

Encountering God in the Scriptures: *Lectio Divina*

The Hook: How can I hear God's Word addressed to me?

This Episode will help you:

1. Understand *Lectio Divina* as a prayerful way to encounter God in the Scriptures
2. Understand how *Lectio Divina* is practiced

Key Points

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Key Terms

- *Lectio Divina*
- Word of God
- *Lectio* ('Sacred Reading')
- *Meditatio* ('Meditation')
- *Oratio* ('Prayer')
- *Contemplatio* ('Contemplation')

**“For now treat the Scriptures of God as the face of God.
Melt in its presence.”
-- Augustine, *Sermo* 22.7**

1. WHAT IS *LECTIO DIVINA*?

1.1. Definition

Lectio Divina is Latin for ‘Divine Reading’ or ‘Sacred Reading.’¹ The practice of *Lectio Divina* is a way to encounter the person of the Word of God—the eternal Son of God, who became flesh in Jesus Christ, and who poured out his life for each one of us—through the biblical word that testifies to him and which makes him present. It is an “act of reading the Bible that opens into listening to God’s word, encountering the Lord who speaks through the biblical page, and entering into relationship with him. ... *Lectio* is reading in faith, in prayer, in openness to the Spirit so that we come to hear God’s Word calling out to us today from the biblical page. ...² In the Christian tradition, *lectio divina* is envisioned as taking place in several steps or stages, and there are various models that describe this process. An especially influential description by Guigo II the Carthusian names four stages: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, *contemplatio*. You can figure out what these Latin words mean by adding an –n to the end of each: *lection*, or ‘reading’; *meditation*; *oration*, or ‘prayer’; and *contemplation*. The best way to understand these four stages is to see them as four stages of growing in intimate knowledge and love of God through the Scriptures.³

1.2. Brief History

Prayerful reading of Scripture as a way of encountering God’s Word has been a part of the Christian tradition from its very beginning. In the early Church, a few figures stand out in particular. In the third century, Origen stands out as a unique figure because of his profound theology of Scripture. For him, the eternal Word who became flesh in Jesus Christ, but, after the ascension, became food for us in the Eucharist and in the Scriptures. Christians encounter the living Word through the Scriptures. The Scriptures become, as it were, the living Word’s body, and we can ‘feel’ his face through the Scriptural words, and enter into his presence. Ambrose and Augustine in the fourth century understood the Scriptures to mediate the eternal Word of God.⁴ For them, especially for Augustine, the Scriptures in their entirety reveal Christ, and it is he who speaks through them. Augustine in particular believed that, in the Incarnation, the eternal Son of God assumed not just our flesh, but also, all of our voices, and thus, in Scripture, no matter who speaks, it is a conversation between Christ’s body (the Church) and Christ as the Head of the body. For Augustine, the Scripture’s are ‘the face of God for us now.’⁵

In Gregory the Great and Benedict of Nursia, we see important gateways for the practice of prayerful reading and contemplating of the Scriptures for the middle ages. In the *Rule of St Benedict*, we see that the daily life in a Benedictine Monastery consisted in liturgical prayer, manual labor, and *lectio divina*—understood as a quiet and prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture. St Bernard of Clairvaux had an important influence in the Cistercian monastic tradition by describing how spiritual reading is an encounter between lovers, in which we, the Bride of Christ, encounter our beloved, the Bride, speaking to us through the Scriptural text. The Scriptures become something like a veil, through which one can ‘feel,’ ‘touch,’ ‘spend time with,’ and ‘be intimate with,’ one’s beloved, Christ. The most influential figure for outlining the four stages of *lectio divina* most commonly practiced today is Guigo II – a 12th century Carthusian monk and prior of Grande Chartreuse. He was the first to formally describe *lectio divina* as a four staged progression from reading, to meditation, to prayer, to loving contemplation of God.

