

## Praying with Art – Visio Divina

Read the interview with artist John August Swanson [here](#).



*The Procession*, by John August Swanson

While *Lectio Divina* is a method of praying with scripture, *Visio Divina* (Latin for "divine seeing") is a method for praying with images or other media. While the Orthodox tradition has long practiced praying with images through icons, the western church, and Protestantism in particular, is less comfortable with this type of prayer. But as a cursory glance through scripture will show, images have been an important part of

God's way of communicating. Ezekiel's vision of dry bones, and Peter's dream on the rooftop in [Acts 10](#); are just two instances of how images and prayer are vitally connected.

With our culture becoming more and more visually oriented, an intentional way of praying with images is needed now more than ever. Visio Divina invites us to see at a more contemplative pace. It invites us to see all there is to see, exploring the entirety of the image. It invites us to see deeply, beyond first and second impressions, below initial ideas, judgments, or understandings. It invites us to be seen, addressed, surprised, and transformed by God who is never limited or tied to any image, but speaks through them.

There is no set time frame for the guided prayer below, but twenty to thirty minutes is suggested. As your prayer begins, take a few moments to open your heart and mind to God. When you are ready, slowly look and notice the image, taking your time to let feelings and thoughts come to you as you take in forms, figures, colors, lines, textures, and shapes. What does it look like, or remind you of? What do you find yourself drawn to? What do you like and not like? What are your initial thoughts? What feelings are evoked?

In this initial stage of your prayer simply notice these responses without judgment or evaluation. If you don't like the image, or the feelings evoked, simply acknowledge that this is your initial response and continue to stay open to the image and the prayer. If you have an immediate idea as to what the image means, again, simply acknowledge that this is your initial response and stay open to "the more" as the prayer unfolds.

As your prayer expands, return to the image with an open heart and mind. New thoughts, meanings, and feelings may arise; initial impressions may expand and deepen. Explore more fully the meanings that come to you, and the feelings associated with the image and its colors and forms. Be aware of any assumptions or expectations that you bring to the image. No matter what your response is to the image -- delight, disgust, indifference, confusion -- ponder prayerfully the reason for your various responses and what these responses might mean for you.

As your prayer deepens, open yourself to what the image might reveal to you. What does it and the Spirit want to say, evoke, make known, or express to you as you attend to it in quiet meditation? Become aware of the feelings, thoughts, desires, and meanings evoked by the image and how they are directly connected to your life.

Does it evoke for you important meanings or values, remind you of an important event or season, or suggest a new or different way of being? What desires and longings are evoked in your prayer? How do you find yourself wanting to respond to what you are experiencing? Take the time to respond to God in ways commensurate with your prayer: gratitude, supplication, wonder, lament, confession, dance, song, praise, etc.

In the remaining few minutes of your prayer with this image, bring to mind or jot down in a journal (whatever way is most helpful for you) the insights you want to remember, actions you are invited to take, wisdom you hope to embody, or any feelings or thoughts you wish to express. Bring your prayer to a close by resting in God's grace and love.