

“Guigo II and the Development of Lectio Divina”

(by Joe Colletti, PhD, July, 2011)

Guigo II was a Carthusian monk who died several centuries ago in 1193. His two most renowned writings are the *Ladder of Monks* and the *Twelve Meditations*. The *Ladder of Monks*, which is subtitled "a letter on the contemplative life," is considered one of the first, if not the first, description of the four steps that make up the mystical tradition of Lectio Divina as we know it today. His ladder consists of four rungs termed in Latin as *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*.

According to Guigo, "Reading seeks, meditation finds, prayer asks, contemplation feels." He further notes that

"Reading puts as it were whole food into your mouth; meditation chews it and breaks it down; prayer finds its savour; contemplation is the sweetness that so delights and strengthens. Reading is like the bark, the shell; meditation like the pith, the nut; prayer is in the desiring asking; and contemplation is in the delight of the great sweetness. Reading is the first ground that that precedes and leads one into meditation; meditation seeks busily, and also with deep thought digs and delves deeply to find that treasure; and because it cannot be attained by itself alone, then he sends us into prayer that is mighty and strong. And so prayer rises to God, and there one finds the treasure one so fervently desires, that is the sweetness and delight of contemplation. And then contemplation comes and yields the harvest of the labour of the other three through a sweet heavenly dew, that the soul drinks in delight and joy."

An on-line version of the *Ladder of Monks* can be found at <http://www.umilta.net/ladder.html>.

The *Twelve Meditations* focuses on the interior life and psychological hindrances to solitude. Guigo holds up Christ as the exemplar of how one can lead a solidarity life in the midst of an active world. I do not know of a web site that displays the *Twelve Meditations*. However, both the *Twelve*

Meditations and the *Ladder of Monks* have been translated in a book that is available today entitled "Guigo II: Ladder of Monks and Twelve Mediations."

What follows is a meditation or a brief passage that I chose from each of Guigo's *Twelve Meditations*. I encourage you to read them and practice the steps of Lectio Divina.

"Twelve Brief Meditations from the *Twelve Meditations* of Guigo II"

From the First Meditation:

The Scripture says: the words of the wise are as a prod to those who listen to them in silence. Let all my world be silent in your presence, Lord, so that I may hear what the Lord God may say in my heart. Your words are so softly spoken that no one can hear them except in a deep silence. But to hear them lifts one who sits alone and in silence completely above one's natural powers, because the one who humbles oneself will be lifted up.

From the Second Meditation:

Speak, Lord, to the heart of your servant, so that my heart may speak to you: speak to this orphan, abandoned by all but you. For you are the Lord of hosts, who judge justly and see down into the depths of everyone's heart.

From the Third Meditation:

Lord, you are rich, and your storehouse never fails. Feed today this poor servant with the crumbs that fall from the table of your children. I am your beggar, crying at your door that I have had nothing to eat today. Lord, I am so feeble that I cannot open my mouth to speak.

From the Fourth Meditation:

You know, Lord, how troubled and unstable my heart is, like dust and the sands of the sea; so that whatever I strive to build up I seem rather to heap in ruins about my head. When your Spirit comes to us you will lay as our base and foundation a reverence which is the beginning of wisdom.

From the Fifth Meditation:

This is the state of my soul, my God, this is the state of my soul: It is a land waste and void, it is invisible and formless, and there is darkness upon the face of the abyss. Yet even this abyss lends me its voice. This abyss, deep and dark, calls to an abyss which is far above it. The abyss of my mind cries out to you, Lord, who are beyond all that sense can perceive, asking you to create out of me a new heaven and a new earth.

Most wonderful Creator, if still you perform this work which you performed in ancient days, why do you not then work it in my soul, which is waste and void, darkness upon the face of the abyss. Say, "let there be light, and there will be light."

From the Sixth Meditation:

Return, my soul, return to your source. Sigh for God, the living fount, constantly recalling the words, "When shall I come and appear before the face of my God? Let your inward tears be your bread by day and by night and lest you be swallowed up by a more surpassing grief, take comfort sometimes and say: Why are you sad, my soul, and why do you afflict me? Hope in God, for I will confess Him my comforter and my God.

From the Seventh Meditation:

Lord God, hasten to me today, I beg you, and be merciful to me. I shall say give me drink and who will answer drink and I will shall give you water. Give drink to me, I beg, and make room tonight in your house for me.

From the Eight Meditation:

Feed us, Lord, as you promised to your heirs . . . a spiritual blessing of the dew of heaven and of the richness of the earth, with the abundance of your wheat and wine and oil. The wheat is your flesh, the wine your blood, and oil the Holy Spirit.

From the Ninth Meditation:

Hasten, O inferior one, hasten to where you will find life. I ask you my soul, why are you weakening away? . . . is there no one to give you counsel?

From the Tenth Meditation:

Therefore let God's law be always on your lips by constant meditation, so that you may always bring forth good understanding. It is by the understanding that this spiritual food is tuned into love in the heart, so that what you understand you do not ignore but cherish in love.

From the Eleventh Meditation:

No one can rest unless his heart keep watch. In true peace shall I sleep and take my rest, the Psalmist says. Christ said to his disciples: Sleep now and rest. Sleep from worldly affairs, rest in the inner places of your heart.

From the Twelfth Meditation:

Never let God's law be silent in your heart; turn it round and about, look at it this way and that, and then you will understand how sweet the manna can taste. The psalmist did this and he said: Lord, how sweet are your words in my mouth.