

Prayer Experience - Ignatian Contemplation: Imaginative Prayer

Introduction

Prayer using the imagination is a pillar of the Ignatian spiritual tradition. In its most common form, you take a passage from scripture, usually one of the gospels, and immerse yourself in it imaginatively using all the senses. You feel the heat of the day, smell the livestock and clouds of dust on the road, listen to Jesus' words, watch his actions. It's a way to engage the gospel personally, with all of our faculties.

Ignatian Contemplation, Jim Manne

The Practice

Let us begin by getting settled in a comfortable chair and in a quiet place where we won't be distracted. Our first gesture might be to open our hands on our lap, and to ask God to open our hearts and imaginations.

Then pick a story from scripture. Read through it once slowly and put it down.

Here are some suggestions:

[Luke 24: 13-35](#)

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

[Revelation 2: 7](#)

Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

[Mark 1:15](#)

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.

[Matthew 25: 40](#)

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

You may have another passage of scripture you would like to use.

Prayer Experience - Ignatian Contemplation: Imaginative Prayer

Now we begin to imagine the scripture scene as if we are standing right there.

What is around me? Who else is there? What do I hear in the scene? If I am in a house, what noises are in the house or in the street outside? What are the smells I can pick up? Who is in the scene? What conversation takes place? What is the mood – tense? joyful? confused? angry?

Feel free to paint this picture in any way your imagination takes you. If we worry about historical accuracy, it can be a distraction that takes us away from prayer. This isn't scripture – this is letting God take our imaginations and reveal to us something of the intimate life of Jesus or others.

If, in our prayer, Mary pulls the toddler Jesus onto her lap to tie his shoes or zip his coat, we can let it happen that way. We don't want to fret about the historically accurate kinds of food served at a dinner or what kind of carpenter tools Joseph might have really had in his workshop. Here is an experience of prayer that lets our imaginations free themselves from anything that limits them. This is God revealing himself to us.

It helps if we imagine Jesus and his disciples as the real people, they were who walked the earth. St. Ignatius imagined that the first-person Jesus appeared to after the Resurrection was his mother and he encourages us to picture Jesus appearing at home to Mary, watching the joy and emotion in the scene.

