

Praying with Images



Visio Divina

Visio Divina uses the same prayer format as Lectio Divina, except that the object for contemplation is an image, not a text.

You can choose any image you like for Visio Divina. There are a wealth of wonderful resources for art in the Christian Tradition, as well as guided meditations for various pieces of art on the internet.

One particular resource worth looking at is seeingtheword.org based on the recent illuminated bible – The Saint John's Bible – the first hand written and illuminated Bible commissioned by a Benedictine Abbey in more than 500 years.

Visio Divina process

Set the image in front of you so that you can sit straight, with your head and neck in a comfortable position for a few minutes.

How to pray

Prepare: close your eyes, breathe and clear your mind.

Lectio (read): Open your eyes and scan the image. Note what draws your interest but continue to scan the whole image. Close and rest your eyes a minute.

Meditatio (Meditate): Open your eyes and let your eyes be led. Focus on just this part of the image and name it. Close your eyes, just seeing that part of the image in your mind.

Oratio (pray): Open your eyes and look again at the piece of the image that caught your eye. Allow it to bring forth a word, image or emotion. Close and rest your eyes.

Contemplatio (contemplation): Open your eyes and gaze at the image. What is God saying to you today through this image?

How to pray with icons

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.” – St Augustine

We pray because we long to be in union with God, to live in the reality of God.

Icons are often described as window onto Heaven – a way to “Behold the Beauty of the Lord” (Ps 27) We don't pray “to” the Icon – that would be sacreligious – we pray to the God who stands beyond the Icon – the one to whom the icon points us.

One of the biggest problems with prayer is distractions.

“I throw myself down in my chamber and I call in, and invite God and his angels thither, and when they are there I neglect God and his Angels for the noise of a fly, for the rattling of a coach, for the whining of a door.”

John Donne's words still echo true for us today – it is so easy to be distracted! Gazing on an image often helps a person to relax and focus on God.

An icon can provide a visual focus point for those of us who are visual learners.

Praying with the icon of the Pantocrator

The Pantocrator icon is one of the very earliest in Christian Iconography. Pantocrator is usually translated as “all-mighty” or “all-powerful,” derived from one of the many names of God in the Hebrew Scriptures. Sit silently before the icon. Place your hands in your lap, palms facing upwards. Concentrate on breathing slowly and steadily. Gaze at the icon.

You may like to focus on each line of this ancient prayer as you gaze at the icon. If any of the lines strike you, sit with it a little longer.



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



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Christ be with me

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me;
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all who love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

From the ancient Celtic prayer, St Patrick's Breastplate.

Love from Below

Christ's is the world in which we move,
Christ's are the folk we're summoned to love,
Christ's is the voice which calls us to care,
And Christ is the one who meets us here.
To the lost Christ shows his face,
To the unloved he gives his embrace,
To those who cry in pain or disgrace,
Christ makes, with his friends, a touching place.

Below, John Bell & Graham Maule, Wild Goose Publications, 1989.

Writing an icon

Icon writing is a very particular form of art, where the painter seeks to create an image that is a window onto the divine, or to illuminate the life of the saint portrayed so as to help the viewer come closer to God. Icons are generally produced using very traditional materials: wooden board, calico, rabbit skin glue, egg tempera, dried ground pigments and sable brushes. The Uniting Church in Victoria has its own Icon school, now run by Rev Dr Peter Blackwood. He keeps an [Icon Diary](#) on YouTube, where you can see how he produces his own icons for the instruction of his students.

Before an iconographer begins, they say a prayer thanking God for the materials they will use and asking for God to be present with them as they paint. Icon writing is itself a form of prayer.



If you would like to have a taste of the contemplative practice of Icon writing, take one of the two "cartoons" above and some pencils. Pray first, and then begin to colour the icon. Remember, this is not an exercise in artistic merit, or perfect colouring – but rather an opportunity to connect with the God who is reflected in the image.



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Prayer doodles



How to pray

Write a name for God, the name of someone you're praying for, or words from a scripture verse.

Draw a shape around it and begin to doodle

Pray as you draw, ask God to be part of this prayer time.

Keep drawing as you release these prayers to God.

For more ideas, go to www.prayingincolor.com

Prepared for the Banyule Network of Uniting Churches, Holy Habits Lenten Studies by Rev. Sandy Brodine.



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