

Imaginative Prayer

Explanation

Also known as 'Ignatian Contemplation' or 'Composition of Place', imaginative prayer was made well known by St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) in the 16th century AD, though its practice in Christian prayer stems back centuries.

As a spiritual practice, Imaginative Prayer is entering into the narrative of Scripture through engaging the imagination while reading and contemplating a passage of Scripture. In the same way that we believe the Holy Spirit can use our reason and mind for God's purposes in our spiritual formation, so God can use our imagination.

As some are prone to misunderstand, using our imagination in reading Scripture is not an act of creating a new biblical narrative where we change the story to our own whims, but is allowing the Holy Spirit to place us amidst it. In this way we enter the Biblical story not as passive observers but as active participants. In the words of St. Ignatius, we "apply all our senses to our task"; smell the air, feel the sun, hear the crowd, see the faces, taste your sweat. Explore the scene fully. Enter into the action.

Movements of Imaginative Prayer

1. Posture:

- Still yourself. Pay attention to your breathing. Allow any tension in your mind or body to melt away. Posture yourself in a way that opens to God with the wholeness of your being: mind, heart, body, spirit. Invite God to be present with you through the Holy Spirit, asking for God's help.

2. Imagine/'Composing the Place':

- Read the passage. It can be helpful to read it once to familiarize yourself with the story before the next step.
- Read the passage again, this time slowly. Imagine yourself in the story, 'composing the place' by imagining what your senses are experiencing. Take time with each sense.
 - What do you see?
 - What do you hear?
 - What do you smell?
 - What do you feel (physically)?
 - What do you taste?

3. Pay Attention:

- Pay attention to what is happening around you as a "passive observer" with judging as little as possible. Allow yourself to be drawn in.
 - Who are you in the story? Where are you in the story?
 - What is going on around you?
 - Who is there? What are they doing?
 - What or who am I most drawn to

4. Inner Reflection:

- Pay attention to what happened within yourself
 - How did I feel?
 - What thoughts went through my mind?
 - Was there something unexpected that was a surprise to me?
 - Did something give me joy or excitement? Or oppositely, desolation—sorrow, despair, dread?
- Take note of any insights, emotions, desires, memories or feelings you may have had.

5. Seek God's Insight

- Ask God to speak to you about what you noticed: God, is there something you want to say to me? Is there something you want me to take away from this? Are you calling me to something new? Is this for me, for the church, or for someone else?
- Leave space for God to speak and lead
- End your time thanking God for meeting with you (even if you didn't hear or sense anything, God was with you!), inviting God to move with you as you go on with your day.