

SMALL GROUP PRAYER RESOURCES

THE 4 P'S (INTERCESSORY PRAYER)

- What **praise** do you have from this past week?
- What **problem** are you facing?
- Do you have a **plan** for improving your spiritual walk? (If this has already been shared, adjust the question to “how are you doing with the plan you told us about?”)
- What can we be **praying** for with you this week?

MEMORIZED PRAYERS

- e.g. Our Father, Hail Mary, Decade of the Rosary, etc.
- If you use memorized prayer in your group, make sure everyone is familiar with the prayer and that it is not the only way you pray together. Practice vocal or intercessory prayer as a group as well.

CONSOLATION / DESOLATION

“Consolation” and “desolation” are two terms coined by St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesuits, in his *Spiritual Exercises*. These two words are important “movements” – as Ignatius would call them – of the spiritual life. How does Ignatius explain them?

- **Consolation:** “I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is **inflamed with love** of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that **move to the love of God**, whether it be because of sorrow for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is **immediately directed to the praise and service of God**. Finally, I call consolation every **increase of faith, hope, and love, and all interior joy** that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one’s soul by **filling it with peace and quiet** in its Creator and Lord.”¹
 - As Ignatius’ words denote, “consolation” is an interior movement of the spiritual life that arouses within oneself a greater desire to love God. “Consolation” carries with it joy, peace, and rest.
- **Desolation:** “I call desolation what is entirely opposite of what is described by consolation, as **darkness** of soul, **turmoil** of spirit, **inclination** to what is low and earthy,

¹ *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Louis Puhl (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951), #316



restlessness rising from many **disturbances** and **temptations** which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord. For just as consolation is the opposite of desolation, so the thoughts that spring from consolation are the opposite of those that spring from desolation.”²

- “Desolation,” therefore, indicates a movement of heavy darkness. A movement of desolation is often accompanied by anxiety, self-preoccupation, and doubts.

In our “Consolation and Desolation” exercise, we take time to reflect and discern a movement of both consolation and desolation in our life. So, after the opening prayer, we take time for silence – about a minute or so – in order to locate these movements. After locating such a movement, we then dive deeper into the experience in order to find a word that best encapsulates the given movement. This word can be a noun, adverb, adjective, verb . . . whatever. At the end of this period of reflection, each person shares his or her one word. Then, the process repeats. I think it is best to do desolation first, and then consolation.

The purpose of this exercise is threefold.

- First, it helps to provide the setting with a prayerful aroma, so to speak. Bible study is ultimately an adventure of prayer, of conversation with God; accordingly, it is best to approach the study of Scripture prayerfully.
- Second, and this is closely related to the first, the exercise provides times of silence. We live in a very loud, hectic, and busy world. Yet, it seems that silence is the telltale sign for God’s presence.
- Third, the exercise is reflective and revelatory. When we read Scripture, it is important to proceed in a reflective manner, lest we risk reading over God’s Word hastily and so without attentiveness. In addition, the exercise is revelatory: enfolded within the one word I share with group is a personal experience. It is a way of sharing with others deep dimensions of my life in such a way that I am not making myself overly vulnerable: I do not need to have developed a lifelong relationship with someone to share with them one word.

(Brother Tommy Piolata O.F.M. Cap.)

² Ibid., #317



LECTIO DIVINA

“*Lectio Divina* is ‘capable of opening up to the faithful the treasures of God’s word, but also of bringing about an encounter with Christ, the living word of God’. I would like here to review the basic steps of this procedure.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*)

Lectio divina is a form of meditation rooted in liturgical celebration that dates back to early monastic communities. It was a method practiced by monks in their daily encounter with Scripture, both as they prepared for the Eucharist and as they prayed the Liturgy of the Hours. Its use continued in the Middle Ages in religious orders, such as the Benedictines and Carmelites, that not only practiced *lectio divina* daily but passed this treasure from the past on to the next generations. The practice of *lectio divina* is resurfacing today as a wonderful way to meditate on God’s Word -Sr. Antoine Lawlor, IHM, USCCB

Let us now consider the four steps:

- *Lectio*: This is exactly what it sounds like, i.e., *reading* the text. Reading the text “leads to a desire to understand its true content: *what does the biblical text say in itself?* Without this there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas.”
- *Meditatio*: After reading the text, one meditates. This is to ask: “*What does the biblical text say to us?* Here, each person . . . must let himself or herself be moved and challenged.”
- *Oratio*: Prayer asks the following question: “*What do we say to the Lord in response to his word?* Prayer as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise, is the primary way by which the word transforms us.”
- *Contemplatio*: To contemplate, in this setting, is to “take up, as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality, and ask ourselves *what conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us?* In the *Letter to the Romans*, Saint Paul tells us: ‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect’ (12:2). Contemplation aims at creating within us a truly wise and discerning vision of reality, as God sees it, and at forming within us ‘the mind of Christ’ (1 Cor 2:16).

To copy this procedure in the Bible Study, someone first reads aloud the biblical passage. After the reading, a brief period of silence is observed, and then each person shares one word – or one phrase – from the reading that grabbed their attention for whatever reason. Then the text is read aloud again. After this reading, the group discusses the text together. The discussion is open-ended, though, as it often happens, the four questions Pope Benedict XVI lists above, are discussed.

(Brother Tommy Piolata O.F.M. Cap.)

