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt. 13:9), anyone will understand that the ears spoken of are of a diviner kind. When it is said that the word of the Lord was “in the hand” of Jeremiah or of some other prophet; or when the expression is used, “the law by the hand of Moses,” or, “I sought the Lord with my hands, and was not deceived” (Ps. 77:2 [LXX]),--no one is so foolish as not to see that the word “hands” is taken figuratively, as when John says, “Our hands have handled the Word of life” (I John 1:1). And if you wish further to learn from the sacred writings that there is a diviner sense than the senses of the body, you have only to hear what Solomon says, “Thou shalt find a divine sense” (Prov. 2:5). (Contra Celsum, vii. 34, quoted in McInroy, Mark J., “Origen of Alexandria,” in Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, 29-30)

**Gregory of Nyssa: Homily 5 on the Song of Songs**

…the Song of Songs sets out for us matters that evoke a desire for the contemplation of transcendent goods. At the very same time, it fills our soul with grief as...it creates despair of our grasping the Incomprehensible...for...the purified soul...does not yet seem...to have laid hold on what she seeks...

...Filled with sweetness by the [apple tree’s] fruit, she entered the treasure houses of gladness (for the name of gladness is “wine,” by which the heart of those who share it are rejoiced [cf. Ps 103:15]). Disposed and ordered by love, she is sustained by perfumes, after being clothed about by apples...(In Richard Norris, trans., *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012)

**Augustine, Confessions X. 27. 38**

You (God) called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours. (Henry Chadwick, trans., p. 201)
Julian of Norwich, Showings
And so we shall by his sweet grace in our own meek continual prayer come into him now in this life by many secret touchings of sweet spiritual sights and feelings, measured out to us as our simplicity may bear it. And this is done and will be done by the grace of the Holy Spirit, until the day that we die, still longing for love. And then we shall all come into our Lord, knowing ourselves clearly and wholly possessing God, and we shall all be endlessly hidden in God, truly seeing and wholly feeling, and hearing him spiritually and delectably smelling him and sweetly tasting him. And there we shall see God face to face, familiarly and wholly.
THE SPIRITUAL SENSES

Bibliography

Augustine, *Confessions*.


——. Contra Celsum

——. On First Principles

LECTIO DIVINA
(Sacred Reading)

Guidelines

**Lectio**: We read

**Meditatio**: Under the eye of God

**Oratio**: Until the heart is touched

**Contemplatio**: And leaps to flame

We start a session of *lectio divina* by setting aside a special time to spend exclusively with God. Although twenty minutes to half an hour ordinarily should suffice, gifting yourself on occasion with two hours of quietness and solitude can deepen your experience in important ways. Such an extended period may even be necessary if we’ve been distracted by many things or haven’t been able to pray for some time. Even if you and God don’t actually need that much time on a given day to speak and listen to one another, just knowing that you have reserved such an expanded space of time can take away the psychic pressure associated with the idea that you must achieve something in prayer, or that something momentous must happen. Teresa of Avila says that prayer means “taking time frequently to be with the One we know loves us.” She’s right, of course. However, if in our recent history we haven’t managed to keep frequent appointments with God, we may need to take additional time, at least at the beginning of a new practice.

Simply put, *lectio* is reading. But it’s a special kind of reading, slow, hopeful, and meditative. When beginning the practice of *lectio*, the text should be scripture, although later a good classical piece of devotional writing or even theology could be appropriate, as long as it doesn’t distract you from God but, instead, leads you toward God. *Lectio* is a way of reading that gives way very quickly to listening: We allow the text of scripture to sound forth in our hearing with God’s very special word spoken to us. Yes, God does speak to us when we allow God to remove every obstacle which tells us that God never speaks to us. *Lectio* creates the context in which God begins to train us to hear the word of God. At every step, God’s training up of us involves a profound letting go, letting go even and especially of our fear that God is not there for us, letting go on the other hand, of our need to have God be there for us in the way that we want God to be there for us. God comes in God’s own way and on God’s own time-table. And that fact transforms us, modulating our self-centeredness, preparing us for relation with others and with our God who is utterly Other. Thus, in *lectio divina*, as contrasted with other styles
of prayer, the method itself prepares us for genuine love: because the text is not our own subjectivity, the process of lectio teaches us a fundamental lesson about the otherness of creatures and, ultimately, about the otherness of God.

