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The Practice of Visio Divina: Seeing with the Eye of the Heart

Visio Divina facilitates a relationship with an image or subject, patiently being with it, receptive in mind and heart, perhaps even in dialogue with it. In stillness, we allow the image to reach beyond the intellect and into the unconscious level of our being, a place that can't be accessed directly. In wonder, we are invited to look at every aspect of an image and ponder it as an encounter with God. It is a way of seeing an aspect of ourselves in God, at the non-verbal, heart level. The image then becomes alive with personal meaning, meant just for us. This is the same movement of the Spirit we can experience with Lectio Divina and Scripture – gazing, reflecting, responding and resting

This practice does not require any special knowledge or appreciation of art, just a willingness to interact with the colors, textures, forms and overall impressions.

We start by simply gazing at the image, taking in the entire composition and registering what it depicts. As we continue to gaze, we begin to reflect on the deeper meanings that present themselves. For example, we may wonder how it demonstrates consent to the will of God. Then we gaze at each of the component parts and see beyond seeing how each part contributes to the whole. As we ponder the image and observe every detail we may place ourselves in the scene and see and feel from this perspective. We observe our responses. A prayer or an inspiration may arise; we may receive a glimmer of how consent manifests and how the Spirit of God presents opportunities for us to deepen our relationship with ourselves, others and God. The possible messages are endless and very individual – there is no right or wrong way of seeing.

Here are a few more suggestions for practicing Visio Divina:

Take the time to gaze at an image and allow it to speak to you, first on the level of what is seen with the eyes of your rational mind, the literal details of the image. When you are ready, allow those sights and thoughts to pass by, making space for the inner eye of the heart to open and interact with the image.

You may wish to sketch the image and experience your own non-verbal response. You do not have to be an artist to do this -- you simply follow the lines as you see them, tracing them on paper. Or, you may trace the image with your finger -- or both.

Be patient. Stay with your experience. Settle in and rest in the presence of the image. See beyond seeing and allow the image to speak its truth to you. You may also journal, and/or use these questions to inspire your reflections: How does this image inform or illumine your relationship with God? How does it speak to you of your spiritual journey now? How does this experience support your willingness to be opened, to be healed?

