

**Interview with Sister Maria Tasto**  
**An Introduction to Lectio Divina**  
**November 2009**

3           Q:       Hello this is Rob Barnett I am the  
4           "Caretaker" so to speak of Centering Prayer on  
5           Twitter. I am here today with Sr. Maria Tasto,  
6           Maria is a Sister of the Order of Saint Benedict and  
7           she resides in Ferdinand, Indiana.

8                     Sister Maria, we know that Centering  
9           Prayer is a contemplative practice.

10          A:       Yes.

11          Q:       And Lectio divina, you are going to  
12          tell us a little bit about, because it is also a  
13          contemplative practice and it is certainly  
14          complementary to the practice of centering prayer,  
15          so could you tell us a little about what is  
16          Lectio divina?

17          A:       Yes, Lectio divina is a very ancient  
18          prayer practice that goes all the way back to Judeo  
19          Christian times and it actually means sacred reading  
20          and very strictly speaking we are talking about the  
21          reading of the scriptures.

22                     And so but it is a different kind of  
23          reading. Most of us are schooled in the practice of

24 reading for information. And trying to grab the  
25 essence of, or pull out the essence, or meaning of  
2 what we are reading.

3           Lectio divina is reading for formation  
4 and when we speak about formation we are talking  
5 about reading in a manner that changes us, that  
6 transforms us, that brings us into who God has  
7 created us to be. And so Lectio divina is a way of  
8 reading the scriptures that really prepares us or  
9 disposes us to deepen our relationship with God, and  
10 it happens very naturally. It is much like a human  
11 relationship. And so the moments of Lectio divina  
12 reflect the different moments in a relationship.

13           And it is more like a four step dance.  
14 We read, we reflect, we respond, and we rest with  
15 the scriptures. Maybe just a word or a verse, but  
16 we just ruminate with it, ponder it, respond to it  
17 and then simply rest with it.

18           So, it is a very simple way of praying,  
19 and what we find is that as people engage in  
20 Centering Prayer which is a prayer of consent to  
21 God's presence and action in our life we begin to  
22 ask the Q:uestion, well, who is this God I am  
23 consenting to?

24                   And so the natural place we are drawn  
25           is to go to the scriptures, the inspired word of  
2           God, that reveals to us through Jesus Christ who God  
3           is as much as we can understand. And so we are  
4           drawn into the mystery of that relationship through  
5           the practice of Lectio divina.

6           Q:           You mention that one of the stages is  
7           the stage of rest?

8           A:           Yes.

9           Q:           Could you say a little bit more about  
10          what you mean by that?

11          A:           Well, just as in a human relationship  
12          there are moments when for example, two people are  
13          walking in the woods and really there is no need for  
14          any words, or just maybe kicking the autumn leaves,  
15          or just spending time with each other in each  
16          other's presence and there is no need for any words,  
17          that is comparable to the rest of Lectio divina.  
18          Simply resting with the word we have been -- we have  
19          been ruminating on, and absorbing and responding to,  
20          and then as we find ourselves maybe drawn back to  
21          the scriptures again, and maybe rereading the verse  
22          and asking some more Q:uestions and really entering  
23          into that dialogue as a response or just ruminating  
24          with what the meaning is, the conversation continues

25 to unfold. And so the rest is not sustained in  
2 Lectio divina as it is in Centering Prayer. It is a  
3 moment of the relationship, but we move with the  
4 relationship, because again it is like a four step  
5 dance. It's to read, to reflect, to respond and to  
6 rest and then maybe be called back into more  
7 reflection, rereading the passage again and maybe a  
8 new response opens up within us and we find  
9 ourselves expressing a prayer or a poem or some way  
10 that we find ourselves in response to what we have  
11 heard.

12 Q: Very good. I neglected to mention  
13 Maria, that you have been involved with  
14 Contemplative Outreach for many years?

15 A: Yes.

16 Q: In many capacities, but certainly in  
17 the area of teaching and passing on the practice of  
18 Lectio divina?

19 A: Yes.

20 Q: You have been a central figure so to  
21 speak in those activities?

22 A: Yes. Well, Lectio divina is really a  
23 monastic practice, monastic in the sense, not just  
24 for monastics, but monastic in the sense that this

25 was the way that the desert mothers and fathers  
2 prayed.

