



A Lectio Prayer Service for the Family

~ from the Teaching Catholic Kids .com article Lectio Divina for kids: Teach your kids to pray with Scripture

As with any new practice or habit, expect to try lectio a few times before your kids get comfortable with it. Regularly previewing the Sunday Scriptures with your kids lays a great foundation for lectio divina.

If you have very young children, skip down to the next section for some ideas about how to prepare them to do lectio divina.

Because lectio divina is ultimately a dialogue with God mediated by the text, it's better suited to individual practice. However, as you introduce it to your kids, the following guided family prayer service may be helpful. Instructions are in bold, with spoken parts in italics.

Before beginning, choose your reading. Use one of the readings from the day's Mass or Liturgy of the Hours as your text, or choose a favorite text of your own, or consult the list near the end of this article.

BEGIN with the Sign of the Cross and silence.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, you inspired the authors of Sacred Scripture to write what you wanted us to know for the sake of our salvation. Inspire us now to hear those words not only with our ears, but our hearts, so that we might know your saving Word for us today.

Silence.

READ the sacred text several times. Introduce this step with these or similar words:

Listen to this reading carefully, paying attention to what words, images, or ideas the Holy Spirit brings to your heart.

Read the sacred text slowly, savoring the words and pausing briefly after significant phrases and sentences. Observe a brief silence after the first reading.

Read the sacred text again (or ask someone else to do so), observing a brief silence afterward. If appropriate, pause to discuss the meaning of the text, using footnotes and commentaries as needed.

Read the text a third time, and observe a brief silence.

MEDITATE. In the meditation step, ask questions such as:

What words, images, or ideas did the Holy Spirit bring to your heart? What stood out for you in the reading? How do those words, images, or ideas relate to your life right now?

What might God be saying to you (us) in this reading? What action might you (we) be called to take?

How does God's word make you feel? Excited, encouraged, comforted, loved? Or do you feel challenged, confused, or resistant?

Offer your own reflection as a model before inviting your children to share their own thoughts.

PRAY. Respond to the reading by addressing God in prayer. Say:

Let's respond to God's word for us in prayer.

Exactly how you pray the reading will depend on what surfaced during the meditation step. Some possibilities:

Offer thanksgiving to God for important insights that emerged from the text.

If the text was difficult or confusing, ask God for guidance and clarity.

If the text was challenging or caused anxiety, ask God for humility, strength, and the ability to trust in providence.

CONTEMPLATE*. Invite family members to still themselves and “rest in the Word,” attending to God's presence:

Let's quiet our hearts for a few moments so we might hear God's response to our prayer. Rest now in God's presence.

CLOSE. After a period of silence, end with the Sign of the Cross:

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

*A note about the contemplatio step: By its very nature, contemplative prayer is difficult to teach.

However, you can describe something of what it looks or feels like to your kids. The most basic feature of contemplation is that words are replaced by a simple feeling—what St. Thérèse of Lisieux describes as a “surge of the heart” and “cry of love.”

A simple lectio divina for young children

You can prepare young children for Lectio Divina by previewing the Sunday Scriptures with them, or by doing a little sacred story time with them.

But even young children can try the basic movements of Lectio Divina following these steps:

Reading. Use a short story (the shorter the better, but definitely less than five minutes long) from a good picture Bible, a Bible-based storybook, or a children's book about the lives of the saints. Help your child prepare to hear the story by allowing a short snuggling/settling down time, and explaining what you're going to do: “Now let's read a story about God (or Jesus). While I read, you listen for what God (or Jesus) is doing in the story.”

Don't worry about questions or interruptions; if they are about the text, then your child is already “meditating” on it; if not, address the distraction and gently redirect attention back to the story. You may want to read the story or parts of the story again, either immediately or during a later step.

Meditation. If your child doesn't have questions or comments of her own, offer some comments and prompting questions: What is happening in the picture (or in the story)? Why? What are characters thinking or feeling? How is God (or Jesus) acting in this story? (If God isn't directly mentioned in the story, you may need to suggest some ways that God is quietly present.) Which character would you like to be? What would you do differently if you were that character? How would you feel?

Prayer. Invite your child to respond to the story in prayer: “You know, God gives us stories like this to help us grow closer to him. Let’s pray to God about this story. What would you like to say to God? Or what questions do you want to ask God about this story?”

Provide guiding prompts, if necessary. Be sure to offer your own prayer response, both to make the experience prayerful for you and to model prayer for your child.

Listening. With young children, the contemplation step can be described as listening to God: “Now that we’ve prayed to God about this story, let’s be quiet so we can hear what God might be saying back to us, inside our hearts.” Take at least thirty seconds to be silent. If your child is restless or noisy, do your best to complete the period of silence yourself.

Wrapping up. You can finish by asking your child whether they heard God speaking to them. If they say no, you can reassure her that it’s okay—sometimes we aren’t listening closely enough, and sometimes God just likes to spend time quietly with us. End by blessing your child.