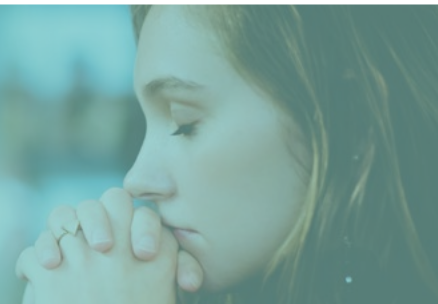


Praying with Images



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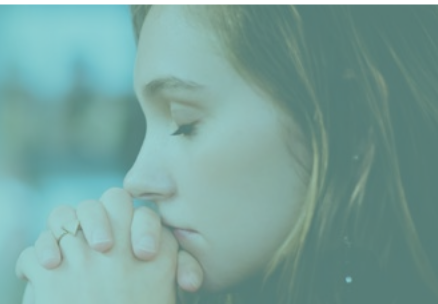
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Praying with Images



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?

An Old Woman in Prayer

Let's begin our practice of Visio Divina with an image of a woman praying in her home. It is a painting by the Dutch artist Nicolaes Maes, from the 17th Century, and a pupil of Rembrandt. When you are ready, and after reading through the steps again to remind you of the Visio Divina process, move your cursor down and bring up a full screen image of the next page.

As we pray each in our own homes, the subject of this painting connects with our current situation, available to us centuries later.

- ▶ Focus on the face and on the hands. I wonder what these say about the woman's interior life?
- ▶ Focus on the table and the shelves. I wonder why the artist chose to include these particular items?
- ▶ Another title for this painting is "*Prayer without ceasing.*" How does that effect the way that you read the image?
- ▶ Focus on the cat. What is about to happen? How does this potential catastrophe resonate with you?

About the Artist

Nicolaes Maes (1634 -1693) was one of Rembrandt's most gifted pupils. He was about fifteen when he moved from Dordrecht to Amsterdam to take up his apprenticeship with the great master. Until around 1660, Maes tended to paint genre scenes in the same style as Rembrandt, with plenty of chiaroscuro (light and dark) and warm colours. Later, Maes switched to portraiture. Maes's portraits were adapted to the fashion of the day: smoother and more detailed, with more colour, and generally lighter than Rembrandt's. This proved a successful approach and Maes was soon much in demand, a prolific painter of Baroque state portraits.



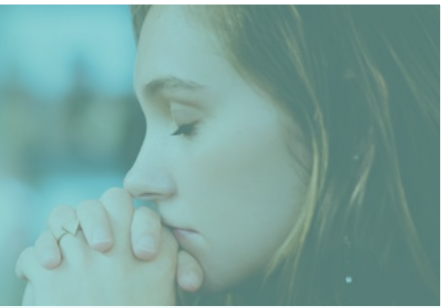
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Image credit: *Old Woman in Prayer*, Nicolaes Maes, c. 1656

Praying with Images



Praying with icons

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.

Christ Pantocrator

The Pantocrator icon is one of the very earliest in Christian iconography. Pantocrator is usually translated as "all-mighty" or "all-powerful" and 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 the ancient prayer, St. Patrick's Breastplate, printed here. If any one line resonates for you, sit with it a little longer.

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.

You are invited to conclude praying with the icon by speaking aloud, (or sing, if you know the tune) these lyrics:

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.

Image annotations

Christ Pantocrator (p. 6)

by Peter Blackwood, coordinator of the Uniting Church Icon Schools, modelled on 6th century icon of St Catherine's Monastery, Mt Sinai, 2010



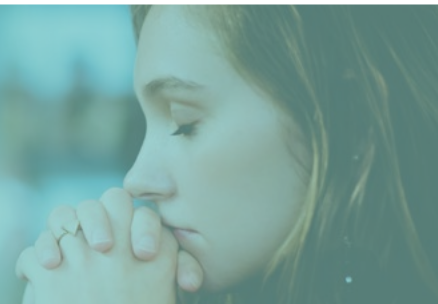
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Image credit: Peter Blackwood, *Christ Pantocrator*, c. 2010

Praying with Images



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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