

Time on our Hands 4

We pray through the day, and we have amongst that, a time of intercession for those we love or who have asked for our prayer. I always assumed people in my congregation read their Bible, until I saw the results of a survey which said that just over half of the people in church read their Bible regularly. When Bev and I became Benedictine Oblates we were introduced to a way of praying and reading the Bible together. It came from a question to a wise elderly monk when he was asked by someone if he had read the Bible. Don't smile, it is a sensible question, monks are like the rest of us. Dom Kenneth said it's not about quantity, it's about quality, as to quantity he had read most of it, as to quality he would leave the questioner to decide. Put in another way if someone says to me, "I've read the Bible", my response is "have you lived it?".

When we read the Bible it's not about getting to the end, as if we were reading the latest novel, it's about reading it and allowing it to speak to us. It is God's word to us, He speaks to us through it. How do we listen if we are rushing to finish Mark so that we can get onto Luke?

Using an ancient form of prayer, the Benedictines and most monastic communities use *Lectio Divina*. As I said, an ancient form of praying the Bible, in simple form this is it:

1. Get comfortable at a desk, or with the Bible on a knee, whatever works for you and open it to the passage for today. That does take some preparation, are you going to read the whole of a book or selected passages, use the lectionary readings, the eucharistic readings or just open it and see where it falls. Be consistent.
2. Ask God to bless your time with him, to open your heart to hear His word speaking through the words on the page.
3. Read the passage slowly, keep reading until a word or phrase jumps off the page at you. Then stop.
4. Reflect on what it is about the word that has stopped you. How do you feel about it, what memories is it evoking, are they good or bad memories? Spend time asking God to speak about the word in your life, to heal the bad and bless the good.
5. Form the word, emotion, memory, whatever it is into a prayer before God.
6. Move on with your reading until another word or phrase jumps out at you, until you run out of the time you have allowed for Bible reading, more than 5 minutes!
7. Read the passage again and bring everything together into a time of silent prayer thanking God for being with you and speaking to the depth of your heart.

You may stop once or a few times. You may not stop at all. God is still with you in that time and space so the prayer times are still important. The next time you use that passage you may see things and wonder why you didn't see that before.

If this is done each day you may never read Genesis to Revelation but you will have allowed the Word of God to sink into your life and change you. Abbot Columba Marmion a great Benedictine Abbot wrote this: "*the principal source of prayer is to be found in Holy Scripture, read with devotion and reverence and laid up in the heart.*" A lifetime of *Lectio Divina*.