Guigo II describes this in his classic book: *The Ladder of Monks*, as well as in some of his letters. The ‘classic’ passage that summarizes *lectio divina* is:

One day when I was busy working with my hands I began to think about our spiritual work, and all at once four stages in spiritual exercise came into my mind: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. ... Reading is the careful study of the Scriptures, concentrating all one’s power on it. Meditation is the busy application of the mind to seek with the help of one’s own reason for knowledge of hidden truth. Prayer is the heart’s devoted turning to God to drive away evil and obtain what is good. Contemplation is when the mind is in some sort lifted up to God and held above itself, so that it tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness (Guigo II the Carthusian, *The Ladder of Monks* 2, trans. Edmund College and James Walsh [Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981], p. 68).

The prayerful, spiritual reading of Scripture has continued in the Christian tradition, along with a proliferation and diversification of Guigo II’s outline. During the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin continued to advocate for *lectio divina*, and afterwards, we can see certain reformed versions of it among certain other protestant groups, including the puritans. It was a method of prayer favored and taught by St John of the Cross, and continues to provide renewal for hearts and minds seeking to hear the Word that God has lovingly addressed to them. In one of Benedict XVI’s speeches celebrating the 40th anniversary of *Dei Verbum*, he states:

In this context, I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *Lectio divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church - I am convinced of it - a new spiritual springtime.⁶

1.3. Importance and Significance for us

So often in life we search for a word from God. “God, what’s your plan for me?” “God, why did this happen?” “God, what do you want me to do?” and so forth. But sometimes we might feel like we’re overloading the heavenly Post Office, without any mail returned. Maybe a little ‘sign’ here or there, a feeling, a notion, etc. But overall, we might wonder, deep down, ‘How am I supposed to really hear God’s word for me?’ At this point, I always think back to a line by St. Irenaeus in the early Church, written in the year 185 AD. He says when people only hear God’s silence, it’s because they do not realize that he has spoken everything in his Word. This line deserves some attention. He’s not saying that whatever God spoke is past, as though you’ve got to be a professional historian to figure out God’s plan for you. Rather, he’s making a much more powerful claim. He is saying that God—who is infinite, free, and personal—has spoken to *you* and to each one of us—through his Word, that is, Jesus Christ. (Recall that Jesus is the “Word made flesh,” Jn 1:14). And if we look past or beyond God’s word to us in his Word, then all we encounter is silence.

Thus, when we turn to God’s Word addressed to us, and pose our questions—why God? What do you want from me? And so forth—we realize, even before we get our question off our lips,

that we have already been addressed all along. God made us a dialogue partner in his conversation of love long before we raised our eyes to him. Every question we pose God is, and can only be, a response to a love and Word that he has first given us. *Lectio divina* is an opportunity to encounter God's Word to us through the scriptural word, ... to meditate on Christ's love and gift of himself as he offers himself to us in the Eucharist and in the Scriptural Word, such that, if we more deeply form our eyes of faith, we can 'see' his face with our hearts, speaking to us through the Scriptures, and therefore, we can contemplate God's loving self-gift to us, and raise our hearts to him in obedience and self-surrender, out of love and adoration.

2. THE STEPS OF *LECTIO DIVINA*

2.1. Preparation

Jesus says, 'Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you' (Matt 7:7). Guigo II the Carthusian's paraphrase: 'Seek by reading and you shall find in meditation. Knock in prayer and contemplation shall be opened for you to enter' (Guigo, *Letter to Gervase* 3).

