

Gospel Sharing and *Lectio Divina* – ways to pray and listen to the Word of God.

By Wendy Louis

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At the heart of both Gospel Sharing and *Lectio Divina* we find a contemplative listening to the word and, in faith, we meet the Risen Lord personally and directly. The word reaches our heart and requires a response. The difference is that in one case the listening and the response is individual and in the other it is communitarian.

Lectio Divina is a most beautiful way of praying with the Word of God. It's like sitting under the cool shade of a great tree, stopping to pay attention to the Lord who wants to guide our lives through his word. The steps are to first Read the word (*Lectio*), then to Meditate on the word (*Meditatio*), then to pray over the word and surrender oneself to God (*Oratio*) and finally to enter into a deep union with God in contemplation (*Contemplatio*).

Sometimes *Lectio Divina* is done in a group but with *Lectio Divina* it's like a teacher in a language laboratory where each student has their own audio equipment or computer terminal. The instructions are given from the teacher's desk and each student puts their answers into the terminals without making a connection to anyone else in the class. With *Lectio Divina*, although the text is read together the rest of the steps are carried out by each one present for themselves personally. Whether in a group or sitting alone, when we go through a text using *Lectio Divina* our response to the word is personal and individual.

In Gospel Sharing the Risen Lord is present in a community that longs to hear both his comforting and challenging words which will propel them into action as a community. It is not possible, by virtue of its nature, to do Gospel Sharing alone. Every step in any Gospel Sharing method is done by individual members for the community. Whether we invite the Lord to be with us, or read the text or pick up words or phrases, we do it for the others present and we also benefit from what others are praying or repeating from the text.

We build up our friendship with Christ and with each other as we share our lives and we grow in our understanding of our common mission when we look at the life of our society in relation to the texts.

The word of God which is shared is heard as a community and the response is communitarian rather than individual. The community acts on the word of God as a group or members are sent by the community to do particular ministries in twos or threes.

The Individual Apostolate and the Community Apostolate or witness - both ways of responding to the word are important, but we need to see the difference. Its not a case of either or.

There are many Gospel Sharing methods which can be done in a group. Some begin with life experience and go to the word of God, others start with the Scripture text and move to life.

Whichever method is used within a Small Christian Community, the Gospel Sharing method is a framework within which the life of the community is lived in and through the Word. The prayer, listening, sharing and acting are all part of the life of a community which is not only about the hour or more of a weekly gathering but also is lived throughout the week.

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