

Notes for Group Leaders
Deacon Al Laabs, CTK Parish
Why Catholic-Year Four
"PRAYER—Christian Prayer"
Fall 2011---Chapters 1-6

In General

"Introduction" Highly recommend reading page xi in the Intro on the topic "How we can pray right from our hearts." I have always recommended that groups end with some spontaneous prayer and several of the sessions this year specifically call for it. This four part approach may help those in your group who hesitate to speak aloud what is in their hearts.

Note that the "Suggested Environment" has expanded suggestions beyond the usual Catechism, Bible, and candle. See Session One with its idea of burning incense at the start of the session as an example.

This revised version of year four is tremendously improved over the earlier version I reviewed several months ago and I must give credit to the editors of Why Catholic for including much more information in each session.

I think you will find it easy to get through these sessions with your group. In the final analysis, what we have learned through years one to three of Why Catholic should lead us to be able to enter into a personal relationship with our God. I think the following opening paragraph from Part Four of the Catechism is a great introduction to the mystery of our life of faith and prayer: CCC 2558:

""Great is the mystery of the faith!" The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles' Creed (*Part One*[of the Catechism]) and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy (*Part Two*), so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father (*Part Three*). This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer."

Session One "What is Prayer?"

Strongly recommend that everyone reads carefully and **prayerfully** sections 2559 to 2565 from the Catechism to develop an insight that prayer is a response to God's love for us as gift, covenant, and communion. Prayer begins with faith in the person of Jesus Christ and our words, our responses, and whatever we do forms the personal encounter that flows from a relationship with Him. Because of our social nature and the imprint of our Creator in us, in some fashion, prayer will always mirror Trinitarian Love—that is it will involve a three part relationship between God, ourselves and others. Note also the following reflection on the Catechism from the USCCA, p. 463, "We should consider Part Four's reflection on the

foundations of prayer and the meaning of the Our Father as essentially related to liturgical prayer and a basic complement to it.”

Key Ideas:

- Prayer is God’s gift but we are the ones who hide from Him in face of a totally free creative love that wishes salvation and life eternal for us.
- The beginning of prayer is our belief and in the mystery of our faith we respond, celebrating it in liturgy as a people and living it in a relationship with God and others we call prayer and response.
- How do we know God wishes to embrace us? Scripture and the revealed history of God’s relationship to us...stories such as the Samaritan woman and the Prodigal Son.
- We know the face of God through Jesus.
- Take note of the first sharing question on page four of the this session: “Take a moment to reflect on what word, phrase, or image from the Scripture passage touches your heart or speaks to your life.” This will be an important response to all the “Pondering the Word” sections.
- In “Being with God” note that all relationships we know can suffer if we neglect them or fail to hold them in priority.
- While prayer can take many forms, note that the source of prayer is this mysterious part of us we call our heart—the center of our inmost being, the place where we enter into that “covenant” and encounter our God and where we want to exercise our will to align it with God’s will.
- At times God may seem distant to us (CF: Mother Teresa of Calcutta’s struggle) but in truth God never leaves us. Good suggestions at the end of this session for spiritual reading that can help us overcome times of dryness. I find that going back to Scripture helps me as does an honest evaluation of God’s blessings in my life.
- Journaling is a powerful way of setting a priority as well as a place/time for reflection on our prayer life.

Session Two

“Prayer in the Old Testament”

I’ve often heard people say something to the effect, “What does the Old Testament have to do with us today?” It is interesting that one of the early heresies faced by the Church is that of Marcion (approx. 145 AD) who wanted to throw out the Old Testament, in effect saying that the God of the OT could not be the Father God of the New Testament whose Son is Jesus. In truth there are a lot of parallels between us and our Jewish forbearers. Do we not have a constant struggle with the culture of our times in terms of our faithfulness to God? Haven’t we erected “strange gods before us” in the form of materialism, radical personal freedom, and a culture of relativism? So I think the lived experience of the “Old Israel” in their prayer and experience of God in their lives can teach us much about ourselves and God in our lives.

