

Musical Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina means “divine reading” in Latin. It is a meditative way of reading the Bible, in which we let go of our own agendas and open ourselves to what God is trying to say to us. Since many of the texts in chant come directly from scripture, and chant is the “handmaiden of the word”, we can meditate on the divine Word of God through the lens of the melody of a Gregorian proper.

This exercise takes approximately one hour.

Materials needed for participants:

- Bibles (can be different translations), or printouts of the desired scriptural text
- Sheet music copies of the English version of the chant proper (recommended: “American Gradual” by Bruce Ford, in chant notation or western notation; both available and free online)
- Sheet music copies of the chant proper, preferably with included translation

Preparation:

- Choose Latin chant proper with a scriptural reference (introit, offertory, communion, etc.), and find English version of the chant with the same melody (e.g. “American Gradual” by Bruce Ford). Spend time with the chant, and prepare some leading questions concerning how the chant melody illuminates the scripture text.
- Decide on which section of the Bible chapter (of which the proper is part) you will read through as a group. Make it big enough to provide a wider scriptural context for the proper.
- Choose a song to close the Lectio Divina.
- Consider asking your priest or deacon to join the group.
- Make copies of all materials for participants (you may ask them to bring a Bible with them).
- **If hosting Lectio online**, send all attachments to participants in advance, and encourage them to print and have them available during the exercise. They should have Zoom downloaded to their computers prior to the start of the exercise, and be aware that they will be asked to keep their videocameras on. **Host should know** how to zoom in/zoom out on any document being shared. Host should spend time becoming familiar with Zoom, especially screen share, use of chat box, and muting/unmuting participants. Make sure you have a strong, reliable internet connection.

PREPARE

If hosting this exercise online, ask participants to leave their cameras on, and keep microphones on mute unless speaking. **Show** them how to mute/unmute their microphones. Draw their attention to the chat box, and encourage them to type their answers in the chat box if there are many people trying to speak at once. (Host will need to make sure to keep checking the chat box, and to keep the chat box open on his/her screen.)

Welcome. Explain what Lectio Divina is. Explain the role of silence within it. This silence does not need to be “filled in”. The most important conversation in this exercise is the private conversation happening between the participants and the Holy Spirit.

Prayer (recommended: Prayer to the Holy Spirit, followed by the Our Father)

Read the Word of God slowly, and then keep a time of silence. Never forget that the Word of God has “infinite senses” and that it is a living Word spoken by God to me today.

FIRST STAGE (study the text)

- Repeat words and phrases that stand out (no explanations, just words from the scripture)
- Who are the characters?
- What do they say?

- What are the details that strike me?
- Do I see any contradictions with other scripture passages?
- Do I see any contradictions with other words of Jesus?
- Do I see any contradictions with what I live?

Leader: point out which verse from the selected scripture passage relates to the chant which will be studied. Then, sing chant in English.

SECOND STAGE (study the music)

- Where is/are the highest points in the melody? On which words do they occur?
- Where is/are the lowest points in the melody? On which words do they occur?
- Where are the half bar and full bar lines? How do they relate to the text?
- What is the “final” pitch of the chant”? (re, mi, fa, or sol) Which phrases end on the final?
- Which phrases end on a pitch that is not the final?

Sing the chant in English again, pointing out where the final occurs, and the pitches on which other text phrases end.

- Are there any musical “question marks” or phrases that do not sound finished?
- Do we hear the flat anywhere? Does the chant change between “ti” and “te”? If so, where?
- Do we see special neumes, such as the quilisma, bistropha, and tristropha?
- On which words do we see lots of notes and/or melismas? Which words have very few associated pitches?
- Are there musical phrases which are found in more than one place in the chant, or phrases that sound very similar to each other? Which words/phrases do they fall on?

Sing the chant in Latin. If this is the group’s first exposure to chant notation, be prepared to answer a few questions about it, but do not spend too much time here.

THIRD STAGE (What is the light that I receive from this passage?)

- Translate each word from the Latin. Look for English “cognate” words. Point out that while the melody is the same, word order is different in Latin, and there are fewer words in Latin.
- Do the musical phrases, neumes, pitches, etc. fall in the same places in the Latin text, as in the English? If not, what is different?
- How does the melody amplify the text?
- What is God trying to show me through this antiphon? What is he telling me?

FOURTH STAGE (What about me?)

- How do I receive this passage?
- Will this scripture passage change anything in my life?

Read the passage again and write down one phrase that struck you, and meditate on it during the day and coming week.

CLOSING

Sing a song together.

If hosting this exercise online, ask all participants again to mute their microphones and to sing along with the leader, who will not be on mute. You may choose to sing an antiphonal song (such as the Magnificat) and alternate between two leaders on the verses.

This method was derived from a style of group Lectio Divina offered by the Community of Saint John. The musical dimension is a fitting extension of their method, and also provides a soft approach for introducing choirs to chant and chant notation.