The Summit Online Word of God, Word of Hope

Lectio divina

If you are in a group, you can also read each of these steps aloud as you enter into them so that everybody is engaged.

Step 1: Lectio

The first step involves reading the text aloud. Reading it through three times is often a good amount, leaving time for a few minutes of quiet between readings. The purpose of this step is to calm our minds and listen, paying attention to what words or phrases stand out. After the third reading, it is common practice to share aloud which word or phrase resonated.

Step 2: Meditatio

The second step, meditation, leads us to ask: 'What is the text saying to us personally?' The first two steps often blend together. As we read or listen to the Scriptures, it is good to repeat the word or phrase in our minds, letting it sink in and pondering why it resonates. To provide a more structured approach, the meditatio section of this resource also offers reflections on the Gospel reading to help unpack its core themes.

Step 3: Oratio

The third step is prayer, a time to enter conversation with the Lord, responding to what he has said. Those present might like to bring their questions, their desires, or their thanksgiving before God.

Step 4: Contemplatio

The fourth step is a time of resting in God's presence, simply being with him, loving him. Pope Benedict XVI also said this step was about asking for the gift of seeing the world the way God sees it (VD §87), so that what we have glimpsed through the Scriptures can transform us.

Step 5: Actio

While this is not a traditional step in lectio divina, many spiritual traditions have now included it, recognising the importance of changed hearts overflowing into a life of charity and discipleship. With this step, participants can discuss or journal how they might live out what they have learned more practically, so that they can be a living witness of hope to others.

Those leading groups can also use this step to begin conversation, inviting everyone to share their experience and prayers, thoughts and questions about the subject for each week.

The Second Sunday of Advent

Revised New Jerusalem Bible © 2019 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd

In those days, John the Baptist came, proclaiming in the desert of Judaea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven has drawn near." This was the man spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said: A voice of one crying in the desert, "Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight." John himself wore a garment of camelhair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole region round the Jordan district kept going out to him, and they were baptised by him in the River Jordan as they confessed their sins. But seeing many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, "Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Produce fruit worthy of repentance, and do not be satisfied with saying to yourself, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is being laid to the root of the trees, so any tree failing to produce good fruit is cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you with water for repentance, but the one who comes after me is more powerful than I, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that never goes out.

Matthew 3:1-12

Lectio

whether you are reading this passage of Scripture individually or as part of a group, before moving on to the following reflections, spend some time praying slowly with it according to the first step of lectio divina. Read the passage two or three times and see what sticks out. Feel free to journal your initial questions or thoughts.

The Summit Online Word of God, Word of Hope

Meditatio

As with last week, the Gospel for the second Sunday of Advent confronts us with themes of Christ's coming and of judgement, playing with images of fire and purification, of confession and repentance. It helps us tease out what it is we are meant to do with that news—that hope—of Christ's coming.

Hope, after all, is not 'naïve optimism,' as Pope Francis reminded us in *Spes non confundit* (§24). It is not a vague belief that everything will work out regardless of our own contribution. On the contrary, it is through our contribution, through our preparing a way for the Lord, as St John the Baptist did, that Christ comes. We are called to clear the paths in our heart so that Christ can live completely within us, even now. As we do this, the hope of Christ becomes more real, more tangible, for others.

One of the practical ways we do this is through prayer. The life of prayer is, as the Catechism says, 'the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him' (§2565). In his encyclical on hope, *Spe salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that it is through the school of prayer that we grow in hope, for in prayer, in learning to be in the presence of God, we expand our hearts so that God can prepare us for eternal life.

'Saint Augustine, in a homily on the First Letter of John, describes very beautifully the intimate relationship between prayer and hope. He defines prayer as an exercise of desire. Man was created for greatness-for God himself; he was created to be filled by God. But his heart is too small for the greatness to which it is destined. It must be stretched. "By delaying [his gift], God strengthens our desire; through desire he enlarges our soul and by expanding it he increases its capacity [for receiving him]". Augustine refers to Saint Paul, who speaks of himself as straining forward to the things that are to come (cf. Phil 3:13). He then uses a very beautiful image to describe this process of enlargement and preparation of the human heart. "Suppose that God wishes to fill you with honey [a symbol of God's tenderness and goodness]; but if you are full of vinegar, where will you put the honey?" The vessel, that is your heart, must first be enlarged and then cleansed, freed from the vinegar and its taste. This requires hard work and is painful, but in this way alone do we become suited to that for which we are destined. Even if Augustine speaks directly only of our capacity for God, it is nevertheless clear that through this effort by which we are freed from vinegar and the taste of vinegar, not only are we made free for God, but we also become open to others. It is only by becoming children of God, that we can be with our common Father. To pray is not to step outside history and withdraw to our own private corner of happiness. When we pray properly we undergo a process of inner purification which opens us up to God and thus to our fellow human beings as well. In prayer we must learn what we can truly ask of God-what is worthy of God. We must learn that we cannot pray against others. We must learn that we cannot ask for the superficial and comfortable things that we desire at this moment-that meagre, misplaced hope that leads us away from God. We must learn to purify our desires and our hopes. We must free ourselves from the hidden lies with which we deceive ourselves ...

For prayer to develop this power of purification, it must on the one hand be something very personal, an encounter between my intimate self and God, the living God. On the other hand it must be constantly guided and enlightened by the great prayers of the Church and of the saints, by liturgical prayer, in which the Lord teaches us again and again how to pray properly.

Spe salvi §33 - 34

Oratio

Spend some time now in conversation with the Lord. Respond to his Word.

Where has your prayer and meditation led you? What questions or desires do you want to bring before God? Bring them now. Feel free to use the journalling space on the first page to help you pray

Contemplatio

Pope Benedict XVI said that this step of contemplation (contemplatio) is the time of taking up 'as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality ... forming within us "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16)' (Verbum domini §87). Spend some time resting quietly in God's presence, asking for the gift of his heart and mind.

Actio

If you are in a group setting, discuss your thoughts and meditations from your time in prayer. Towards the end of your time together, focus especially on how your prayer might lead to action, to greater witness. If this is an individual exercise, journal your thoughts and resolutions here.