Key Ideas:

- Acknowledgment of God's presence in the world.
- Abraham's call and the embracement of God's will as the "indispensable" part of a prayer relationship
- Abraham's fidelity and trust even in his childless state leads our authors to comment, "Thus one aspect of the drama of prayer appears from the beginning: the test of faith in the fidelity of God." CCC2570.
- Prayer as a "...battle of faith and as the triumph of perseverance." CCC2573. See Abraham, Moses, Queen Esther.
- Note section on page 14, "Spotlight on the *Catechism*" and the vast importance of the Psalms. Pope Benedict in his *Jesus of Nazareth, Part Two*, makes immense use of the Psalms in developing a more complete understanding of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Note their use in Liturgy and in the *Liturgy of the Hours*, the daily public prayer of the Church. It is worth quoting page 15 of this session to describe them: "A unique part of the Old Testament is the Book of Psalms, a collection of 150 hymns and prayers that express the personal experiences of the writers or the works of God among his people." The Psalms cover a complete range of emotions from lament to joy, anger to sorrow, and truly do mirror our own experiences.

Session Three
"How to Pray"

Key Ideas:

- "I must take a little silence with my soul to be united with my God..." Pope JP I, 1978.
- "We can learn about prayer most fully in the example of the life and ministry of Jesus...and intense prayer of Jesus that is described in the gospels springs from his loving relationship with God." See page 19.
 1. Jesus prays before decisive events in his ministry.
 2. Prayed constantly and for all people.
 3. Began his prayers with thanksgiving.
 4. Expressed a total submission of his human will to that of his Father.
 5. Jesus told us to be reconciled with our brothers and sisters before prayer.
 6. Pray with confidence and childlike trust, be watchful, attentive.
 7. Most Important: when He would no longer be there with them, they were to pray to God in His name, in the name of Jesus.
- Our prayer is also modeled on the prayer of the Virgin Mary. Her "let it be done according to thy word" echoes our own prayer in the Our Father "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." See esp. the "Spotlight on the Catechism" section on page 22. "We do not pray to Mary in the same way we pray to God. In prayer to Mary, we invoke her intercession on behalf of our needs, whereas when we pray to God we ask him directly for gifts and favors." USCCA pp. 471-472. I would esp. recommend your reading the section "Prayer in Communion with Mary" in the USCCA pp. 470 to 472. I think this

is important because Catholics are often criticized by other Christians since we “worship” Mary or we “split our devotion between Christ and Mary.” We ask Mary to intercede and pray for us as in the ending of the Hail Mary just as we might ask any person of influence for assistance before an authority. Similar criticisms also are made in relation to intercessory prayer towards the Communion of Saints.

Session Four ***Expressions of Prayer***

It is important to note as this chapter begins that prayer has always been integral in the life of the Church as the Acts of the Apostles describes the early life of the followers of Jesus. As such in the prayer life of the Church, scripture plays an essential part. “The Holy Spirit, (as the session continues), has inspired the Church to develop additional forms of prayer. The following is an interesting summary introduction in this same vein that is available on Wikipedia under Roman Catholic Devotions. Those of you who see this in electronic version will have the [links](#) working for further information:

“While the Catholic Church considers the [liturgy](#) as central to the life and mission of the Church and encourages Catholics to participate in it as often as possible, it also acknowledges the objective nature of the liturgy and also encourages the cultivation of pious acts and personal devotions; the constitution [Sacrosanctum Concilium](#), item 12 states: "The spiritual life, however, is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy".^{[11][12]}

“Building on the [Gospel](#) of [Matthew 6:6](#), which encourages *private prayer*, the Church thus encourages an "interior life" of prayer and devotion and the development of a personal relationship with God, as well as with the [Blessed Virgin Mary](#), the angels and the saints.^[11] The constitution [Sacrosanctum Concilium](#), item 13 states:

“Popular devotions of the Christian people are to be highly commended, provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church, above all when they are ordered by the Apostolic See.^[12]

