

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we near Lent and time for reflection again we suggest a few books that you might consider to be your “**Lenten Reading Partner.**”

For our purposes, not being together at Gethsemani we would suggest either each individual choose a title or one title for all in a local community. Each person may commit to a particular amount of time each day for this reading as you will see the monks do at Gethsemani (see below.) Each will need to decide how much time we can commit to and at what hour of the day it is. May I suggest using the time you currently commit to Lectio could be used for this, since we all are doing that, correct? :-) You each will know best what is right for yourselves but I would think at least 15 or 20 minutes should be a minimum. You may read this as Lectio, slowly absorbing what God may be bringing to light for you during this Lenten season.

Fr. Michael suggests:

The Art of Affirmation by Robert Furey, Paulist Press, 2007.

And some LCG members suggest:

Richard Rohr's *Wondrous Encounters*

The Easter Mysteries by Beatrice Bruteau.

Jesus a Pilgrimage by James Martin (it follows the life of Jesus chronologically and is like our journey through Lent.)

+LENTEN READING, the Practice and Gethsemani by Fr. Michael Casagram:

Every year on the first Sunday of Lent, each member of the Gethsemani community receives a book at the end of the morning Chapter, that he is to use as his Lenten reading. A couple weeks before this day the Abbot will announce that each of us should select a book for Lenten reading and put it at his office door. This gives him a chance to be sure it is appropriate and if nothing has been given him, he himself will pick a book for the brother as Lenten reading. A few prefer the abbot to pick something for them. These are placed in various piles around the Chapter room and a few designated brothers distribute them when asked to do so. There as the old custom of bowing to the person who gives you your Lenten book as a sacred gift.

Regards the practice, it is brought up in the Rule where Benedict gives a chapter on the Daily Manual Labor. St Benedict is obviously putting it into this context to remind the monk that it is important for him to maintain a balance between prayer (public and private) manual labor and lectio divina. In Lent Benedict allows extra time in the morning for the monks to read. He knows well the power of the Word to change our lives, to aid the ongoing conversion that is given extra emphasis during this season. To designate a book as “to be read the whole of it straight through” is saying more than we may first realize. It is to move us into a sense of the sacredness of the reading that will expose us to the Word of God whom we will meet in the reading. We are not to jump around at whim but read it straight through so that we are being the ones who are being read as much as doing the reading. Effective lectio divina is where the word comes off the page and reveals us in the eyes of God, enabling us to take a close look at the values we hold or aspire to and how we are living them. Before beginning to read there is the custom of saying a prayer so as to be disposed to this presence of God’s Word.

Designating a time for this each day gets us to stop our normal routines and being in control of our lives. It gives us the time to sit and reflect, to let a sacred book inspire us in such a way that we personally taste more of Christ the living Word of God. Lectio early on was done mostly with the Scriptures as texts In fact, Benedict’s community had few books to start with, mostly being various books of the Scriptures or commentaries on them. So any book we chose today should have content that comes out an in depth experience of the Scriptures, something that will challenge us like the Scriptures themselves will do.

Much more could be said but this gives something of how we experience Lenten reading at Gethsemani. I personally like the idea of each person selecting what she or he is going to read and run it by your group leader as kind of a check on it being a true vehicle of God’s own living Word.