

“Annunciation” by Bette Dickinson



Advent Spiritual Exercise Inviting & Responding VISIO DIVINA

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” Matthew 7:7-8

Poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning has famously penned, “Earth’s crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God, but only he who sees takes off his shoes; The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.” God is all around us, revealing himself in truth and beauty, art, and nature but we often go about our days in such a way as to miss his invitation to see him and respond.

Visio Divina is a Latin term that literally means “sacred seeing”. It is a form of Christian prayer in which we allow our hearts and imaginations to enter into a picture, image or piece of art, in silence, to see what God might have to say or reveal to us. This sacred seeing is a way of listening to the still, small voice of God within. This is similar to how you might use a passage of scripture to pray, but instead you are using something visual, like a painting, a sculpture, or a photograph.

On the following pages are some pictures you can choose from to do a Visio Divina exercise, or you may choose a different one, perhaps a picture that hangs in your home or an image from a book. After choosing what image you will use, settle in, get comfortable and take a few deep breaths. Sit quietly, still your mind, and become aware of God’s presence with you. God joins you in this time. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you as you observe the picture reflectively and interact with the themes and thoughts it evokes. Learning to quiet your mind and body will make a big difference in your ability to perceive with your imagination. After quieting yourself, give yourself the freedom to be imaginative, and to receive what God brings to you through your thoughts and imagination.

by Scott Erickson



STEP 1

Observe – Look at the picture

- What stands out the most to you?
- If you could give this art a title, what would it be?
- What part of the image are you drawn into?
- Observe colour, texture, shape, contrast, etc. You don't need to analyze or interpret. Just be present and open to God.

STEP 2

Listen – Ask God to speak

- Is there a scripture that comes to mind? A thought about God or theological truth that seems to be revealed.
- What does the picture call forth from you?
- Notice what emotions, if any, rise within you.
- What thoughts do you have about the picture?
If you had to describe the picture in a sentence or two, what would you say?
- Are there any memories that are being evoked?
Associations?
- Ask: "What might God be saying to me through this picture? What might God be asking of me? Wishing for me?"
- Listen for a word of challenge, comfort, wisdom, revelation, hope.

STEP 3

Respond – Simply talk to God

- What have you heard God say?
- Is there an answer you need to give?
- Is there thanks to express or praise to offer?
- Is there a sin to be confessed or anything between you and God that needs to be removed or repaired?
Ask God to do this work in you.
- Your response can be a dialogue: you responding, and then listening again, repeatedly.

STEP 4

Rest

- Conclude this time with silence and contemplation.
- Simply rest in God's presence and enjoy God's companionship.
- Remember that God is in control, he is with you and holds you with complete acceptance.
- There is nothing you have to do or say. Just be with God.
- Rest in what you have heard and experienced for a few minutes to complete the exercise.