“It should be noted that Catholics worship only God and the [Holy Trinity](#). The three level hierarchy of [latria](#), [hyperdulia](#) and [dulia](#) (which were discussed by both Saints [Augustine](#) and [Thomas Aquinas](#)) determines the appropriate type of worship and veneration for different situations.^{[13][14][15]} The term [latria](#) (from the [Greek](#) [λατρεία](#), *latreia*) is used for worship, adoration and reverence directed only to the Holy Trinity.^{[16][17]} [Dulia](#) is the kind of honor given to the communion of saints, with the exception of the [Blessed Virgin Mary](#), who is honored with [hyperdulia](#). Thus hyperdulia is below latria and above dulia.^{[13][14][15]}

I thought maybe this last paragraph above at the beginning of this session might be a good addition to the issue that sometimes is mentioned in conjunction with prayers to the Saints and Mary. From the perspective of apologetics, there are wonderful resources online

that can help us defend our Catholic devotions. Otherwise, the bulk of this session outlines five forms of prayer. I found that the original descriptions of these types of prayer are wonderfully done in the *Catechism* from 2626 through 2639. It would be good to recommend everyone's reading of those sections, using them as the basis for additional prayer and meditation.

Key Ideas:

- Prayers of blessing and adoration: A prayer of blessing is our response to God's gifts as we turn to God as the source of all that is good in our lives. "Underlying this dialogue is adoration, in which we both respect and exalt the greatness of our creator and the power of Jesus Christ, who saved us from the consequences of sin and death CCC,2628."
- Prayers of petition: Our most familiar form of prayer! Note that the *Catechism* reminds us that we should always pray first for God to forgive our sins. "In fact, this primary petition, this expression of trusting humility, is a prerequisite for both personal prayer and for the celebration of the Eucharist (CCC, 2631)."
- Prayer of intercession: "Intercession is prayer on behalf of another." Think of all the times during the shared liturgy we pray for others, living and dead, and for the world. Note also the *Liturgy of the Hours*, the official prayer of the Church, is offered for others and is constantly being prayed by priest, deacons and religious as well as the laity around the world through all time zones.
- Prayer of thanksgiving: The most powerful prayer of thanksgiving we share together is the Eucharist.
- Prayer of praise: "We praise God in prayer not because of what he has done, but just because he is—he exists." I think the following sentence on page 31 is worth highlighting: "Praise is the prayer form that embraces all the others and focuses them on the source and goal of all prayer: God (CCC, 2639)."

For those who get these notes on line, here's a good link to site sponsored by EWTN that has a wonderful collection of Catholic prayers:

<http://www.ewtn.com/devotionals/prayers/index.htm>.

You'll find this quote at the bottom of this site and it is great to ponder its depth and simplicity at the same time:

"For me prayer is a surge of the heart, it is a simple look towards Heaven,
it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy."

- Saint Therese of Lisieux

Session Five

The Sources and Ways of Prayer

Key Ideas:

- Praying with faith, hope and love: We must have the **will** to pray, be **deliberate** about it, and prayer is something we must **learn**. Note the sentence on page 36: "The Holy Spirit teaches us prayer through the legacy—the Sacred Tradition—that is handed down to us in the Church (CCC, 2650).

