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– One –

Reading the Bible Prayerfully and Holistically The Ancient Art of *Lectio Divina*

“IN the history of Moses, as in the other events recorded in the Bible, we find realities that are repeated in the life of every individual. Anyone who is inwardly open and acquainted with prayer can find in the words of scripture what is needed for his or her life.

“It seems to me that the decisive questions to be asked by each person are:

“What does this scripture passage mean to me? What is it saying to me? How is it related to my life?”

“We might at first say, ‘It doesn’t have anything to do with my life.’ But rather than remain with such a first impression, we should look for the cause and ask, ‘Why is there no connection between this Bible passage and my life? What would I want the connection to be?’ In this way, even a negative first impression can be a means of contact between what the Bible says and what we experience.

“Often this contact does not take place immediately, but only after we have entered into a dialogue, a wrestling with the words of scripture. Only then does it begin to shed light. Such a dialogue is a decisive help toward prayer, which springs from our center and expresses our deepest yearnings. This is the aim of spiritual guidance: To help us express ourselves in prayer as we are, in keeping with our situation and nature. Real prayer is not child’s play. Scripture teaches us that prayer is a struggle, a battle. It places us face to face with our greatest difficulties. In prayer we are trained to look at the problems of our life with an open eye and to accept them, for human beings are often afraid to confront themselves.”

– Two –

On the Run with the Word of God Responding to Stressful Times in Union with the Holy Family

***Lectio* Review and Preview**

As discussed in chapter one, *lectio divina* is a traditional Latin term for a holistic process of prayerfully reading and responding to God's word. Its five stages: reading / listening, meditation, prayer, contemplation, and action, are fundamental to the spirituality of most major religions, though theological and devotional connotations vary considerably.

Because its activities are so fundamental to human spirituality and development, and God's word encompasses more than the Bible, the process of *lectio divina* can also be applied to life experiences and other devotional and liturgical activities. It has a cross-cultural, non-sectarian, amorphous (adaptable to many circumstances) dimension which makes it suitable for ecumenical dialogue and evangelization along with wellness and potential fulfillment. We'll discuss this briefly in chapter five.

In the early and medieval Church, *lectio divina* was also applied to the writings of the Church Fathers, which typically draw extensively from Scripture. *Lectio* (often abbreviated to such) can be used with other spiritual writings, especially those grounded in the Bible such as spiritual classics or magisterial documents.

As discussed in Fr. Dysinger's article in the appendix, the process of *lectio divina* can also be applied to devotions (e.g., the Rosary, Stations of the Cross, the Jesus Prayer), the

– Three –

Word and Sacrament

IN this chapter we will consider the nature of the word and the sacramental vision underlying it. All of life is a divine mystery that is revealed through signs and wonders that we often miss. It is interesting that John's Gospel, which elevates and illustrates the Word, is also the Gospel with the most pronounced sacramental outlook on life and that offers the concept of sign to illustrate the inauguration of God's kingdom by Jesus. The etymology of the word "Sacrament" includes the concepts of sign and mystery.

What Is the Word?

Now that we are forewarned of what fidelity to the word entails, it is important to sharpen our understanding of what the word of God means from a theological, anthropological, and pastoral perspective. The concept of "word" is essential to an understanding of both the human and divine dimensions of the Bible.

The biblical concept of word (in Hebrew, *dabar*) was dynamic and multi-faceted. A word, and particularly God's, was not only an utterance, but a portent of meaning and action. The following verses illustrate this:

"Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, like a hammer shattering a rock?" (Jer 23:29).

"For just as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed for the one who sows and bread for those who eat, so shall my word be that issues forth from my mouth. It will not return to me unfulfilled, but it will accomplish my purpose and achieve what I sent it forth to do" (Isa 55:10-11).

– Four –

The *Lectio Divina* Dialogue

“PAUL VI had a marked capacity for friendship, a surprising respect for whomever spoke to him, a rare ability to show that two were needed in a dialogue, not just one. He made one feel, truly and unpretentiously, that whomever he was speaking to was important to him and from that person he mysteriously expected something decisive. He was ready to give very generously but without ever making his giving a burden. Indeed he seemed to be excusing himself for it, asking that it be seen as something obvious, so that the real, personal aspect of the relationship might not change.

“For this reason he did not see dialogue merely as an instrument but as a method reflecting the dialogical makeup of his personality. And so, without being compelled to say so, he felt close to modern people, close also to those who were distant or who opposed him in theory or in practice. This is why his pontificate, moving rapidly forward in the way prophetically indicated by Pope John XXIII, was to provide for the Church an audience and a worldwide respect in which the charism of mass encounters with people, characteristic of Pope John Paul II, could be freely prepared.

