

# “ARE YOU AFRAID OF THE THIEF?”

*A contemporary approach to lectio divina*

by

Br. Simeon Leiva-Merikakis, OCSO  
St. Joseph's Abbey  
Spencer, Massachusetts

**T**HANK YOU FOR COMING HERE today...to deepen our understanding of and love for the Word of God. The title of my presentation is: “Are You Afraid of the Thief? A Contemporary Approach to *Lectio Divina*.” I am grateful...for this invitation to share with you some reflections on *lectio divina*, one of three central practices of my daily life as a monk following the Rule of St. Benedict at St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts.

*I will speak only from my own experience as a monk and make no claims to the validity for others of anything I may say. I am not a professional biblical scholar, so don't expect scientific exegesis from me. I am only a monk and, as such, strive to become a better lover of the Word of God. In fact, you're probably going to find much of what I say a little “over the top”. But that's the way it is with lovers, you see, and that's what you get for ferreting a monk down to Manhattan from his New England woods!*

## QUALITIES OF *LECTIO DIVINA*

*As I afterwards analyzed what I had instinctively done, I came up with nine qualities that sum up my own experience. Obviously, I'm by no means proposing these as either normative or exhaustive, only as generally descriptive guidelines.*

*For me, lectio divina is, first of all:*

***I. leisurely:*** *It cannot be rushed. Its rhythms flow from total openness. No specific amount of text must be “covered”. This leisurely quality requires a slowing down of our mental processes, a quieting of our emotions and desires, a putting on hold of our need to achieve something palpable and take away a concrete result or lesson.*

2. ***ruminative:*** Visualize a placid cow lying out in the middle of a summery field, chewing its cud in most leisurely fashion, and you will have a good picture of what you and I should look like while “browsing” in the lush Eden of the Bible.

3. ***cordial:*** *Lectio* thrives on the freedom of the heart to follow its own instincts, like a dog on a leash that is always thwarting its master’s preconceived trajectory by lunging into the bushes.

4. ***contemplative:*** For me this refers to rather fundamental spiritual attitudes: a listening heart, a high receptivity of spirit and imagination...

5. ***disinterested:*** *Lectio* should be “disinterested” in the sense of being without predetermined goals or functions...

6. ***provocative:*** The Word of God must never be a soothing narcotic. The living Word and our encounter with it are a “pro-vocative” experience in the sense that here God *calls us forth* imperiously out of our comfort zone and offers us new life on his own conditions.

7. ***ecclesial:*** We read the Bible with unending gratitude to the Church, because it is she who is its rightful owner and guardian as primary recipient of the Word of her Bridegroom.

8. ***transbiblical:*** I have invented this rather pretentious word to refer to the need for our *lectio* to “breathe” freely by our allowing a tranquil free-association to occur between our particular text and many other texts that may be evoked by it in our minds.

9. ***mystagogical:*** This quality, above all the others, is what merits for *lectio* the adjective *divina*. “Mystagogical” refers, then, to the interior process whereby the disciple, led by the Spirit, gradually puts on the mind of Christ and is gradually initiated into the mysteries of his Heart: