

Faith Tidbits..
*a little food for thought
and some knowledge
about your
Catholic faith*

April 2009

This monthly series will answer questions you always wondered about or questions you never even thought to ask... all about our Catholic Faith. If you have a question you want answered, call Diane Hardick at 633-3672.

1. What is the Catholic Church's stand on cremation today?

In 1997 the Holy See granted permission to the United States Bishops to allow funeral Masses in the presence of cremated remains. The remains of the body are to be placed in a "worthy vessel" and then put on a table in the spot usually occupied by the coffin. The vessel may be placed there before the funeral Mass or it may be carried in the entrance procession and then placed there. One change is that explicit baptismal references are omitted in the presence of cremated remains, for it was the body that was washed in baptism, not the remains. At the end of the funeral Mass, the cremains may be incensed just as the body was. The rituals of the Catholic Church do adapt to the cultural needs of its members. The increase in cremation to almost 35% nationally has largely been due to cost. Although the Church continues to prefer and encourage the faithful to bury the bodies of their loved ones, it wishes to support the faithful in honoring the life and memory of the departed.

2. What is *Lectio divina* and is it new to the Church? How will it help me read the Bible?

Lectio divina is an ancient practice, going back to the days of early Christianity, to the desert fathers and mothers and monastic communities. The Latin expression means literally "divine reading."

Lectio divina is being revived today, in different forms, worldwide. It consists of four steps, with a fifth step now explicitly added.

The first step is (1) ***Lectio*** – putting yourself in a quiet place, and then after humbly putting yourself in the presence of God, you read the Biblical text selected. You then reflect on it: what are its context, images characters and structure? A popular commentary would be very helpful here (Jerome Biblical Commentary or the Colledgeville Biblical Commentary).

The second step (2) ***Meditatio*** (Meditation) – since you have read the text, you now let it enter into your being. How do I see myself in this reading? When/how does it challenge me? This takes time and quiet reflection.

The next step (3) ***Oratio*** (Prayer) – What do I want to say to God? What do I want to express in the context of my life and concerns? We may not always have a lot to say. Then we can just sit quietly in our prayer with the reading.

The next step is (4) ***Contemplatio*** (Contemplation) – Here we simply rest in God in wordless silence, simply enjoying the experience of being in God's presence. Let the Scripture bring you into a deeper relationship with God.

The final step which before was implicit is (5) ***Actio*** (Action) -- Praying the Scriptures is not complete until we ask: How does, how will, how can this overflow into my life, my actions, my behavior? How does my prayer relationship to God affect the other relationships in my life?

Lectio divina is simple and flexible. As our biblical prayer becomes more personal, it will develop its own rhythms and styles. ***Lectio divina*** is a wonderful way to "prepare" the readings you will hear on Sunday (which are printed in the bulletin). In preparing these readings, you will be open to really hearing them on Sunday as they invite you to the Table of the Lord.