

The 4-step formula for reading and digesting

scripture: Lectio Divina

One of the most beautiful traditions of praying with Scripture, dating back as far as the 3rd century, is Lectio Divina — or Divine Reading. Lectio Divina helps the faithful follow a basic four-step formula of reading and digesting scripture:

1. Read (Lectio)
2. Meditate (Meditatio)
3. Pray (Oratio)
4. Contemplate (Contemplatio)

Lectio Divina helps the reader go beyond the words of the text in front of him to the actual encounter with the Living Word of God. It guides the reader to develop a prayerful posture of contemplation, giving him inspiration and wisdom to recognize the direct divine work of Christ in his life.

I compare this type of prayer to properly enjoying a fine wine or decadent dessert — one in which you slowly smell and taste and savor with every sense. The delightful flavor of that deep wine or rich chocolate lingers on your taste buds for hours.

Praying with the method of Lectio Divina isn't difficult. Begin with the Gospel passage for the day or upcoming Sunday, reading it slowly and carefully — out loud if you choose. Sit quietly with the words, allowing them to be digested fully. Perhaps go back and read the passage again, listening for a word of phrase or idea that is being particularly spoken to you in this moment. Discuss this word or idea with God, thanking him for the light, asking him to bring his word to fulfillment in your life that you may be able to recognize and act upon it. Contemplate the depth of the meaning of the words you have just read and allow that truth to transform and continue to elevate you.

The slow and thoughtful process of reading Scripture, in which you properly taste, enjoy, and digest its meaning is the most fulfilling. As the statue of St. Jerome so accurately portrayed, when one allows the truth of the Word to transform them, they are spiritually elevated closer to Christ in all ways. The appreciation of the experience lingers deep within us and can be easily recognized by those around us.