

St Mary's, Inverness

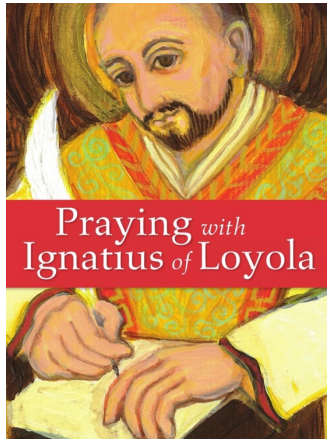
The RC Diocese of Aberdeen: SC005122J

The Year of St Ignatius

20 MAY 2021 >31 JULY 2022

FORTY-FIFTH IGNATIAN REFLECTION

IMAGINATION AND CONTEMPLATION



'Contemplation' : we could say that contemplation, in the Ignatian tradition, is Gospel centred 'mental prayer'. We use our minds creatively by actively engaging the **'imaginative sense'**. We become aware of a new immediacy when Jesus is made present. His life, teaching and achievements are refreshingly alive when we use our senses in our contemplation of a scene from the Gospel.

This way of prayer is introduced in the *Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*. The whole thrust of this is that we should 'journey with Jesus', we are walking with Him in the circumstances of the Gospel stories. *The Exercises* were designed for the use of a Retreat Giver, guiding a person on retreat over a period of weeks. We can draw


some practical advice for a pattern of prayer for as long as it is useful. In praying, we do what we are able to do, but perhaps being open to experiment or the adventure of walking with Jesus.



Particularly St Ignatius, guides us in regard to **The Nativity**- the whole circumstances of that Journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem : Joseph, the pregnant Mary, the demands of the Census, and the journey with an ass. We engage all our senses, imagining the sights of the journey by day and night over different countryside, the smells and the sounds, and we are there with them as an observer taking it all in. The efforts of Mary, Joseph, innkeeper, the humble birth, all the Nativity narrative details we bring to mind, and recreate them as far as we can in a multi-dimensional way. Then we when we reflect on all of this with open minds and hearts we become 'participants', not simply reading a text but the actualities of the story touch us and in a way embrace us. The contemplation of the Gospel stories reminds us that they all lead to the Passion and the New Life of Easter. Seeing ourselves in that great Journey, in which we are embedded through our Baptism, we invite the Holy Spirit to make us alert to the movements in our hearts and minds, the Living Lord Jesus is near to us. So it is by using all our senses and reflecting on our

feelings that we can begin to know Jesus more clearly, and sensing perhaps what He may be asking of us. It could be that we may not find this as easy as it might seem, but if we let ourselves be grasped by the Gospel stories then we may live with them and await, with patience, for the nudges of God, hints of grace, the still small voice that echoes in the silent moment. We open up our 'colloquy' : our conversation is an engagement with God-in-Christ as He becomes known to us in the circumstances of our reflective minds, illuminated by our imaginative insights.

Ignatius Loyola



We must speak to God as a friend speaks to his friend, servant to his master; now asking some favor, now acknowledging our faults, and communicating to Him all that concerns us, our thoughts, our fears, our projects, our desires, and in all things seeking His counsel.

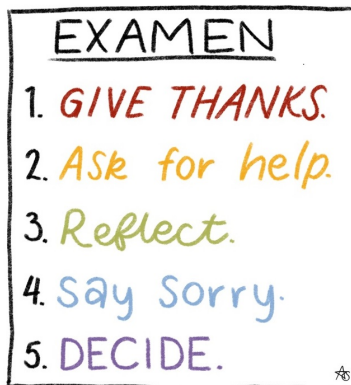
In the First Book of Kings [1 Kings 19: 11-14] the prophet Elijah is looking for a word from God, when from his cave retreat he hears the great wind, the sounds of an earthquake and a rushing fire, but it is only after these that there is a gentle movement, a breath of God, the hint of an echo. If we would seek the response of God in our prayers then we seek

to avoid the clamour, the thrusting noises and the immense activity that surrounds us in life.



To enable us to hear the whispers of God we turn down our own busyness and noisiness. Then we can listen with the heart as well as the mind.

Clearing the lines of Communication: St Ignatius encourages to be thankful and through our grateful hearts we open up in friendship with Jesus seeking his assistance and removing any obstacles to our conversation with Him. We undertake the EXAMEN with all its opportunities for creating a positive relationship with the Lord and all His friends.



Preparation for Scriptural Reflection :

- *We place ourselves in the presence of God – short prayer of devotion: 'My Lord, and my God'*
- *We open up to God, expressing our sorrow for sin and our gratitude for our blessings*
- *We ask God to receive our lives, our hopes, our best intentions and our prayers*
- *We begin to read the passage of Scripture slowly. It helps to say the words, even silently.*
- *We think **imaginatively** trying to see ourselves in the scene of the Scripture : what we see, what we hear, what it feels like, what we smell, what we might taste.*

Passage for Scriptural Reflection :

St Luke 2.1-20 [RSV]

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. ² This was the first enrolment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. ⁷ And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling

cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; ¹¹ for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



Points for Reflection :

- Using the imaginative method we visualise and contextualise this account of the Birth of Jesus and the Shepherds who visit the stable. Are we able to read it with creative relish, really getting into the story in all its imaginative beauty?
- What do we see and hear? Can we differentiate the 'voices'- who is speaking, to whom, and to us? Is there a 'small voice', an insistent echo giving us a word from God?
- Mary 'ponders' in her heart all that she was experiencing -we can pray with Mary as we dwell on the people and the actions.
- The movements of the shepherds from fearfulness, to wonder, to praising God – do we move out of our 'comfort zone' to find Jesus wherever He is? Have we praise in our hearts?

A Period of Silence in which we pray with St Ignatius, talking conversationally to God as Father : seeking understanding and insight, ever searching, ever finding, always willing, and Loving.

Suscipe

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.*

You have given all to me.

To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.

*Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.*



The Lord's Prayer

Jesus Mercy, Mary Pray

Laus Deo Semper : Thank God Always