

Reading (lectio)

When Guigo II says we should make a “careful study of the scriptures”, he doesn’t mean we should look at the original language, break out the commentaries, and analyze the text. He means we should give the text our absolute attention, “concentrating all one’s powers,” by reading it slowly and “chewing” on the words.

“Reading-- Read the passage until you hear a word or phrase that touches you, resonates, attracts or even disturbs you.”

Meditation (meditatio)

As we slowly read the text several times, what comes to mind? What am I thinking; what am I feeling? Whatever it is might or might not be directly related to the passage, but it will be in response to what I have just read. Reading might bring to mind questions about what it means to have a pure heart. Maybe I begin to miss someone who I knew to have a good and pure heart. Maybe I experience a simple but persistent longing to see God. The possibilities are wide open. My meditation is nothing more than the act of reflecting on what comes to mind from reading. There is no such thing as a wrong meditation. There is only my experience from listening to the Word speak through the text.

“Reflecting-- Ponder this word or phrase. Listen for what the word or phrase is saying to you at this moment in your life, what it may be offering to you, what it may be demanding of you.”

Prayer (oratio)

As I read and meditate, I begin to have something with which to pray. My prayer will be related to whatever comes to mind. However, what I pray is not quite as important as the intention of my heart behind the prayer. Maybe I am sad in thinking about someone I miss; I begin to pray about that. Maybe I am curious in wondering what a pure heart is; I pray about that. Maybe I long for something good that is not yet present; if so, then that’s my prayer. The desire of my heart, no matter what it is, is rooted in my inherent desire for good. However, behind that prayer is the desire of my heart that informs that prayer. At the core of our being, our basic desire is for goodness, which is another way of saying that our basic desire is for God. For me, the key to moving from prayer using words to prayer of the heart (contemplation) is turning my simple desire for good toward the ubiquitous presence of God.

“Expressing-- When you feel ready, openly and honestly express to God the prayers that arise spontaneously within you from your experience of this word or phrase.

Contemplation (*contemplatio*)

The last step is the goal: contemplation. After we have read, meditated, and prayed; we want to let go of all our thoughts and turn our attention to God with the desire of our heart. Whatever thoughts or feelings we might have become periphery to our attentiveness to God so we let them go as easily as they come. In my own contemplative practice, *I turn my mental attention to my chest area. I learned to do this from contemplatives in the Eastern Orthodox Church. They turn their mental focus toward the chest area because it is “prayer of the heart.” But I have learned that in turning my mental attention toward the chest area, it helps cut down on a lot of the mental activity that can distract me from being attentive to the divine presence. At any rate, I focus my attention on my simple desire for good and the divine presence, which are both in me (God is ubiquitous so focusing the mind on the chest area is as good as any other). In my experience, where those two desires meet is where contemplation happens.*

“Resting-- All yourself to simply rest silently with God for a time in the stillness of your heart remaining open to the quiet fullness of God’s love and peace.