2.1.1. Prayer⁷

2.1.2. Ask for the Holy Spirit⁸

2.1.3. Attitude of Listening to the Lord who wishes to speak to us⁹

2.1.4. Scheduled Time and Solitude¹⁰

2.1.5. Silence¹¹

2.2. Stage 1: *Lectio* ('Sacred Reading')¹²

"We begin our reading in search of an objective and correct comprehension of the 'letter' of the text. This means trying to avoid purely subjective interpretations so that we can access the text in its otherness, come to know it with objectivity as it tells us about the Lord, and come to discern the Lord who speaks to us through it."¹³

Reading is less like 'passive reading,' and more like *mastication*.¹⁴ "Medieval monastic writers were not using an idle image when they spoke of *lectio divina* as chiefly consisting of the 'mastication' of the actual text of Scripture, almost literally fulfilling the experience of Ezekiel: 'I saw a hand stretched out to me, holding a scroll. ... Then he said to me, 'I Man, eat what is in front of you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the Israelites.' So I opened my mouth and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said, 'Man, swallow this scroll I give you, and fill yourself full.' So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey' (Ezek 2:9-3:3)."¹⁵

2.3. Stage 2: *Meditatio* ('Meditation')¹⁶

"In *meditation*, we deepen this understanding through reflection and study, until the message of Scripture becomes clear enough to reach us as we read or listen, wounding or consoling, but always revealing Christ crucified and risen. By now Scripture is a Word addressed to me, revealing an event that has to do with me and also revealing the love of Christ, who 'loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20).¹⁷ *Meditatio* is like the alternating heartbeat phases of systole and diastole: we apply the text to ourselves, and ourselves to the text until we start to 'breathe Scripture.' In the space of *meditation* I read and evaluate my personal and communal life before God and his word. I think of myself in relation to what the Word demands, so that I will be moved to act in obedience to God's word in my daily life."¹⁸

As the Scriptures become food for you, find in them Christ speaking to you. Everything in Scripture refers to Christ.¹⁹ ‘Eat’ of this food by emptying yourself and receiving this word in you.²⁰

2.4. Stage 3: *Oratio* (‘Prayer’)

“Thinking is integrated with praying as I bring my personal life objectively before God, just as in the psalms of supplication. There we find the speaker ‘setting out his case,’ that is, describing his own situation in God’s presence. By now, Scripture will have given me a word, one addressed to me personally, and so I enter into dialogue, *oratio* (‘prayer’), with God and accept God’s covenant, which is costly grace.”²¹

2.5. Stage 4: *Contemplatio* (‘Contemplation’)

“Since I have come to Scripture in faith, open to the Spirit’s action, my prayer is no longer a monologue, introspective thinking, or moralistic self-examination. I have a conversation partner who is present with me in prayer, and this leads to *contemplation*, the revelation of this Presence in ourselves. We discover that we are called to make our own bodies and lives transparent to Christ for others. In *contemplation* we can glimpse Christ’s face, first revealed by Scripture, in the faces of those around us and in the created world, because we have drawn very close to the spirit of the gospel, the breath of Christ, God’s gaze and way of seeing.”²²

2.5.1. *Seek the Face of God.*²³

2.5.2. *Encounter the Eyes of the One who is looking at you.*

St. Therese shows us that holiness is nothing more, but certainly nothing less, than enduring God’s glance. It may appear mere passivity to withstand the look of an eye; but everyone knows how much exertion is required when this occurs in an essential encounter. Our glances mostly brush by each other indirectly, or they turn quickly away, or they give themselves not personally but only socially. So too do we constantly flee from God into a distance that is *theoretical, rhetorical, sentimental, aesthetic*, or, most frequently, *pious!* And yet the best thing would be to surrender one’s naked heart to the fire of this all-penetrating glance. The heart would then itself have to catch fire, if it were not always artificially dispersing the rays that come to it as through a magnifying glass. Such enduring would be a yielding, a declaring oneself beaten, a capitulating, an entrusting oneself, casting oneself into him. It would be childlike loving, since for children the glance of the father is not painful: with wide-open eyes they look into his. Little Therese—great little Therese—could do it. Augustine’s magnificent formula on the essence of eternity: *videntem videre*—“to look at him who is looking at you.”