- We learn to pray by reading, reflecting on Scriptures, by celebrating sacramental liturgy, by practicing the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. When we pray, we take in this relationship with our God, making it a part of us, and in turn becoming other Christs. Note the “Spotlight on the *Catechism*” and esp. the last sentence, worth underlining: “Faith puts vitality in prayer because it brings us to a personal relationship with Christ. Hope carries our prayer to our final goal of permanent union with God. Love, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, is the source and destiny of prayer (*USCCA*, pp. 468-69).” To that I would add the expansive idea that the destiny of love is both God and Neighbor.
- The Holy Name: I would commend the exercise in reflection two, the Jesus Prayer, and discussion on your group’s experience (see pages 38-39).
- In reflection three which centers on the role of the Spirit in prayer and suggests calling on the Spirit, I would direct your group to CCC, 2670 and point out the second sentence in that section which reads: “Every time we begin to pray to Jesus it is the Holy Spirit who draws us on the way of prayer by his **prevenient** [emphasis mine] grace.” See also CCC, 2681: “The Church invites us to invoke the Holy Spirit as the interior Teacher of Christian prayer.” Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. It helps to remember that prayer is always Trinitarian in nature.
- Prayer inspired by Mary: This short section has two themes that are important to grasp. When we pray to Mary in the first instance, our prayer “magnifies” the Lord for all He has done for her and through her Fiat what she made possible for all human beings. The second theme entrusts our cares and needs to her good graces to present to her Son on our behalf. Let me again mention what the *USCCA*, page 472 (top), says about praying to the Blessed Virgin: “We do not pray to Mary in the same way we pray to God. In prayer to Mary, we invoke her intercessions on behalf of our needs, whereas when we pray to God we ask Him directly for gifts and favors.”

Session Six
Guides for Prayer

I would recommend as group leader that you read the *USCCA*, p. 472 entitled “Guides for prayer.” This four paragraph section does a wonderful job of summarizing this session.

Key Ideas:

- The heritage left by the Saints, their lives as examples, their writings, and their intercessory prayers on our behalf that continue to be with us all can be an aid and guide to a life of prayer.

- Similarly, mention can be made of the schools of spirituality that are part of our Church's rich heritage such as the Franciscan, Dominican, and Jesuit and so on. All of these can be accessed by reference material and books to teach us how to pray.
- The first place of guidance in prayer is the "domestic church" otherwise known as the family and hence the key responsibility parents have after Baptism to form the new creation into our faith.
- Note the very worthwhile box on page 45 with a quote from Blessed Pope John Paul II's letter to Families.
- The emergence of prayer groups is mentioned and it should be obvious that the Spirit has played a role in the development and strengthening of each of our "study" groups that also take the time to pray. So the point to make is to recognize the power of groups/individuals committing themselves to join in prayer. One of my favorite themes is how much we can inspire and influence one another in our faith when we gather "in His name." This is a true pep rally but with the potential for ever lasting impact on us as individuals and on us as a Christian community.
- I think it is worthwhile to point out the suggestion of creating a "prayer corner" in our homes, a place set aside and marked by pictures of our favorite saints, other religious signs, icons, and use it on a regular basis. If the sentence quoted on page 47 of our book, "Prayer is the life of the new heart" has truth in it, then regular prayer has to be seen as the heart beat of the Catholic Christian. And that takes a place and a time of daily commitment.
- Finally, note the box "Spending time in His presence" on page 47 also. It is so important to invite our group members to take advantage of our monthly holy hour of adoration on First Friday. We are truly blessed as Catholic Christians, however, since all we need do to spend time in His presence is to visit our Church when we have an opportunity. A quick visit in passing can life out hearts and assure us that Christ is with us as we go on to face the next challenge on our journey.

Final Note

I am passing along a printed presentation by Linda Kulzer, OSB., I received during my course on Spirituality in our deacon training. Fr. Albert shared this insight in Lectio Divina as prayer with us because it also touches on some aspects of Benedictine spirituality and prayer itself. In re-reading it, I think it also has some great insights into the ideas on prayer touched on in these first six sessions so please feel free to use it as you please. I do suggest that you try for one of your sessions this fall, an effort at Lectio praying using scripture of your choice. The author's approach is very easy to follow with a group or for an individual.

