

Call upon the Holy Spirit

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Take the Bible in your hands and hold it in front of you with the same reverence you would give to the Body of Christ. Make an epiclesis, an invocation of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit directs the Word's activity. The Spirit caused the Word to speak and write through the prophets and those who composed the wisdom literature, through Jesus, the apostles, and the evangelists. The Spirit gave the Word to the Church so that eventually it could find its way, whole and entire, to you.

The Word spoken by the power of the Holy Spirit is comprehensible only by the Spirit's guidance (*Dei Verbum* 12). Arrange everything in your life to open the way for the Spirit to come to you - *Veni Creator Spiritus: Come, Holy Spirit!* - in its full force, its dynamis, and to remove the veil from your eyes so that you may see the Lord (Ps 119:18; 2 Cor 3:12-16). The Spirit gives life! Only the letter kills! This is the same Spirit that came to Mary, overshadowing her with power and generating in her the Logos, the Word made flesh (Lk 1:34). This is the Spirit that came upon the apostles, bringing them to the fullness of truth (Jn 16:13). This Spirit will do the same for you: *it will generate the Word in you and lead you to the fullness of truth. What we sometimes call 'spiritual reading' - lectio divina - means reading in the Holy Spirit and with the Holy Spirit those things that were dictated by the Holy Spirit.*

Wait for the Spirit's coming, even though it seems to tarry (Hab 2:3). Find secure hope in Jesus' words: 'If you, who are bad, know how to give your children good things, how much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him' (Lk 11:13).

You will hear his powerful Word within you: *'Ephphatha: Be opened!'* (Mk 7:34). Then you will feel no longer alone, but in good company as you stand before the biblical text, like the Ethiopian who was reading Isaiah but did not understand it until Philip arrived and by the text brought into his silent heart the voice of the Holy Spirit he had received on Pentecost (Acts 8:26-38), or like the disciples themselves, who needed the Risen Lord to open their minds to the understanding of the Scriptures (Lk 24:45).

Without an epiclesis, lectio divina remains just a human effort, an intellectual activity. We could say that in it we 'learn knowledge' but not 'divine Wisdom'. Reading on one's own like this, without discerning the Body of Christ in the Scriptures, is reading condemnation to ourselves (cf. 1 Cor 11:29).

So pray however you can, in whatever way the Lord enables you; or use these words for your prayer.

Our God, Father of light, you sent your Word, the Wisdom which comes from your mouth, into the world, that she might have dominion over all the peoples of the earth (Si 24:6-8). You willed that she make her dwelling place in Israel and that she make known your will through Moses, the prophets, and the psalmists (Lk 24:44), and speak to your people about the Messiah - Jesus - who was to come. Finally, you willed that he who is your only Son, that same Word and Wisdom eternally with you, become flesh and, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary (Lk 1:35), pitch his tent among us (Jn 1:1-14).

Send upon me the Holy Spirit, that I may have a heart capable of listening (I K 3:5). May your Spirit stand before me in these holy Scriptures and generate the Word in me. May your Spirit take away the veil from my eyes (2 Cor 3:12-16), lead me to the fullness of truth (Jn 16:13) and give me understanding and faithfulness.

I ask all this through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who is blessed forever and ever. Amen!

Above all, you can use Psalm 119 as an aid in this preparatory prayer, for it speaks about listening to the Word. This psalm has special meaning for *lectio divina*. It speaks between the dialogue of the Lover and the Beloved, the believer and the Lord!

From: ENZO BIANCHI, *Praying the Word, An Introduction to «Lectio Divina»* Cistercian Publication, Kalamazoo 1998, pp. 91-93.