

St. Dominic's Eighth Way of Prayer

The following description of our Holy Father, Dominic at *lectio divina* is given in an early Dominican document on his Nine Ways of Prayer.

The holy father Dominic also had another beautiful way of praying, full of devotion and grace. After the canonical hours and the grace which is said in common after meals the father would go off quickly to some place where he could be alone, in a cell or somewhere. Sober and alert and anointed with a spirit of devotion which he had drawn from the words of God which had been sung in choir or during the meal, he would settle himself down to read or pray, recollecting himself in himself and fixing himself in the presence of God. Sitting there quietly, he would open some book before him, arming himself first with the sign of the cross, and then he would read. And he would be moved in his mind as delightfully as if he heard the Lord speaking to him. As the Psalm says, 'I will hear what the Lord God is saying in me, because he will speak peace to his people and upon his saints, and to those who turn to him with all their heart' (Psalms 84:9). It was as if he were arguing with a friend; at one moment he would appear to be feeling impatient, nodding his head energetically, then he would seem to be listening quietly, then you would see him disputing and struggling, and laughing and weeping all at once, fixing then lowering his gaze, then again speaking quietly and beating his breast. If anyone was inquisitive enough to want to spy on him secretly, he would find that the holy father Dominic was like Moses, who went into the innermost desert and saw the burning bush and the Lord speaking and calling to him to humble himself (Exodus 3:1ff). The man of God had a prophetic way of passing over quickly from reading to prayer and from meditation to contemplation.

When he was reading like this on his own, he used to venerate the book and bow to it and sometimes kiss it, particularly if it was a book of the gospels or if he was reading the words which Christ had spoken with his own lips. And sometimes he used to hide his face and turn it aside, or he would bury his face in his hands or hide it a little in his scapular. And then he would also become anxious and full of yearning, and he would also rise a little, respectfully, and bow as if he were thanking some very special person for favors received. Then, quite refreshed and at peace in himself, he would continue reading his book.

Text for *The Nine Ways of Prayer* (1997) translated by Father Simon Tugwell, O.P.



Lectio Divina as Dominican Prayer

Our Holy Father St. Dominic inherited this way of prayer from the monastic tradition which he participated in through his life as a Canon Regular. He is called the "vir evangelicus," the "man of the Gospel" because he was so saturated with the Word of God and so eager to preach that Word to bring souls to Jesus Christ. As founder of the Order of Preachers he taught his sons and daughters and showed them by his example that all preaching flows from the deep relationship with God nourished by contemplation of His Word. The cloistered Dominican nuns live this life of contemplation at the heart of the "holy preaching" of the Dominican Order:

"The friars, sisters and laity of the Order are 'to preach the name of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout the world'; the nuns are to seek, ponder and call upon him in solitude so that the word proceeding from the mouth of God may not return to him empty, but may accomplish those things for which it was sent (cf. Is. 55:10)."

(*The Constitutions of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers*, 1.II)

A Dominican Guide to *Lectio Divina*



The purpose of all regular observance, especially enclosure and silence, is that the word of God may dwell abundantly in the monastery.

(*The Constitutions of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers*)

I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *Lectio Divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n.25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church – I am convinced of it – a new spiritual springtime.

(Pope Benedict XVI)

Dominican Nuns, Dominican Monastery of St. Jude
143 County Rd. 20 E., Marbury, AL 36051

MarburyDominicanNuns.org

What is *Lectio Divina*?

Lectio Divina, literally “sacred reading,” is an ancient monastic way of praying Holy Scripture leading to a dialogue with God. As St. Ambrose said in the fourth century, “We speak to God when we pray, we hear him when we read the divine sayings.”



By praying with the Scripture in this way, we open ourselves to be transformed by the Word of God. We imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary, who “kept all these words and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). In receptive silence our hearts are able to receive the Word so that it may bear much fruit in our own life and for the salvation of souls.

Steps of *Lectio Divina*

Preparation: Find a calm, quiet place in which to pray, at a time when you will not be disturbed. Start with 15-30 minutes of *lectio divina*, ideally every day. You may use the daily Gospel reading for Mass, or choose to read sequentially through a book of the Bible—it is recommended to begin with the Gospels.

Begin in silence with a prayer to the Holy Spirit to enlighten your heart and your mind through His Word in Scripture. Ask Our Lady to help you be open to receive the Word from God.

1st Step: *Lectio* (Reading): Read through the passage of Scripture, taking it in on a basic level. It can be helpful to read it out loud, if possible, or if not, to enunciate the words interiorly. Notice what strikes you about the passage.

Lectio divina has been compared to nourishing oneself on the Word of God; this first step, *lectio*, is like taking the food into your mouth.

2nd Step: *Meditatio* (Meditation): Return and read the passage over from the beginning. This time, stop and linger over any word, phrase, or sentence that strikes you. Repeat it to yourself. Taste it. Sometimes the larger meaning of a passage will impress you; other times the presence of a particular phrase is striking, or simply the fact that God has given this to you as His Word. You may notice more deeply connections within the passage, with other texts from Scripture, and with your own life.

Meditatio is compared to chewing, ruminating over what you have taken in. Ponder and absorb the Word; as you repeat and soak up the Word, it almost becomes memorized, a part of you. In this you are also “taking on the mind of Christ.”

By shunning the cares and illusions of the world (cf. Mt. 13:22), the nuns allow the seed which is the word of God to grow in their hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit; in so receiving it they are interiorly renewed and more closely conformed to Christ.

(The Constitutions of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers)

3rd Step: *Oratio* (Prayer): As you slowly ponder the Word, you also respond to what Our Lord is saying to you at this moment. Perhaps you praise Him for His marvelous works, ask Him for graces for yourself or others, tell Him you are sorry for

failing Him in some way and resolve to do better, or thank Him for speaking to you now and revealing Himself to you through the Scriptures.

Oratio can be seen as obtaining the flavor, the appreciation or response to the food.

4th Step: *Contemplatio* (Contemplation): The end point of *lectio divina* is simply resting in God’s presence. Sometimes this is an extension of an act of thanks, praise, or love in response to the Word. Sometimes it may be an awareness of His presence simply given by God. As St. Peter said on the mount of the Transfiguration, “It is good, Lord, to be here.”

Remain with Our Lord, without worrying about getting through the whole Scriptural passage; when your attention wanders, return to the text and continue again with *lectio*.

In digestion, the food you have eaten accomplishes its end in nourishment for the body; *lectio* ends in *contemplatio*, sweet refreshment and nourishment for the soul.

Progression of Steps: These four stages are laid out in order to describe the basic progression of this prayer, not to limit your practice of it. So, for instance, if in your initial reading (*lectio*) you are moved to cry out to God in prayer (*oratio*), certainly do so! St. Dominic himself was said to pass from reading to prayer, from prayer to meditation, and from meditation to contemplation. The point is to meet God through His Word in the Scripture.

Conclusion: Praise and thank God for the graces you have received. Pray a *Hail Mary* asking the Blessed Virgin to help you continue to ponder these words in your heart as you go about your daily life.

For this, it can be helpful to choose a word, phrase, or sentence that especially stood out to you during the time of prayer, to impress especially on your mind and remember throughout the day in order to renew the graces received and lift up your mind and heart to God. You may also wish to record particular “lights” or insights in a spiritual journal in order to recall God’s blessings later on.