

# Visio Divina – Sacred Seeing

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Visio divina has a rich history in many religious traditions, so there are many ways to pray using images. Franciscan priest, Fr. Richard Rohr, explains Visio Divina:

“In the Hindu tradition, *darshan* (or *darsana*) is to behold the Divine or to see with reverence and devotion. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, icons are windows into God’s heart; they are symbols of deeper than apparent wisdom. Approaching images with openness to God’s presence is also known as the practice of *visio divina*, sacred seeing.

Choose an image (painting, photograph, sculpture, or other artwork). Set aside some quiet time with this piece and begin with a prayer of intent to be open to God.

Look slowly at the image, taking in every detail without critique. Observe the colors, shapes, shadows, lines, empty spaces. Allow your unfiltered response to arise—feelings, memories, thoughts. Notice and welcome these reactions, without evaluation, whether they seem negative or pleasing.

How do these feelings, evoked by the image, connect with your life? What desires are stirring in you? How are you drawn to respond?

Take a few moments to reflect in writing, movement, or sound—whatever embodiment fits your expression. Finally, simply rest in God’s presence.”

## Using the St. John’s Bible & Lectio Divina

[www.saintjohnsbible.org](http://www.saintjohnsbible.org)

My personal experience with visio divina was developed by Dr. Barbara Sutton and of St. John’s School of Theology • Seminary in Collegeville, MN. Dr. Sutton combines lectio divina with visio divina using the illuminations from the St. John’s Bible. Here are two resources and their processes for lectio divina. Follow the links to learn more about the resources.

## Illuminating Ministry – Group Spiritual Companionship

(Ed. Victor Klimoski, Barbara Sutton) available through Liturgical Press ([www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org))

*This process is done with a group of 3-5 people and each session take about two hours. This is an excellent faith sharing group for adults in ministry.*

- Reflections Benedictine Charisms and Values
- Sharing Stories
- Reflecting on ministry
- Listening to the experience of others
- Lectio and Visio Divina
- Silence and Prayer

## Seeing the Word [www.seeingtheword.org](http://www.seeingtheword.org)

This process is flexible and can take anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour to a sessions over a number of days with any size of group. If you are using this process with a large group, invite participants to share personal reflections in small groups.

1. *Listening*: Listen for God’s word or a passage that touches the heart. (Read the scripture out loud)
2. *Meditating*: Ruminant on the word. Allow the word or passage to dwell within you. Allow this pondering to invite you into dialogue with God and then, in the spirit of Pentecost, share the word with the Group. (After a few moments of reflection, share your word or phrase with the group. You may repeat these first

two steps again if you wish).

3. *Seeing*: Return to God's word for the purpose of "hearing and seeing" Christ in the text. Fix your gaze on the illumination. Ask God to open the eyes of your heart to enable you to see that God wants you to see. Be open to images, thoughts, impressions, and feelings that come into your awareness. (After a moment of personal reflection, share with the group what you see in the image. Begin with observations and move into reflection. What does the image reveal to you about the scripture? What is being illuminated in your heart?)
4. *Contemplating*: Notice the transforming presence of God within you. Surrender all that is stirring, even if only briefly, and rest in God's embrace. (Return to silence, reflecting on what the other participants have shared).
5. *Becoming Christ-Like*: Return to God's word. Allow it to transform you. Notice how your faith is being deepened and your way of life motivated. (Read the scripture one more time and conclude the session in a prayer, include intercessions and thanksgiving.)

#### **TIPS FOR USING VISIO DIVINA WITH YOUTH:**

- Set the environment. You want to be somewhere that is quiet and free of distractions.
- Prayer involves the body. Invite the participants to get comfortable and let them know they will be sitting for a long time.
- Prepare the participants by explaining the process carefully ahead of the prayer. Let them know that there will be periods of silence – this may be uncomfortable at first, but if they welcome the silence it will become more natural.
- Let the participants know that everyone will be sharing and that no insight is invalid or stupid. The image that you will use is open for interpretation. As they reflect on the image with scripture, encourage them to start with simple observations of what they see in front of them. Encourage them to interpret the signs and symbols, placement, color, etc. What is the artist trying to evoke? What new revelations do you have as you look at this image? What is God challenging in you?
- Take your time, but don't drag!

#### **THE RAISING OF LAZARUS**

*(John 11:17, 20-27)*

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days...When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

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