“... As the passing of time moves us further and further from the earthly existence of Paul VI, his spiritual figure comes closer to us. More and more we understand that he was truly one of us, a man of our age who freed us from the danger of shutting ourselves up in our age, who helped us dialogue with the past, who gave us the courage and the joy to become contemporaries of Christ,” (*Journeying with the Lord*, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini).

– Five –

The Gender Dimension of *Lectio Divina* A Journey with Mary and Joseph

A BOOK on *lectio divina* does not typically include a chapter devoted to gender-related considerations, but after reading this chapter, I hope you'll agree that it should. Such an omission deprives the reader of precious insights into how the counter-cultural witness of Joseph and Mary can inspire and enhance our practice of *lectio divina* and Christian virtues. Joseph and Mary's synthesis of the word of God (spirituality) and life application (morality, praxis, i.e., faith in action) is a model for us.

Gender and *Lectio Divina*

Throughout this book *lectio divina* has been discussed and grappled with as a multi-dimensional communications, spirituality, and wholeness/wellness model whose applications extend far beyond devotional practice. The communications and wholeness dimensions make *lectio* particularly suited to gender identity, vocation, and collaboration issues.

Like the genders, *lectio* is a paradox and mystery. There are as many ways of practicing *lectio* as there are persons, just as, to quote the French proverb, "as many marriages, that many arrangements." There are also common principles and practices in both *lectio* and gender relationships that we can identify and assimilate in order to optimize our experience and promote peace of mind and soul.

The Sexual Signs of the Times

Gender relations is a critical area in secular and Church life

the Church and society has been lacking due in large part to ignorance, fear, apathy, discouragement, and polemical propaganda. A main objective of this chapter is to expose and affirm the wisdom of moderation with respect to both gender issues and the Bible. This can eliminate a lot of conflict, misunderstanding, and grief. We don't have the time or space for a complete treatment, but at least we'll lay a foundation and stimulate a *lectio* response to a confused and disorderly aspect of modern life.

Reconciliation is necessary first within the individual, then within the genders, and finally between them. Individually and communally, we are our own worst enemies. Ultimately there is more contentiousness and sabotage within the ranks than from the perceived adversary.

Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI have recognized the critical relevance of biblical teaching on gender issues in their addresses and writings, but the nuances and practical applications of their insights have generally not filtered down to the parish and family level. Generally the secular media has ignored, opposed, repressed, or distorted the message.

Interpretation Versus Ideology

In its 1993 document, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," the Pontifical Biblical Commission pointed out the dangers of injecting modern ideologies such as feminism into exegesis of the Bible. The potentially divisive nature of this subject was such that several members of the commission requested that their disagreement with the commission's conclusion be disclosed in a footnote.

The imposition of the radical feminist mentality onto the biblical text can lead to a neutering and politicization of the text, thereby diminishing its inspirational and transformational power. Gender-specific biblical passages that contradict feminist doctrines are often dismissed as sexist and either marginalized or subjectively reinterpreted.

The profound spirituality of passages such as the house-

– Seven –

Responding to the Word with Joseph

ST. Joseph and St. Peter were having an argument in heaven about the qualifications necessary for admission into the kingdom. Joseph favored mercy, and Peter went by the Book. Their discussion reached an impasse, at which point the Rock waved his keys at the Guardian and asked him to leave. The imperturbable Saint calmly consented, while adding that of course he would take his son and wife with him. Apparently knocking the Rock and setting him straight runs in the family.

Our *lectio* model in this final chapter is the guardian not only of the Redeemer but of the universal church (in theological terms, patron). The following observations are culled from Pope John Paul II's 1989 Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* ("Guardian of the Redeemer"):

"In bestowing upon St. Joseph the title of universal patron during a difficult time in Church history, Pope Pius XII observed that 'the Church, after the Blessed Virgin, his spouse, has always held him in great honor and showered him with praise, having recourse to him amid tribulations.' In his encyclical *Quamquam Pluries*, Pope Leo XIII exhorted the Church to seek St. Joseph's protection, referring to him as 'the provident guardian of the divine Family.' "

Pope John XXIII had a great devotion to St. Joseph and even invoked papal privilege to pull a few strings for him. He directed that St. Joseph's name be inserted in the Roman Canon of the Mass after the name of Mary but before the apostles, popes, and martyrs. That's good company!

In an audience given on the feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 1969, Pope Paul VI invoked St. Joseph's patronage: