

# HOW TO PRAY THE BIBLE

## *THE FOUR STEPS of Lectio Divina*

SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD -- JANUARY 24, 2021

**“Pray daily with sacred Scripture, especially through the practice of *lectio divina*.”**

When Pope Francis instituted the Sunday of the Word of God, he challenged Catholics to “pray daily with sacred Scripture, especially through the practice of *lectio divina*” (AI 3). *Lectio divina* is Latin for “divine reading.” But what does it involve? How do we pray with the Bible?

In Pope Benedict XVI’s exhortation on the Word of the Lord, he outlines four “basic steps” for the practice of *lectio divina*. (VD 86-87)

### 1 Reading

The first step is to pick a passage from the Bible and read it carefully. If you are a beginner, it is a good idea to start with one of the Gospels. While reading the passage, we strive to understand its content, asking: “What is the biblical passage saying in itself?”

### 2 Meditation

The second step is to think about what we have read and allow ourselves to be “moved and challenged.” This means taking time to reflect. While meditating, we ask: “What is this passage saying to me?”

### 3 Prayer

The third step is to talk with God from the heart. During this step, we ask: “What do we say to the Lord in response to his word?” By taking time to talk with God, our Scripture reading leads to a dialogue between us and the Lord.

As the Catechism teaches:

We speak to him when we pray, we listen to him when we read the divine oracles. –St. Ambrose (CCC 2653)

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### 4 Contemplation

The fourth step involves simply listening to God in the silence of our hearts. In the beautiful words of the Catechism:

*Contemplative prayer is a gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus. “I look at him and he looks at me.” (CCC 2715)*

During contemplative prayer, our hearts are focused on the Lord while we abide in his presence, so that “*the mind of Christ*” may be formed in us. Ultimately, *contemplation is “a gift, a grace” (CCC 2713).*

The twelfth century Carthusian monk, Guigo II, used the analogy of eating to describe this prayer:

Reading is like bringing food to the mouth;  
Meditation chews and breaks it down;  
Prayer is tasting its flavor, and  
Contemplation is the sweetness  
that delights and renews.<sup>1</sup>

And, as Pope Benedict XVI pointed out, this prayer is never fully complete unless that sweetness not only refreshes and gladdens our hearts but “moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity (VD, 87).”

<sup>1</sup> *Scala Paradisi, II (Patrologia Latina 40:997)*, original translation.



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