2.5.3. *Love and Adore Him, as the Response of Love to His Love, Which Always Comes First.*

“Adoration is love overwhelmed by beauty, the power, the immense grandeur of the loved object. Love then falls into a kind of faint, into a full and profound silence. It is also the final effort of a soul that is overflowing and can no longer speak” (Elizabeth of the Trinity)

2.6. Summary

Some recommend that you keep a journal in which you write down whatever progress you’ve made in your spiritual journey with God. The goal of keeping a journal is not to write

down your exposition of the text, but to write down whatever word you received from God for your life.²⁴

3. HOW TO SELECT A PASSAGE FOR *LECTIO DIVINA*

Either choose a book of the Bible and read it through from beginning to end, one periscope per day, or follow the Bible readings in the daily liturgy (perhaps by choosing one of them, such as the Gospel readings). The benefit of choosing a book of the Bible is that you will get familiarity with a whole book, and can slowly progress through the entire Bible. The benefit of choosing the daily liturgy reading is that your *lectio divina* will intersect with the Church's liturgical life, which should be the heart of our own spiritual life.

If someone doesn't have much familiarity with *lectio divina* or the Bible, it's a good idea to slowly ease into *lectio* by starting with a text that is both simple and foundational, such as the Gospel of Mark (followed by, for example, Exodus 1-24, or the Gospels of Matthew and Luke). Books that are typically approached by more experienced readers are Daniel, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, and Revelation.

4. A FINAL WORD ON "TECHNIQUE" AND LOVE

I want you to imagine that I am having a conversation with my wife over dinner, and she asks me a question—one of those questions that make your stomach sink a bit and say, Uh Oh, I better get this one right: "Honey, why do you love me?" ... Now, let's suppose that I respond: "Oh, that's easy, because of how you make me feel. You make me a better person, you pick me up, and you give me confidence and comfort." And then keep eating. I assure you that I will be sleeping on the couch that night ... if not longer. Why? Because, as St Theresa of Avila said perfectly, "Love calls for love in return." My response did not return her love, but rather, my response *instrumentalized* her love. It made it into something that I could benefit from, which is not an appropriate response to love. A similar thing can happen with God, but much worse. And it happens every day. We turn God into an instrument. We worship because it makes us feel more peaceful, fulfilled, whatever. We need to remember that God has loved us first, and has loved us with his whole life, to the point of death on a Cross. Anything we do is always a *response* to that. St. Bernard of Clairvaux says: "You wish me to tell you why and how God should be loved. My answer is that God himself is the reason why he is to be loved. As for how he is to be loved, there is to be no limit to that love. Is this sufficient answer?" (St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*, I.1). The reason this is important is because we need to beware of turning *lectio divina* or any other form of prayer and contemplation into a "technique," to be "mastered," in order to arrive at some "experience." The moment that you're yearning more for an experience than for God, you will be pursuing a projection of what God is. *Lectio divina* is not a "technique," it's a journey; it's not a "tool," but a way of opening up to receive the Word that God has spoken to you through flesh and blood, and with great cost, the cost of his only begotten Son (Jn 3:16).

[HERE ENDS THE OUTLINE]

A Common Q&A

Question: Is *Lectio Divina* only for monks?

Answer: Although *Lectio divina* is practiced widely in monasteries, it is by no means limited to the monastic life. In fact, one of the best responses to this question comes from St. John Chrysostom in the early Church who, upon advocating for a spiritual reading of Scripture by lay persons, was asked a similar question. Here's his response: "Some of you may say, "I am not a monk..." But here you are mistaken, because you think that the Scriptures are meant only for monks, whereas they are *actually far more necessary for you*, the faithful who *live in the midst of the world*. The only thing more gravely sinful than not reading the Scriptures is believing that reading them is useless and serves no purpose" (*In Matthaem* 25; PG 57:20).

He says elsewhere: "When you return home you should take the Scriptures and, with your wife and children, you should read and repeat together the Word you have heard [in Church]" (*In Matthaem* 51; PG 57:55f) and again, "Return home and prepare two tables, one with plates of food, the other with plates of Scripture. Let the husband repeat what was read in Church. ... Make your house into a church" (*In Genesim* 62; PG 54:607).

