

When thinking of the value of doing spiritual reading or Lectio Divina I found myself thinking of those lives that have been deeply changed by engaging in this religious practice. One of the first to come to mind is St Augustine who when faced with the corruption in his life, found himself “weeping in the bitter agony of my heart.” He heard a voice saying “pick up and read, pick up and read” so he opened a copy of letters of St Paul and read the first chapter. His eyes landed on: “Let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

These words changed his life and I think the Word of God will continually change any one of our lives if we allow it to address whatever we are dealing with that keeps us away from being our true selves. All that is really asked of us as we seek God is to take the time to expose ourselves to this Word of God. This is not easy in our modern world when the media and the occupations of daily life so easily distract us from this kind of exposure. What becomes crucial in any of our lives is to set apart some time each day when we allow ourselves to be open and completely present to the life-giving Word of God.

I know for myself how easy it is to get caught up in the demands and concerns of daily life and how I can ignore what is most important and transformative for holy living. To be in a living and loving relationship with God is what makes us truly human and authentic as persons seeking to realize our full potential. To get sidetracked is all too easy so that we become alienated from our true selves. Merton at one point wrote a whole book on this as the epidemic of our time.

I know that in my own life one of the great moments affirming my monastic vocation was in the midst of my Lectio Divina. I was attracted to the writings of William of Saint Thierry so I read Odo Brooke’s commentary of William, the chapter on the [Trinitarian Aspect of the Ascent of the Soul to God in the Theology of William of St Thierry](#). This is volume 37 of the Cistercian Studies series of books. Let me add at this point, that you can find a nicely written summary of the history of Lectio Divina if you simply google these two words and find the Wikipedia synthesis.

Reading this chapter, I became aware like never before of what it means that we are made in the image and likeness of God. Following the insights of St Augustine about our human makeup, William realized how our memories reflect the Father in the Holy Trinity, our intellects reflect the Son and our wills image the working of the Holy Spirit. What William of St Thierry saw so clearly was that in using our memory, intellect and will according to the calling of grace in our everyday lives we realize the way we are made in the very image and likeness of God. We thereby become the loving persons we are destined and intuitively know we are meant to be. We come to the realization of how Christ wants to become manifest in everything we do throughout the day so that his good news may spread to all those with whom we live.

It is all too easy to be diverted from this divine calling but in living it we discover that perfect freedom that belongs to the children of God, the joy for which we have been destined. It is to experience already here on earth the life we are to enjoy for all eternity. To come to this perfect freedom, this divine exaltation means a real death to our “old” selves, to that self-centered life that undermines our real purpose in life. But this death to self becomes greatly facilitated when we realize just how close and involved God wants to be in each of our lives. This is what Lectio Divina will do for us as often as we let ourselves fully engage in it.

