

Ignatian Contemplation

Praying with our imagination

Each week in our Wednesday e-news, we will post the scripture passage we'll be reflecting on in our Sunday morning service. You might choose that passage to pray with or any other story in scripture.

How do we start? First, we get 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.

Read the selected scripture passage through slowly, once or twice. Now we begin to imagine the 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 can I smell? What is the temperature of the air?

Who is there? You can imagine yourself, as yourself, in the scene, or as one of the people described in the story. What conversation takes place? What are you feeling? What is the mood – tense? joyful? confused? angry?

We become onlooker-participants and give full rein to our imagination. Jesus is speaking to a blind man at the side of the road. We feel the hot Mediterranean sun beating down. We smell the dust kicked up by the passersby. We feel the itchy clothing we're wearing, the sweat rolling down our brow, a rumble of hunger. We see the desperation in the blind man's face and hear the wail of hope in his words. We note the irritation of the disciples. Above all we watch Jesus—the way he walks, his gestures, the look in his eyes, the expression on his face. We hear him speak the words that are recorded in the Gospel. We go on to imagine other words he might have spoken and other deeds he might have done.

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 being revealed to us through our imagination.