

HANDOUTS: Week Four

Imaginative Contemplation



Ignatian Contemplation is prayer with Scripture and is especially suited for the Gospels. It is meeting God through story. The prayer develops as you “live into” a Scripture story with all your senses and imagination. You become a participant in the story, and you continue in the story in your heart, mind, imagination, spirit and body after the reading ends. Imaginative prayer makes the Jesus of the Gospels *our* Jesus. We don't *think* about Jesus. We *experience* him. Jesus fills our senses. Imaginative contemplation is about trying to encounter Jesus in a personal and unique way.

You let the Spirit guide the prayer - you don't force anything to happen - you let it happen to you, within you, around you. God meets and interacts with each individual personally and differently. That interaction of our spirit with God is prayer. The difficult part of the process is relaxing into it and letting God be in control, rather than trying to force your response or reaction.

Put yourself in the midst of the Gospel scene. Imagine yourself as one of the disciples or as one of the Pharisees, one of the onlookers or as the one to whom Jesus is ministering. Allow your reactions and sentiments to bubble to the surface. You may feel joy or great trust, pity or annoyance, have questions or be overcome by wonder. Pay attention to how your heart is being moved and what feelings are evoked within you. Ask yourself what God is saying to you in the emotions that arise inside you.

Suggestions for contemplative prayer:

- Find a spot where you can relax comfortably without interruption.
- Sit comfortably with your eyes closed, relax, and quiet yourself.
- Take a few deep breaths and relax your body.
- Put yourself into the Lord's holy presence and open yourself to His divine action within you.
- Read through the passage slowly and let it unfold within you, in your imagination, mind and heart.
- Place yourself in the Gospel scene and observe Jesus' actions and words closely; feel yourself in the place and in the story.
- Observe your thoughts as they arise and pay attention to how you are feeling.
- Ask yourself: What happened for me in the story? What did Jesus say to me? What does this mean to me? What emotions do you feel? What did God say to me?
- Journal about your experience and feelings.