

Assignment 12 b Michael Evans

“lectio divina” – as I understand it, means reading not only with the mind, but with the heart as well. Not just to get an intellectual understanding but to **believe** and live by what one reads. Reverent reading of Scripture is the way we should approach it – Isaiah 66:1-2

This was the instruction Joshua was given by Yehovah –

Joshua 1 ⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but **you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.** For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God *is* with you wherever you go.”

It was the same given through Moses to all Israel – Deut 6 ⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! ⁵ **You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.**

⁶ “And **these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.** ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

As one exercise, we have been asked to apply “lectio divina” to John 15:1-5 – and express what abiding in Christ means – “how is it experienced”.

Herein lies a potential problem that can happen with lectio divina – if one takes an isolated passage and focuses meditation on it. With all the baggage, concepts and emotions one has in one’s head, in pure sincerity of heart one can take it the wrong way and build a self-inspired construct. If one doesn’t get the whole context from the Scripture first – also bringing in other passages that are related, one can go off on a tangent, or “into the long grass”. Some Scriptures, particularly the Psalms or Proverbs, can be meditated on in isolation – but always thinking of connecting Scriptures in one’s memory, not applying one’s own interpretation.

Emotion is essential in our relationships – one cannot have a real relationship without it – but it has to be controlled and directed by the mind – with the understanding. “Emotional thinking” can lead to big problems and errors. However, thinking without emotion and feeling is sterile and dead.

This could happen if applying lectio divina to the first five verses of John 15

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

⁵ "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

One needs to read the full context – and then go back to these verses, keeping that as part of one's thinking. We learn more of what Jesus was meaning by subsequent verses – particularly 9-14

⁹ "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; **abide in My love.** ¹⁰ **If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.**

¹¹ "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. ¹² **This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.** ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. ¹⁴ **You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.**

Also - **John 14** ²³ Jesus answered and said to him, **"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."** ²⁴ He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

Understanding this, we realise that it is more than a "warm happy feeling", or pleasant experience. Abiding in Christ involves both thinking and doing what He teaches. Keeping His commandments – all of them – including "to love one another as I have loved you". This love includes keeping the "ten commandments". The "old, carnal self" and its selfish, lawless ways has to be crucified – put to death – to enable Christ to live in us through His Spirit. It is hard work, and a struggle – 1Cor 9:27 – and we have examples written down of attitudes and behaviours we must beware of and fight against – 1Cor 10:1-14. There is more to learn in Romans 7. "Abiding in Christ" could make one feel humanly rather uncomfortable, along the road. It is a difficult and narrow path.