ACCOMPANYING NOTES AND REFERENCES (Mostly from the Fathers of the Church, but also others)

¹ "*Lectio divina* means sacred or divine reading, but the translation certainly misses the richness of this term. It is far more than just reading, which is too superficial. It is less than study, which is too intellectual. It is different from meditation, which is too pietistic and centered in one's own will. Hence we prefer to retain here the Latin term *lectio divina* or to translate it with 'the Word prayed' or with 'praying the Word' (p. 27). I think that E. captures well the fact that *Lectio divina* is not well captured in the typical translations of 'sacred' or 'divine reading,' though I would *firmly* disagree with his characterizations of reading, study, and meditation.

² Enzo Bianchi. *Lectio Divina: From God's Word to Our Lives* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2015), p. 95

³ E. Bianchi says: "It may be helpful to see this progression today as a necessary initiation into the art of meeting the Other. It is the training of body and spirit that is asked of us so that we may enter into dialogue and relationship with the Lord who speaks through the text, and live in his presence" (ibid., p. 96).

⁴ In Ambrose, Augustine, and Hilary of Poitiers, they use the words 'lectio divina' as synonymous with 'lectio sacra' ('sacred reading') and at times as synonymous with 'sacra pagina' (the divine page, i.e. Scripture itself) meaning that the articulate difference between 'lectio divina' as *Scripture* and 'lectio divina' as *referring to a way of reading Scripture* appears to be subsequent to them, and to have its place in the monastic tradition. But for the sake of brevity and simplicity, I'm not going to quibble about how they understood the term 'lectio divina,' but narrate how that practice developed regardless of how one called it.

⁵ Sermon 22.7

⁶ Benedict XVI. Address Of His Holiness Benedict XVI To The Participants In The International Congress Organized To Commemorate The 40th Anniversary Of The Dogmatic Constitution On Divine Revelation "*Dei Verbum*." (Friday, 16 September 2005). Accessible: http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050916_40-dei-verbum.html

⁷ St John Chrysostom: ‘Open the eyes of my heart so that I may know and do your will ..., enlighten my eyes with your light.’ St. Ephrem: ‘Before you read, pray and implore God to reveal himself to you.’

⁸ St Gregory the Great: ‘the same Spirit which moved the souls of the prophets moves the heart of the reader’ (Gregory the Great, *In Ezechielem Homelia* 7.11 (PL 76:846AB);

St Ephrem: ‘only when we are filled with the Spirit can we drink in Christ’;

William of Saint Thierry: ‘the Scriptures need to be read by the light of that same Spirit in which they were written and understood in that light’ (*Epistola ad fratres de monte Dei* 121; SCh 223:239; ‘*Golden Epistle*’);

The Second Vatican Council: “Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written” (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 3.12)

⁹ St Ambrose describes attention as ‘the whole person being intensely involved in the act of listening to God’ (St Ambrose, *In Psalmum* 118 *Expositio* 68; PL 15:1270B);

Caesarius of Arles: ‘Someone who listens to the Word half-heartedly deserves the same blame as someone who negligently lets the Lords’ body drop on the street’ (Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 782; CCSL 103:324).

¹⁰ William of Saint Thierry: ‘At fixed hours time should be set aside to do definite reading. Haphazard reading, constantly varied and spontaneously chosen, not only fails to edify the soul but actually robs us of our stability’ (*Epistola ad fratres de monte Dei* 120; SCh 223:238; ‘*Golden Epistle*’).

¹¹ We must allow silence to invade our soul—silence of the senses and of the understanding and affections—in order for the birth of the Word to take place in our being. This is the silence celebrated in the Christmas liturgy: ‘When all things were wrapt [*sic*] in a profound silence, and night in her swift course was half spent, thy almighty Word, O Lord, leapt down from thy royal throne in heaven’ (Introit, second Sunday of Christmas).

