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Lectio divina reignites the embers of faith

Isabella R. Moyer | Sep. 10, 2012 NCR Today

Political conventions prove the inspirational power of words. We all gravitate to the sound bites, the zingers that produce the loudest applause and the headlines in the morning. Words have the ability to touch us in our deepest core, resonating with an inner truth. When they echo our own thoughts and beliefs, we grab onto them. We mull them over, repeating them for ourselves and for others. They become sign posts directing us on life's journey.

The posthumous words [1] of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini have touched many hearts, mine included. They speak to that agonizing tension that comes when love and disappointment fight for heart space. Yes, I feel the tiredness of the church in our Western world. Yes, I need heroes to inspire me, those embers beneath the ash who can "reinvigorate the fires of love." I need fresh air to blow new life into my own ash-covered embers of faith.

Martini suggests three tools to fight against the exhaustion within our church: conversion, the word of God and the sacraments. He says the following about the word of God:

> Vatican II gave the Bible back to Catholics. Only those who perceive this Word in their heart can be part of those who will help achieve renewal of the church, and who will know how to respond to personal questions with the right choice. The Word of God is simple, and seeks out as its companion a heart that listens. ... Neither the clergy nor ecclesiastical law can substitute for the inner life of the human person. All the external rules, the laws, the dogmas, are there to clarify this internal voice and for the discernment of spirits.

Martini was a renowned scripture scholar. He spent many hours with the young people of Milan, teaching them about *lectio divina*.

Lectio divina is a countercultural prayer form for our overstimulated minds. The term means holy or sacred reading. Its roots are in Benedictine spirituality. The method is simple and flexible. You begin with the scriptures or any other spiritual reading. As you read (*Lectio*), you stop and focus on a sentence, phrase, word or image that pops out for you. Then you stop and meditate (*Meditatio*).What does this word or phrase mean to me? What is God trying to say to me -- today, in this place and time? What am I being called to do, to bring this word of God alive in my actions this day? This leads to a moment of prayer, a dialogue with God (*Oratio*). Finally, we take a moment to silently rest in the presence of God (*Contemplatio*).

The practice of a group *lectio divina* opens up the dialogue between person and God to the whole community. As wisdom and insights are shared, the diversity of inspiration is recognized and celebrated. Enriched by this diversity, we marvel at the richness and depth of the word of God -- speaking personally to each of us, in our own place and time.

A daily *lectio divina* practice provides the fresh air needed to stir the embers of our faith. The word of God becomes the sound bite of our day, the zinger that gives us energy, hope and guidance on our life's journey.

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Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/translated-final-interview-martini