



Tuesday of the 7th Week in Ordinary Time



Date: Tuesday, May 21, 2024 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** B

First Reading: James 4:1–10

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 55:7–11a, 23 | **Response:** Psalm 55:23a

Gospel Acclamation: Galatians 6:14

Gospel Reading: Mark 9:30–37

Preached at: The Cardoner Chapel at Bellarmine House in the Archdiocese of Sydney, Australia.

The argument that preoccupies Jesus’ disciples in the same Gospel story—namely, “Who was the greatest?” (Mk 9:34)—deserves the stern warning of James:

“Where do the conflicts among you come from?”

A question we can well ponder today as we look around the world at the moment. He then admonishes:

“Begin to lament, to mourn, to weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.”

More gently, Jesus tells them the same thing. In Jesus’ day, the child that he set before the Twelve was not a symbol of innocence but of poverty and powerlessness. Children in that world were vulnerable and voiceless, as they are in ours. Jesus was telling the Twelve—and us—that true greatness consists in extending a warm welcome to the least of his brothers and sisters.

How true it is that when we cease to welcome others, in their difference and diversity, and instead wall off ourselves and our opinions, we become isolated, defensive and prone to attack from everyone who is seen as a threat. Compounded, this attitude leads to war. We forget we are all equally God’s creatures, and equally deserving of God’s gifts and love. By focusing on the weakest, we can be reminded of that fact.

This is a practice we can do in our own lives, and encourage more of in our society.

Draw Near to God

To do so, James says in the first reading:

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”

I want to teach you a way today of drawing nearer to God, using Scripture. We call this method *Lectio Divina*.

Lectio Divina is a Latin phrase meaning “*Godly reading*.” It is a simple yet profound method of prayer found in many traditions of Christian spirituality. Sometimes it is called *meditative reading* or *spiritual reading*, but it could perhaps better be described as *praying with a listening heart*.

The *lectio* of Lectio Divina is a listening with the heart, as you tend to do quite naturally when you are struck by the beauty of a sunset, as you are mulling over a treasured memory, or as you pay attention to someone you love. In praying this way you hear a scripture passage or other sacred text and you let God guide your heart.

You read slowly, with pauses, and relish or drink in the words you are hearing. A natural process takes place: heartfelt listening moves naturally into a deep reflection upon the words and the silences between them; and that deep reflection leads you to some kind of heartfelt response. You find yourself speaking from the heart to the God who has spoken to you.

The Four Steps of Lectio Divina

Let me explain this four-step process with an analogy from Margaret Silf. *Lectio Divina* has also been likened to “*Feasting on the Word*.” The four parts are:

1. **Taking a bite** (*Lectio*)
2. **Chewing on it** (*Meditatio*)
3. **Savouring the essence** (*Oratio*)
4. **Digesting it** (*Contemplatio*)

Step 1: *Lectio* – Listening

Choosing the chocolate, taking a first bite

This first moment consists in reading the scriptural passage slowly and attentively several times. Listen for the word or phrase that seems to be calling to you, seems important to you, and stands out to you.

Step 2: *Meditatio* – Meditating

Put the whole chocolate in your mouth and chew on it

The Christian, gravitating around the passage or one of its words, takes it and ruminates on it, thinking in God's presence about the text. He or she benefits from the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination—the inward working of the Spirit that enables the Christian to grasp the revelation contained in Scripture.

Meditate on your chosen word or phrase while chewing your chocolate. Think about your word or phrase in God's presence.

Step 3: *Oratio* – Prayer

Savouring the taste of the chocolate

This is a response to the passage by opening the heart to God. It is not an intellectual exercise, but an intuitive conversation or dialogue with God.

Spend time now remembering what your chocolate tasted like. Have a conversation with God about what your chosen word or phrase means for *you* today. What does God want you to know about yourself or about Him? What is God inviting you to?

Step 4: *Contemplatio* – Contemplation

Digesting the chocolate

This moment is characterized by a simple, loving focus on God. It is a beautiful, wordless contemplation of God—a joyful rest in His presence.

Now think about your body digesting the chocolate. Spend some time sitting in God’s presence and remembering your word or phrase. Also remember what God said to you. Rest in knowing that God speaks to you. Just as the chocolate is being used by your body, God’s Word will also be used in your life.

I suggest we try this prayer together after Communion, but for now I just wanted to share the image of choosing your favourite chocolate, tasting, chewing, savouring and digesting it.

In praying this way we can ingest the Word just as we ingest and give thanks at the Eucharist. But it is a way—a very good way—of drawing nearer to God.

Hopefully we can take our troubles and pride and jealousies and greed and all that disturbs us and takes us away from the service of others, and ask God to give us of Himself instead—so that we become filled with His Spirit again, and hopefully rediscover the importance of *Love*, for ourselves and our neighbour.

“Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for the second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire.”

— *Teilhard de Chardin, SJ*

For now, let us continue to pray for peace in the world and in our hearts; and for all the volunteers we serve—may they know God’s love and peace for them too.

Amen.

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