Lectio Divina as Prayer
Linda Kulzer, OSB
Oblate Sunday, January 25, 2004

Introduction

In this conference I want to talk first about prayer in general and then about *Lectio Divina*, which is frequently referred to as Holy Reading. While the daily common prayer we do together is certainly one of the forms of prayer, my talk today will be concerned mainly with private or personal prayer. I would like to make two short comments on common prayer before I go on to discuss private prayer. One represents a type of monastic story that is always making the rounds in our Benedictine houses. We are told that a certain monastery was engaged in Liturgy of the Hours when a terrible storm started rocking the Chapel. The Abbot suddenly rings the gong and everyone stops praying. He announces, "We have to stop this and say some real prayers." A more positive image comes from Demetrius Dumm, OSB in his book, *Cherish Christ above All*. He speaks of how the effect on us of the daily recitation of the psalms is like the action of the crock-pot. I am drawn to this analogy because I have a penchant for cooking with a crock-pot.

The crock-pot cooks by a process that is very slow, quiet and unobtrusive, but it tenderizes the toughest cut of meat in a way that is so subtle that one is invariably surprised at the result. (He then refers to the speedier process of the pressure cooker.) But that is not the Benedictine way. Benedictines have always been very patient in matters of conversion, for they are convinced that haste is not fruitful in the long run. And I suspect that many a tough-willed monastic (or other Christian) has been made docile and gentle before God by faithful praying of the psalms.

But today we will look at private prayer. I will say a little about what prayer is not and then spend more time on trying to say what I believe prayer really is. Next there will be a section on *Lectio*, with the hope that another time S. Helene will find someone to give more attention to the actual practice of *Lectio*.

What Prayer Is Not

My first concern is to say what prayer is not. Prayer is not about pleasing God. Such an attitude is really a block to our believing in God's unconditional love. This attitude makes us feel that God is disappointed in us because we do not pray or because we do not pray enough. It is difficult for us to grasp the truth that God does not need prayer from us. We need prayer in our lives. We tend to feel that God would like us better if we prayed more. God loves us just as we are at this very moment. God's unconditional love for us is not influenced one way or the other by our prayer life. When we connect God's disapproval with our lack of praying, we introduce a negative element that can actually damage our prayer life.

Prayer as Building a Relationship with God

I just asserted that we need prayer in our lives—we need it for our own happiness and spiritual health. Now let's look at some of the things that might help define prayer. First of all, prayer is about building a relationship. Here I would like to make a claim about faith—our Christian faith is first and foremost faith in someone—in Christ the Son of God. When we claim that we embrace Christianity—we need to look carefully at the word, Christianity. For a Christian, true prayer concentrates on the person of Christ.

There is a story told by a French theologian of the instructions being given to someone training for marksmanship. The persons helping him suggest that he should hold the gun in a particular way so as to hit the target. However, the trainee's efforts at hitting the target are unsuccessful. After many more suggestions, all of which were unsuccessful, an observer asks to be given an opportunity to assist the novice. This person tells him to look steadily at the target--not to let anything else distract him: "Keep your eyes on the target until you feel drawn to its center." Within a short time the trainee was hitting the target repeatedly. The theologian then goes on to say that this is very applicable to the spiritual life. Keep your eyes constantly on Christ, don't become distracted by other issues such as laws and regulations. You will find yourself drawn to Christ, and that very attachment will illuminate all other aspects of the spiritual life.

Jesus is more than a model to be imitated. In the book, *The Holy Longing*, Ronald Rolheiser quotes John Shea, "Jesus is not a law to be obeyed or a model to be imitated, but a presence to be seized and acted upon." Rolheiser says that Jesus wants us to undergo his presence so as to enter into a community of life and celebration with him. He then goes on to explain: Undergoing Jesus must be the center of any Christian spirituality. Within Christian spirituality, long before we speak of anything else (church, dogmas, commandments, even admonitions to love and justice), we must speak about Jesus, the person and the energy that under-girds everything else; after all, everything else is merely a branch. Jesus is the vine, the blood, the pulse and the heart.