3 Q: Back in the third and fourth century?

4 A: Yes. Yes. And so it has always been  
5 our form of prayer as followers of Saint Benedict,  
6 but it is -- it is a form of prayer that is very  
7 natural, very organic, very I think attractive to  
8 everyone, because it is all about relationships and  
9 nourishing our relationship with God and allowing  
10 God to take us to a deeper place in that  
11 relationship.

12 Q: Interesting. As you have traveled  
13 around the U.S. and in fact around the world sharing  
14 the practice with others do you find that people who  
15 are not in orders, religious orders and even perhaps  
16 people who are not of the Catholic Church--

17 A: Un-hun--

18 Q: -- have an interest, or are attracted  
19 to Lectio divina?

20 A: Absolutely, because it's -- it's a  
21 relationship prayer, it's relational and all of us,  
22 the way God created us, we were meant to be in  
23 relationship. That is part of the way we discover  
24 who we are by being in relationship with others and

25 coming to the fullness of who God created us to be  
2 and so to pray in a way that is relational it is  
3 second nature to us. It's not something born that  
4 we place upon ourselves, it's rather the way God  
5 made us, so that it is really God inviting us into  
6 relationship, inviting us to come deeper and come to  
7 that place of oneness that we were meant to be.

8 Q: The word natural comes to mind as you  
9 are speaking?

10 A: Yes.

11 Q: And the word simple?

12 A: Yes.

13 Q: It sounds like a very simple practice?

14 A: Yes, it is very simple. And in fact I  
15 really believe that many people pray this way, they  
16 may not call it Lectio divina, but it is their way  
17 of praying.

18 Q: Yes.

19 A: And as I have gone around and given a  
20 workshop many times at the beginning I will ask  
21 people what their image of God was as a young child  
22 and certainly some people have images like God is a  
23 parent, or God is a judge or something, but many  
24 people speak about God is a good friend. Someone

25       that's been with me since my childhood. I used to  
2       go out into the woods and talk to God.

3               Q:       Yes.

4               A:       So, it is a very natural way.

5               Q:       My "bud"? (short for buddy)

6               A:       Yes.

7               Q:       As they say?

8               A:       Yes, yes, exactly.

9               Q:       My "bud".

10              A:       And so it is really when people are  
11       introduced to Lectio divina they say, oh, yes, I can  
12       identify with that. That makes sense to me. That  
13       speaks to my own experience, if not in relationship  
14       to God at least in relationship to other people.

15              Q:       Right.

16              A:       And it is very easy then to begin to  
17       shift into that awareness that God is calling us  
18       into relationship. He wants us to nourish that  
19       relationship within us and between us.

20              Q:       Good.

21              A:       Yes.

22              Q:       Well, I want to thank you Maria, for  
23       talking with me today about Lectio divina. I am  
24       going to hopefully not put you on the spot here at

25 the end, I know there are many good books that exist  
2 on Lectio divina.

3 A: Yes.

4 Q: Is there one that you might, among the  
5 many good books, one that you might recommend to  
6 people, kind of as a starter or a primer?

7 A: Yes, an excellent book is Thelma Hall's  
8 book "Too Deep for Words."

9 Q: "Too Deep for Words," by Thelma Hall?

10 A: By Thelma Hall. It is just a little  
11 good, good basic primer and it gives the basics. It  
12 is very good and at the end of the book she has  
13 about 550 scripture passages put into thematic  
14 order. So if you are having a hard day she has a  
15 whole list of scripture passages that you can go to.  
16 If you are struggling with some particular problem  
17 or difficulty she has some other passages that may  
18 speak to you. So, it is wonderful place to begin.

19 Q: Very good. Thelma Hall's "Too Deep for  
20 Words."

21 A: Yes.

22 Q: Again Sr. Maria I want to thank you for  
23 sitting down and chatting.

24 A: Yes.



25

Q: And God bless you.

2

A: Thank you.