Lectio is effective for praying because we believe that scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit whom Jesus promised the Father would send in his name is the same Spirit who gives life to the word of scripture. It is our active faith in this Spirit, present in the word and in ourselves, which, when brought to the reading and hearing of scripture, “in-spires” or “breathes into” it the living reality of the Speaker. We also believe that Jesus the Word, Logos, informs scripture, and we can meet him there.

In lectio, as in almost all praying, it is helpful to maintain a posture in which your spine is straight, not rigid, but gently and flexibly held so that the communication of energy between the brain and the body is not constricted. Start by reading a single sentence. Read first aloud; next in a whisper, the voice of intimacy; next in silence, the voice of unity. Dwell on the text’s meaning. But don’t continue to mine it intellectually. Instead, release the meaning and wait in silence. Listen for God’s word. Speak to God in response. And listen again. Repeat the above.

HOW TO PRACTICE LECTIO DIVINA

LECTIO

1. Familiarize yourself with the text.

2. Read the passage slowly, once out loud, once in a whisper, once in silence.

3. “God, You are here, I am here, we are here. And always, always you love us.”

4. Ask: What is this passage saying to me now?

MEDITATIO

5. What is its point of contact with your life? How does it speak to what is going on with you right now?

6. Like Ignatius of Loyola, use your imagination and your mind; read the text through all five of your senses. Put yourself in the scene. Listen, feel, watch, smell,
taste. Allow your intuitive function free rein.

7. Use your mind in the way that works best for you: “Pray as you can, and do not try to pray as you can’t.” (Dom John Chapman)

8. Ask: How does this text speak to me of God, or Jesus?

**ORATIO**

9. Let go of your reasoning process. Stop speculating with your mind.

10. Allow your heart to feel what it longs to feel as it pours out love toward God and remains open to receive God’s love.

11. Enter into a very subtle, intimate, interior dialogue.

12. Tell God and Jesus that you love them (or not) and be open to their response.

13. Ask: What do You want me to do? How do You want me to respond to You? What would it be good for me to desire right now?

**CONTEMPLATIO**

14. Allow yourself to rest in God.

15. Let your inner process be idle and unconcerned.

16. Enter into the eternity of which Augustine speaks.

17. Just gaze on God and feel God’s gaze on you.

**RESOURCES**

Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*

______, *Toward God: The Ancient Wisdom of Western Prayer*

Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina, with 500 Scripture Texts for Prayer*

Francis Kelly Nemeck, O.M.I. and Marie Theresa Coombs, *Hermit, Contemplation*

(Compiled by Dr. Elisabeth Koenig: ekoenig@gts.edu)
LECTIO DIVINA


True self, false self.

Jesus

The Practice of Lectio Divina

"Love itself is a form of knowledge."

Lectio: We read
Meditatio: under the eye of God
Oratio: until the heart is touched
Contemplatio: and leaps into flame.
PRACTICE OUTLINE:

1. Background to Lectio Divina

2. Praying Lectio Divina as a classroom community

3. Debrief and Discuss

4. Praying Lectio Divina individually

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lectio</th>
<th>Explanation*</th>
<th>Faculty*</th>
<th>4-Fold Meaning**</th>
<th>Prayer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading and Understanding the Text.</td>
<td>Mind</td>
<td>Literal (on the page)</td>
<td>Here I am.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditatio</td>
<td>Placing the meaning in context of Christ</td>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>Allegorical (understanding the past in a new way)</td>
<td>Let me discern your spirit in this passage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oratio</td>
<td>Praying for the “holy desire” for God.</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Tropological/Moral (improvement of life)</td>
<td>Help me find my own response to your Word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplatio</td>
<td>Resting in God.</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>Anagogical/Mystical (consummation of God’s promises.)</td>
<td>May I entrust myself to you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From Michael Casey, Sacred Reading and Thelma Hall, Too Deep for Words
**From Diogenes Allen, Spiritual Theology, taken from John Cassian’s Conferences

The Gospel of Luke, Chapter 24: 13-

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near
and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to
them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood
still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are
you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken
place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things
about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God
and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be
condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to
redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is not the third day since these things took
place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb
early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and
told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some
of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had
said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are and
how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not
necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”
Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things
about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if
he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is
almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them.
When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it
to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished
from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us
while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”
That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven
and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen
indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the
road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.