The author of The Imitation of Christ assures us that if we root out one fault each year we will soon become perfect. Anyone who has tried this method knows that after a while, the burden this puts on us becomes too much. No matter how hard we try, we never seem to become perfect in even one virtue. How then can we manage a whole list of virtues? Psalm 86 provides another direction. The psalmist tells us not to strive for patience or humility or charity in themselves. Rather we ask God for the grace to be single-hearted, to have one goal in life and to have that goal be God. Our hearts are not made to fall in love with patience and humility and charity. The very naming of them leaves us cold. But let us spend our time thinking lovingly on Jesus and soon we will find our hearts burning within us and patience and humility will become desirable, not in themselves, but because we would like to be like the Christ we have learned to love.

St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, at the beginning of every meditation from the second week of the Exercises onward offers as the grace to be sought, "That I may know Christ more intimately, love him more deeply and follow him more closely"--that is what the spiritual life is all about. Ignatius locates our entire spirituality in our relationship with Christ. Prayer, therefore, is about our efforts (and the Spirit's efforts within us) to build a relationship.

Prayer as an Awareness of God's Presence

An additional aspect of prayer is cultivating an awareness of God's presence in our hearts. In Thomas Keating's book, *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*, he makes this claim: "The start, middle, and end of the spiritual journey is the conviction that God is always present. As we progress in this journey, we perceive God's presence more and more." This is the great reward of a life of prayer. It means that gradually we find ourselves living more consistently in God's presence. We have a sense of God's gaze of love fixed on us no matter what activity we are engaged in. When Benedict says in the Rule (7:13), "let the (monastic) recall that he is always seen by God in heaven, (and) that his actions everywhere are in God's sight," we should understand this not as a warning but as a reassurance of our invitation to bask in God's presence. Another place Benedict reminds us, "Hour by hour keep careful watch over all you do, aware that God's gaze is upon you wherever you may be." I see this as a summons to turn often to, or hopefully to live continuously in, God's loving gaze.

Prayer as a Corrective Lens

Prayer is also a corrective lens. Prayer does away with the distorted view of reality that for some mysterious reason seems to be our normal vision. In prayer we begin to see what is as it really is. Some of you may be familiar with the movie "Hurricane." It is based on the true story of Rubin Carter, an African-American who spends nearly 20 years of his life in prison for a crime he did not commit. Already an angry man, his prison experience turns him into a deeply bitter human being. When he realizes what his bitterness is doing to him, he gives his law books away and asks his friend to bring him books on the world's cultures and religion. His reading led him to the belief that the problems of this earth exist because people are asleep. He found himself awakened to a higher level of reality. He sees that most of the human race is asleep. He says, "Sleeping people hate one another and fight one another. Sleeping people go to war with one another. Sleeping people rob, rape, and plunder one another. But there is also a circle of humanity that has awakened and is saying, 'I want to know what this is all about and where I am.'" ("Going the Distance, Carter's Long Journey from Convict to Crusader Interview by Ken Klonsy, *The Sun*, August, 2003.)

As I read about the transformation that took place in Rubin Carter's life, I realized that this same awakening can take place in prayer. We wake up and wonder how we could have been asleep for so long. This same theme of awakening occurs in the Prologue of the Rule where Benedict tells us, "The time has come for us to rouse ourselves from sleep." The word Buddha means "the awakened one," someone who has awakened from the sleep of ignorance and sees things as they really are. I believe that many of you have already had an experience of somehow seeing a new reality, but the experience leaves us quickly and we are not sure what really happened. It is in the continued practice of prayer that we come to realize that what we think of as our normal outlook may actually be a distorted view of reality.

Prayer invites us to a different understanding of the spiritual world; it invites one into the adventure of living within reality at a richer and deeper level. Jerome Kodell, OSB, has a passage that enlarges on this idea of prayer as a corrective lens:

"For the church's great doctors of the faith and teachers of prayer, as for the pre-Christian monks of the East, the spiritual world was not a hidden dimension behind the real world, but it was the real world encompassing the world we can see, which is a world combining truth and illusion.

Monasticism sinks its roots into the real world of God by seeking an ever deeper union with God in prayer. "... ("The Search for God in Prayer" by Jerome Kodell, OSB, Benedictines, Summer, 1995).