¹² St. Gregory the Great: ‘Often I have seen people who are so dedicated to *lectio divina* that they offer a sacrifice of tears to the Lord, and in their tears they offer themselves as sacrifices. Their heart is so full of the Bible and their interior so saturated with the Word of God that their soul is always recollected, and their tears show their holy awareness of God’ (St Gregory the Great, *In Ezechielem Hom.* 1.10.11; PL 76:889AB).

St Isidore of Seville: ‘Anyone who wants to be united constantly to God should read the Scriptures frequently ... and should willingly listen to them ..., because all progress comes from reading them and meditating on them. Whatever we do not know we learn from our reading and whatever we’ve learned we store in our hearts by meditating’ (Isidore of Seville, *Sententiae* 3.8.2-3; PL 83:679B).

¹³ Enzo Biacho, *Lectio Divina*, p. 96.

¹⁴ ‘They words were found and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart’ (Jeremiah 15:16).

¹⁵ Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the World*, Vol III.

¹⁶ John Cassian: ‘Here is the goal you should strive for with all your strength: to apply yourself with constancy and concentration to reading the Scriptures, until continual meditation fills your mind and forms it somehow to its own likeness’ (John Cassian, *Conlationes* 14.10; PL 49:970B; CSEL 13:10).

St. Ambrose: ‘Meditate every day on the Word of God. Take Moses, Isaiah..., Peter, Paul, John, as your counselors.... Take Jesus Christ himself as your supreme model so that in this way you may approach the Father. Speak with these people; meditate with all of them all day long’ (St Ambrose, *In Psalmum* 118 *Expositio* 137; PL 15:1382C).

John Cassian: “as our minds are renewed by this study, the very face of Scripture begins also to be renewed, and the beauty of this quite holy understanding is increased to the degree of our spiritual advancement” (John Cassian, *Conlationes* 14.11.1; PL 49:972B; CSEL 13:411).

Erasmus Leiva-Merikakis: “St. Therese of Liseux stated with conviction that, if she had been a priest, she would have studied Hebrew and Greek thoroughly, ‘so as to understand the thought of God as he has deigned to express it in our human language.’ Here the meticulous lover of Christ has triumphed over social conventions: she does not want to be deprived of any detail of her Beloved’s face or of any inflection of his voice! And there is an admirable Hassidic saying that expands the conviction with a metaphor full of humor, wisdom, and desire: ‘To read the Scriptures in translation is like kissing your wife through a handkerchief.’ The Scriptures correspond to the actual features of the loved one’s face, to the skin’s texture and warmth. Kissing one’s wife with passion becomes a metaphor expressing the most incomparable of realities: the spiritual and *corporeal* intimacy with God demanded by mystical marriage. As Hans Urs von Balthasar puts it: we may feel through clothing for the true contours of the body within; but only that body itself is the person we seek, and that body is nothing other than the living, though material, aspect of the revelation, of the incarnate Word” (*Fire of Mercy, Heart of the World*, vol. III).

¹⁷ “All external scenes of Jesus’ life and sufferings are to be understood as a direct revelation of the interior life and intentions of God. This is the fundamental meaning of biblical symbolism and allegory, without which the whole Gospel remains nothing but superficial moralism. Thus, for instance, Jesus’ silence before Caiaphas, the *Ecce Homo* episode with Pilate, the figure of the Lord covered with the cloak and flogged, his nailing to the Cross, the piercing of His Heart, his words on the Cross, and so on. All of this is a direct portrayal and exegesis of God (Jn 1:18), accessible to the senses” (Balthasar, *The Grain of Wheat: Aphorisms*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 58).

