

GUIDELINES FOR IMAGINATIVE CONTEMPLATION

Consider the lilies of the field...

Matthew 6:28



When Ignatius was recovering from his battle wound he read the following:

“ Read of what has been done (in the Gospels) as though it were happening now... Offer yourself as present to what was said and done through our Lord Jesus Christ with the whole affective power of your mind... hear and see these things being narrated as though you were hearing with your own ears and seeing with your own eyes.”

Ludolph of Saxony, *The Life of Christ*.

As he put it into practice, he knew the transforming power of Christ in his life.

“We want to move from an understanding of the incident with our mind to one that touches our heart. We want to know what the mystery is saying to us. We want to become involved in it, not necessarily to discover anything new but, through the power of the imagination, to activate a knowledge and trust deep within us. The word ‘imagination’ may deter people who think of themselves as ‘unimaginative’. This should not be so. It is not so much the work that we do to build in our imagination the gospel scene, as to let the scene take hold of us. It does not really matter whether we see the people in the scene vividly or whether we have an accurate (historical) picture; the people may remain blurred the scene might even be contemporary. What matters is that the scene holds us and we become gently and quietly enfolded in its atmosphere.”

Christopher Bryant, ‘The River Within’ adapted The Acorn Christian Healing Trust

1. **Select a single story before the prayer time itself.** Don't confuse yourself by rifling through the Bible in the prayer time, hoping to hit on one that will do.
2. **Spend some moments settling down.** Use whatever ways you have learnt to centre yourself, such as the breathing exercise, the listening exercise or the body exercise. Adopt the posture you find comfortable, and choose whatever exercise works best for you.
3. **Ask God to touch you through the passage of scripture you have chosen.** Tell God that you desire to be open to the word, the healing, the probing, the consolation, whatever God knows you need at this time.
4. **Pick up the Bible and read the passage slowly and carefully several times.** Pause between each reading for half a minute or so to allow yourself to notice details. Let questions and insights occur as you notice more with each reading.
5. **Place the Bible aside.** Now give your power of imagination free rein to bring the scene to life with yourself as a participant. Take time to see the place, the buildings the countryside and so on. What kind of day is it? Feel free to smell the scents of the seashore or the marketplace, feel the breeze or the sun on your skin. Hear the noises; sense the movements.

It can help attentiveness to ask of any scene, who is present, what are they doing, what are they saying?

Allow yourself to become whoever you want in the scene. Are you one of the disciples or a bystander able to see everything happen right there on the spot? Perhaps you are you the person being addressed by Jesus, if so, how are you feeling at the beginning of the story?

6. **Let the drama slowly unfold.** Let whatever happens, happen. Don't control the story. Let yourself feel what happens. Don't try to learn lessons from the story. Don't start thinking about applications to your life. Allow yourself to be affected by the words and actions of the story.

7. **As your feelings are affected by the event let yourself respond.** Often you need to respond by articulating these feelings to Jesus. Tell him how you have been touched. Ask him what the feelings mean. What kind of gift are they? What are you thankful for? What do you want to ask for? Who is God for you just now? How is God inviting you? At other times the best response is to stay with the impression the story has had on you, savouring it and soaking yourself in it, aware of the presence of the Lord.

8. When the awareness dies down of itself, or you feel you have replied and responded to God's way of touching you in this particular prayer, **bring the meditation to a simple conclusion** by saying a prayer such as the Lord's Prayer or by singing the verse of a hymn or song. It is better to round off the prayer time positively so you can resume your activity rather than just let prayer peter out into distraction and restlessness.

Much of this is taken from: Martin Smith, *The Word is Very Near You*

Some Suggested Passages:

Luke 5: 1-11	The call of the first disciples
Matthew 8: 23- 27	Jesus calms the storm
Mark 5: 24-34	Jesus heals the woman with haemorrhage
Mark 10: 46-52	The healing of Blind Bartimaeus
John 5: 1-9	The healing at the Pool of Bethesda
Mark 15: 21ff	The crucifixion
John 20: 1-18	Jesus appears to Mary

The websites www.pray-as-you-go.org and www.sacredspace.ie are both very useful and full of resources including some guided imaginative contemplations, Examen and daily lectio divina.

A Simple Review after a Time of Prayer

Ignatius always taught the value of looking back over a time of prayer, in order to “reflect and draw profit”. It often helps to mark the transition from prayer itself to the review – stand up, move about a bit, make yourself a hot drink, have a few minutes break and then look back over the prayer you have just done.

Begin by asking God to bring to your mind and heart what it would be useful for you to notice in this review.

Recall how you entered into prayer – stilling, scripture, something else?

Were you hoping for anything in particular in this time of prayer? If so, what was it?

Can you remember anything of your thoughts and feelings?

How did the prayer go? Was it easy or hard to stay with it? Were you fully involved, or more like a spectator, bored, or engaged?

Where did you experience life, or light, or energy, where did God seem close?

Was there anything you reacted against, which seemed to turn you away from God, or drain that same life, or light, or energy?

Did the prayer lead to any kind of conversation with God, what did you say? How did God respond?

Lastly do you have any sense of ‘unfinished business’ in this time of prayer? Is there anything that you might want to come back to on another occasion?