Lectio Divina

Now that we have explored some of the purposes of prayer, we will look at the Benedictine way of doing private prayer--that way is *Lectio*. Our public prayer is usually referred to by the term Liturgy of the Hours and our private prayer as *Lectio*. In Chapter 48 of the Rule, which deals with the organization of the monastic day, Benedict says that the monks ought to be occupied at certain times with *Lectio Divina*, which is usually translated as holy reading. In a book titled, *The Meaning of Monastic Life*, Louis Bouyer claims that *Lectio Divina* should be for the monk what the Exercises are for the Jesuits, methodical mental prayer is for the Sulpicians, and contemplative prayer for the Carmelites. Benedict seems to equate holy reading with private prayer. It was Guigo the Carthusian who presented the image of a ladder of *Lectio Divina* with four steps: reading, reflection, prayer, and contemplation.

The Four Steps of *Lectio*

An easy way to remember the four steps of Holy Reading is to think of the **Four R's--reading, reflecting, responding and resting.** The more formal terms are in Latin, but you will recognize the meanings; *Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio* and *Contemplatio*. Some of you may know that the four bells that ring out the hours in the Clemens Library Tower are named with these four Latin titles.

The process described by the Four R's is familiar in terms of our own human day to day experiences. We view a beautiful sunset (reading). We are so struck that we stop and reflect on what we are seeing (reflecting). We move very naturally to exclaiming over it in our heart--we respond with awe and gratitude at the beauty of creation (responding). Finally we move into a quiet enjoyment of the experience. We rest in what we see.

This process is also one we experience in moving into human relationships. In this case each of the steps is likely to be more prolonged. We meet someone and are drawn to reflecting on the qualities we discover over a period of continuing encounters. Gradually we respond to the person with words of appreciation and affection. After a time no more special words are needed. Just being with the person is sufficient. We will now examine the *Lectio* process in terms of a concrete way of furthering our relationship with God.

Reading

Reading is the first step in a concrete way of hearing what God is saying. We may want to take a particular passage from Scripture. Jerome Kodell, a Benedictine author who has written very tellingly about *Lectio*, cites the importance of Scripture:

In Scripture we do not seek mainly ideas but a person, not mainly intellectual stimulation but a personal encounter, not mainly information, but transformation. The weight is on the personal encounter so that we may be transformed.

So we choose a particular phrase or sentence from Scripture. Here we can hear God speak to us in human words. God speaks to us here and now through these inspired words on the page before us--and we are listening.

Reflecting

Reflecting on this word or chewing on it is the next step .What do these words mean for me at this point of my life? We try to meditate on them in the light of our entire life. God is involved in the very fabric of our lives.

Responding

This moves very naturally into responding to God. Here our knowledge and desires move from the head to the heart. Thelma Hall in her classic work on *Lectio*, *Too Deep for Words*, tells us, “there is less and less reasoning and speculating with the intellect as the heart takes over in a simple outpouring of love and desire which may take the form of an intimate, interior dialogue” (42).

Resting in God

This fourth step is a most important one and perhaps the least understood and the most easily neglected. This is the contemplative dimension of *Lectio*. Here we become quiet and rest in God. Most of us are better at the first three steps because we are the ones doing something, but in this step we are not doing, but being. We don’t have as much practice with that. This may be the step that requires the most discipline. How can we learn to sit still in a society that respects and rewards constant activity? Every great spiritual tradition has known that in profound stillness the human spirit begins to be aware of its own source. Hindu tradition, for example, the Upanishads, speaks of the spirit of the one who created the universe as dwelling in our heart. In our own tradition Jesus tells us of the Spirit who dwells in our hearts. What we learn is that it is in the act of stillness, of resting quietly in God, that we gradually and almost naturally turn inward to acknowledge God’s presence within us and to rest there.

