

Lectio Divina Explained: Steps Suggested

Auxiliary Bishop Santiago Silva Retamales of Valparaiso, Chile, named by Benedict XVI as the vice president of the commission for the message that the synod will produce, explained *lectio divina* by citing St. Gregory the Great, that the objective of this practice is "to know the heart of God through the word of God."

The prelate illustrated the steps that the Valparaiso groups follow in order to do *lectio divina* in communities.

1. The meeting begins by preparing the environment where the encounter will take place. Specifically, an open Bible is placed on an ambo and the participants are also prepared, not only in postures but also with a "clean heart." Each participant brings their own Bible.

2. Next, the Holy Spirit is invoked so that "as the Word was made a book," as in the experience of the first Christian community, so now "the book becomes Word," the bishop said.

3. Afterward, a Bible passage is given and prepared with reflection questions to go deeper in the understanding of the text.

4. The fourth step is the reading, or rather, the proclamation, of the Biblical text. Following the proclamation is a moment of silence so that each participant can personally reflect.

The participants are then encouraged to annotate the passage, using, for example, question marks beside passages that seem more difficult to understand and underlining verses they consider particularly important.

Thus, as a group, they go discovering the key points of the passage, or the group guide offers aids for understanding.

The participants read the passage again, marking it this time with exclamation points beside those verses that invite them to actions or changes of attitudes.

With an asterisk, they mark those passages that help them to pray.

5. Then the participants move on to meditation, following the exclamation points. As an aid, they are invited to ask questions that apply to their lives.

6. Next, the group begins to pray, using the asterisks -- to pray from and with the word of God and what has been lived in the encounter with the Word, that is, with Christ.

7. Finally, time is left for contemplation, aided by silence or music. What is important, the bishop said, is that "Jesus takes hold of me, looks at me and I at him, an exchange of gazes."

Thus, the participants move to the last stage, "action," writing a word (for example, dialogue or help) that indicates to them the path to follow and share.

These community activities are carried out over a span of three years, Bishop Silva explained. It does not pretend to be a Bible course, but rather, an encounter with Jesus in sacred Scripture.