“From the swaddling clothes of his birth to the vinegar of his Passion and the shroud of his Resurrection, *everything* in Jesus’ life was a sign of his mystery. His deeds, miracles, and words all *revealed* that ‘in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily’ (Col 2:9). His humanity appeared as ‘*sacrament*,’ that is, the sign and instrument, of his divinity and of the salvation he brings: what was visible in his earthly life leads to the invisible mystery of his divine sonship and redemptive mission. Christ’s whole earthly life—his words and deeds, his *silences and sufferings*, indeed his *manner* of being and speaking—is *Revelation* of the Father. ... Because our Lord became man in order to do his Father’s will, *Even the least characteristics* of his mysteries manifest ‘Gods’ love ... among us’ (1 Jn 4:9)” (CCC, 515-516; italics mine).

¹⁸ Biacho, *Lectio Divina*, p. 95-7.

¹⁹ Nicholas Cabasilas, the famous Eastern mystical theologian, says that the Scriptures are the ‘representation of Christ.’

Scripture forms a single book, ‘and that single book is Christ, because all divine Scripture speaks to us of Christ and in Christ all Scripture is fulfilled’ (Hugh of St Victor, *De arca Noe morali* 2.8; PL 176:642CD).

Augustine said that in all the things spoken in the Scriptures there is ‘one discourse’ (*unus sermo*) and out of the many mouths come ‘one word’ (*unum verbum*) (*Exposition of Psalm* 103.4.1).

Hugo of Saint Victor, a monk living in medieval Paris: ‘The subject matter of all the Divine Scripture is the works of restoring humankind. For there are two works in which all that has been done are contained. The First is the work of foundation; the second is the work of restoration. The work of foundation is that by which those things that were not came into being. The work of restoration is that by which those things that had been damaged were made better. Therefore, the work of foundation is the creation of the world with all its elements. The work of restoration is the Incarnation of the Word with all its sacraments, those which have existed from the beginning of time, and those which came about later until the end of the world” (*On the Sacraments*, Prologue, 2; PL 176, 183).

²⁰ Reading Scriptures prayerfully, meditatively, and contemplatively, in order to encounter Jesus Christ, is described by Origen as ‘consuming the broken bread’ (*Commentariorum in Matthaeum* series 85; PG 13:1734AB) and by St Gregory Nazianzen as ‘consuming the paschal lamb’ (*Oratio* 45.16; PG 36:644f).

St. Jerome: ‘we eat Christ’s flesh and drink his blood in the Eucharist but also in our reading of Scripture’ (Jerome, *Breviarium in Psalmo*; PL 26:1334B); elsewhere, Jerome says: ‘I believe the Gospel is the body of Christ,’ and for this reason, ‘we should, approach the Scriptures as the flesh of Christ!’ (Jerome, *In Ecclesiasten* 313; PL 23:1092A); and: “Ignorance of the Scripture is ignorance of Christ” (Jerome, *Commentariorum in Isaiam libri xviii* prol.:PL 24,17B.).

²¹ Biacho, *Lectio Divina*, p. 95-7.

²² Biacho, *Lectio Divina*, 95-97.

²³ Evagrius Ponticus: “The Father of all things is a beloved Kingdom. Whoever finds himself in Him and establishes his dwelling in Him will find his joy in living as a stranger, because his delicious food will be the beauty of the Father’s Face.”

“O adorable Face! Forgetting our exile on the shore of the rivers of Babylon, we will sing to your ears the sweetest of melodies. Since you are our hearts’ true and sole Fatherland, our songs will not be sung in an alien land. Your veiled Glance is our Heaven, O Jesus!” (Therese of the Child Jesus).

“There can be no better good, no happier happiness than this: life for God, life from God, who is the well of life, in whose light we shall see light. Of that life the Lord himself says, ‘This is life eternal, that they may know you the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent’ (John 17:3). ... This is his own promise to his lovers: ‘He that loves me keeps my commandments; and he that loves me is loved of my Father and I will love him and will show myself to him’ (John 14:21)” (Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter*, 22.37).

²⁴ “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ ... that you may put on in your living him whom you have put on in the sacrament” (Augustine, *Sermo 8 in octava Paschae*, I, 4).

“God’s words grow with the reader” (St. Gregory the Great, *In Ezechielem* I, VII, 8; PL 76, 843).