***Lectio* Readings other than Scripture**

There are two more points I would like to make before we take time for a little actual practice of *Lectio*. The first point is to state that while Scripture is such a rich context for *Lectio*, there are other kinds of reading that provide wonderful possibilities for *Lectio*. If you are reading a spiritual book that you find you cannot read at a regular rate, but you keep wanting to stop and really spend time on the text, you have likely found a reading that you may want to do *Lectio* with. One of those books for me is *The Little Note Book*. It is the account of Nicole Gausseron’s conversations with Jesus. She is a French woman who had the unusual experience of having Jesus converse with her. The first edition of the book went out of print, but it has been redone by Loyola Press under the title, *Believe that I Am Here*. Anne Lamott, author of *Traveling Mercies*, says of this work, “This book moves me, inspires me, and brings me so much joy I can hardly capture it in words.” I would like to give an example of just one quotation that I personally have found very moving:

Nicole says, “Lord, tell me why so many people go right by you without recognizing you, even though they are looking for you. Jesus replies, “They are looking for the wrong thing.” Nicole questions, “The wrong thing?” Jesus says, “They want an answer, a formula. But I have nothing to offer but myself, and that means a way of life.” She questions, “What is this way of life?” Jesus answers, “To live with me, day after day, hour after hour” (21).

I'm sure you also have the experience I do of reading along in a current book, perhaps a novel, biography or a commentary on some happening and you come upon a section that stops you in your tracks because it is so inspiring. When I find such a comment I copy it into my *Lectio* Journal and use it for *Lectio*. Here is a sample of one such gem. When I read it I realized that it spoke to me of the place of the professed monastic in the world today. In a novel by Ben Erickson titled, *A Parting Gift*, I found the following quote. A priest has been complaining to a layperson about the demands constantly being made of him. The lay person answers:

"No, it's never easy, whether you're a businessman or a priest. Just remember that what your congregation wants and what they need are two different things. What they want is someone flawless to tell their troubles to, who also happens to be an efficient businessman and a social butterfly. But what they need is simply someone connected to powers greater than themselves. Someone who spends time contemplating the infinite while they go about the day-to-day business of making a living and raising a family. Someone who can draw them together and make their petty problems vanish in a moment of beauty and light. Your task, first and foremost, is to know God. Everything else springs from that (176)."

The *Lectio* Journal

The second point I want to make here has been slightly introduced in the example above. Some of you might want to think about beginning a *Lectio* Journal. Jerome Kodell, OSB, has an article, "*Lectio Divina* and the Prayer Journal," that originally appeared in *Review for Religious*, 1980. In this article he gives a historic background showing that monks throughout history often wrote out parts of their *Lectio* for themselves. He describes the *Lectio* Journal as "a collection of the words that God speaks to me (primarily, but not only, in a time of prayerful reading)." Thus it could be a quotation from Scripture, the Fathers, other spiritual writings and ultimately any kind of human word (novels, poems, banners, letters) that would carry God's transforming word into our lives. He goes on to explain: This journal becomes a deposit of personal words from God, a collection of jewels to be taken out over and over again, turned this way and that to be admired and enjoyed. . . The [*Lectio*] journal in this sense is rather a record of God's word to me than a record of my reflection on the word and its effect on my life (587).

I believe quite a few of us keep what could be termed a *Lectio* Journal. I personally find that at times the writing down of a passage fixes it more concretely in my mind and allows me to return to it over and over.

Private *Lectio*

1. Choose a text; it could be the readings for Eucharist of the day. For this exercise we will use the text from Romans 8:35.

"What will separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble, calamity and persecution, or hunger and nakedness, or danger and violence?"

2. Place yourself in a comfortable position and allow yourself to become silent.

3. Read the text slowly. Gently listen for the "still small voice" of a word or phrase that says, "I am with you today."

4. Take the word or phrase into yourself. Memorize it. Allow the memory and the words to unfold. This is an invitation to dialogue with God. At this time, ask God what you are being called to today in this passage.

5. Speak to God in words, images and ideas. Interact with God, the one who knows, loves and accepts you. Rest there in love.
6. Rest in God's embrace and rejoice in silence.