**Whisper of the Beloved**

By Jan Ord

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*Lectio Divina is like the joyful reading of an ancient pile of love letters. It is a time to listen—not to dissect, analyze, evaluate or dialogue. It is not studying to learn about the Scriptures; it is reading to listen. Come to this reading and listening as a young lover would—eager to hear afresh the whisper of the Beloved.*

WE HAVE LOST the art of listening. In our busy, information-saturated Western culture, we have almost forgotten that we are meant to *listen* to language, not just read it silently in our head to ourselves. It's meant to be a community activity.

Little children know this. They love to listen to stories that are filled with alliteration. They relish the

sounds of *The Cat in the Hat* (by Dr. Zeus), and love to repeat nursery rhymes like *Hickory, Dickory, Dock—or* to whisper to each other:

*Hush, hush, whisper who dares,Christopher Robin is saying his prayers.*

If someone will share it with them, they love poetry. Do you remember the first time you heard

these joyous Wordsworth lines?

*1 wandered lonely as a cloudThat floats on high o'er vales and hills,*

*When all at once I saw a crowd,A host, of golden daffodils...*

One of the best memories I have of my home is of the sound of my father's or mother's voice reciting poetry or reading aloud. After tea (called supper, in the U.S.) each evening, they went to a quiet place to read to each other.

We children were only allowed to join them if we were "quiet like mice." They read the latest best sellers,

as well as old favorites—including classic children's books—from their collection.

So, you say, what has that got to do with reading the Scriptures? Everything! Because the written word is

meant to be *heard.* It's good to read the Scriptures, but we need to learn to *listen* as well as read. And what I am suggesting is that we take the time to simply listen tothe voice of the Lord speaking to us as we read.

*Lectio Divina* (divine reading) is a way of reading for formation and transformation, not for information.

There are different ways of doing it, and I'd like to share with you how I do it. Even if you do it alone, read

the passage of Scripture *aloud.* Listen to the sound of each word. Read slowly. And rest as you listen. Remember—this is a time to *listen,* not to dissect, analyze, evaluate or dialogue.

Choose a time when you will not be interrupted— enough so that you do not feel hurried, perhaps 20

minutes. Choose a passage of Scripture. Sit in a comfortable straight chair, and slowly begin to read, listening as you read. Listen as if this were the first time you have ever heard this passage. Listen as if it were the Lord speaking directly to you. Don't analyze what you hear. Don't try to connect it up to something else in the Scriptures, Don't try to apply it to someone else. This is a time for you and the Lord to be alone with His words. So, simply listen with both your ears and your heart.

When you finish the passage, pause for a minute or two, and just let the words sink in. Now, slowly read

the same passage again. Pause again for one or two minutes. Then read it a third time, slowly. When you

are done, just sit quietly with all you have heard for a few more minutes.

As you were listening, you may have found that a word or a phrase kept impressing itself on you.

If you are reading with someone else, now is the time to share, without comment, that word or phrase with them. If nothing impressed itself upon you, then just keep quiet. No comments or evaluations of anything shared need to be made. This is a time to simply listen to what you are hearing internally.

After a few more minutes of quiet, each of you may pray aloud, or silently, in response to what you have

heard. A word or a short phrase of response, or just a quiet "Thank you, Lord," is all that is needed.

That's all there is to *Lectio Divina.* It's as simple as that. I encourage you to add this way of *being with* the written Word of God to your normal devotional practice. It is not *studying to learn* about the Scriptures. It is reading to listen; out of it may come prayer. And out of it may come the desire to study the passage more deeply. But its *purpose* is to put us into an awareness of being in the Lord's presence in a listening, receptive mode.

What are the best Scriptures to read? You may wish to use a portion of your daily Bible readings. Or you

may begin a book in the Bible—the Psalms or the Gospels, perhaps—and read a portion each day

specifically as your *Lectio* practice.

One community I know read the Gospel for the following Sunday. They read it twice a day every day

for the week. And, they tell me, they generally find the Sunday sermon very rich because they have *listened* all week to that same passage from the Gospels.

I find that this way of reading is a very helpful exercise in preparing me for a time of centering prayer.

Even if I do this *after* my centering time (which is what *Listen to the sound of each word. Read*

*slowly. And rest as you listen.*

I usually do), the attitude that it fosters carries into every aspect of my life. I find it much easier to not

comment on stuff that is going on around me. I watch and I listen much more contentedly. And, I find that

my busy, busy mind doesn't have to be in control all the time. By simply practicing this reading and listening, I can listen without having to analyze, know the background, question who is speaking to whom, and what else was going on, etc. I can listen, knowing that right now, right at this moment, the Lord is speaking to me, even if the words were written to someone else thousands of years ago!

*Lectio* sets me free to be present to the sounds in my world. And it sets me free to ignore the sounds in my

world that are none of my business! The wonderful article that precedes this one—Macrina

Wiederkehr's "Divine Reading" from her book, *A Tree Full of Angels*—is on this same subject. *Lectio Divina* is a normal part of the discipline of her Benedictine community, and her experience is encouraging.

Please, don't see this as "another chore" that Christians "need to do" in order to be pleasing to God.

*Lectio Divina* is more like the joyful reading of an ancient pile of love letters: letters written to you when

you were young—perhaps a very long time ago. You will hear words which you may have forgotten and, as you listen carefully to them now, perhaps you will hear them afresh. As you read you can hear the voice of your Beloved, you can see His face, you can hear His laughter.

Don't accept this reading of the Scriptures as a chore. (Don't do it if that's how you feel.) Come to this reading and listening as a young lover would—eager to hear afresh the whisper of the Beloved. G