

"JUST AS IF I WERE THERE"

On Gospel Contemplation

(This explanation may help you to appreciate better the method that Ignatius suggests for most of the Sp Exs. This method is called by various names such as Gospel Contemplation, Method of Contemplation, Ignatian Contemplation. It makes use of guided imagery and active imagination within the framework of a gospel passage of Jesus' life.)

It happened one morning in an 8th century Italian monastery. On waking, the monks all dressed in their cells and then filed down the corridors to a central meeting room. There they sat quietly until a monk, standing at a lectern, began to read a passage from the Gospel.... He read clearly in a leisurely manner... [and then] paused for 30 or 40 seconds. Then he reread the same passage in the same clear, leisurely manner. Again, he paused for half a minute, then read the same passage a third time.

When he paused this time, some of the monks began to return to their cells in order to pray over the passage. Others waited for the fourth reading and even the fifth before they, too, left for their cells.

What was happening? These repetitive readings saturated their imaginations with a Gospel scene of particular energy and colour. This saturation would, of course, minimize distractions, and encourage a frame of mind and heart conducive to prayer. Perhaps it would enable a monk to identify with some particular person in the Gospel episode, and even to discover the inner feelings of Christ. The mystery of the gospel event would so take hold of the person at prayer that the past would become present through the instrument of the imagination and memory. The memory of the person at prayer would be influenced by the memory of Jesus present now to the person praying.

This is how you can enter into the life of Jesus through prayer:

1. Select a short concrete/action passage

First, from one of the Gospels, select an action passage, preferably fast-moving and colourful in detail. When you first begin to use this method do not attempt to pray a parable or a sermon.

2. Relax and settle into God's presence

Ask for a particular grace that you are seeking or the particular gift you need at this time - perhaps to know Jesus more intimately, or to become more compassionate, or to be healed in a particular area of your heart etc.

3. Read aloud the passage several times pausing half a minute or so between each reading while the gospel episode takes hold of you.

Slowly read the passage once - aloud, if circumstances allow. Then for 30 seconds or so look up from the page and let the scene sink into your imagination. Do a second oral reading, noticing

details which you missed in the first reading. Again look up from the page for 30 seconds or so, until these new details fit into the total scene in your imagination. In the third reading, you will see more details for the first time, also insights, questions and interpretations will begin to occur to you. Use a half-minute to let them settle into your memory. Then read a fourth or even a fifth time until almost all the distractions have disappeared, and the Gospel scene totally saturates your imagination.

4. Now place the bible aside and let the scene happen

Do nothing to promote it except to stay alert to its developments. As you let yourself sink into the scene, you will tend to lose the sense of yourself and to identify with the situation. Suppose, for example, that you have read about Jesus quieting the storm on the lake. You may imagine the wind howling, the boat pitching, the apostles struggling at the oars. If this identification deepens, you will find yourself in the boat, e.g., at the oars, or you may find yourself to be in Peter or Philip. Sometimes you will discover yourself drifting in and out of the scene, in and out of various people of the scene.

5. Allow yourself to take part in the scene which is now present to you

Be as passive as possible while being as alert as possible. In fact, let everyone else control the event: Jesus, Peter, Mary, Martha, John. You merely interact with the persons, listen and reply to their words, take part in their activity - conversing with them, accompanying them, helping them in their occupations, in whatever ways you find yourself as part of the event that is present to you.

6. Do not moralize or try to make applications

Don't moralize (for example, "I should be more spontaneous like Peter when I am with my friends ...") or draw theological conclusions (for example "Notice how the three temptations of Jesus parallel the temptations of the Israelites ...") or try to make clever applications ("It's amazing how the Pharisees are so much like the people I am working with ...") By losing yourself in the persons, words and activity of the gospel event your whole being is affected and influenced. You won't need applications because you will notice what happens to you either in the period of reflection after your prayer or, more subtly, in the effects in your life as almost by osmosis you begin to put on the mind and heart of Jesus's Spirit.

7. After your period of prayer comes to an end make a review for a few minutes by reflecting upon what took place during the prayer.

What happened in you during this prayer exercise? What did you notice as standing out even slightly? Is there something you should return to in a later period of prayer? Give thanks to the Lord for being with you during this time.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Traditional

[*Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, 446–55]

First Station
Jesus is Condemned to Death

Second Station
Jesus Takes Up His Cross

Third Station
Jesus Falls the First Time

Fourth Station
Jesus Meets His Mother

Fifth Station
Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus

Sixth Station
Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Seventh Station
Jesus Falls a Second Time

Eighth Station
Jesus Speaks to the Women of Jerusalem

Ninth Station
Jesus Falls the Third Time

Tenth Station
Jesus Is Stripped of His Clothes

Eleventh Station
Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

Twelfth Station
Jesus Dies on the Cross

Thirteenth Station
Jesus Is Removed from the Cross

Fourteenth Station
Jesus Is Placed in the Tomb

[Fifteenth Station
The Resurrection of Jesus]

Scriptural

[*Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, 456–65]

First Station (Mt 26:36–46)
Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

Second Station (Mk 14:43–46)
Jesus, Betrayed by Judas, Is Arrested

Third Station (Lk 22:66–71)
Jesus Is Condemned by the Sanhedrin

Fourth Station (Mt 26:69–75)
Jesus Is Denied by Peter

Fifth Station (Mk 15:1–15)
Jesus Is Judged by Pilate

Sixth Station (Jn 19:1–3)
Jesus Is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns

Seventh Station (Jn 19:6,15–17)
Jesus Bears the Cross

Eighth Station (Mk 15:21)
Jesus Is Helped by Simon of Cyrene

Ninth Station (Lk 23:27–31)
Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

Tenth Station (Lk 23:33–34)
Jesus Is Crucified

Eleventh Station (Lk 23:39–43)
Jesus Promises His Kingdom to the Good Thief

Twelfth Station (Jn 19:25–27)
Jesus Speaks to His Mother and the Disciple

Thirteenth Station (Lk 23:44–46; Jn 19:28–30)
Jesus Dies on the Cross

Fourteenth Station (Mt 27:57–60)
Jesus Is Placed in the Tomb

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Different examples of this flexible prayer format:

"Stations of the Cross" – Catholic Relief Services

<http://helpinghands.crs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/US15155-RB-Stations-of-the-Cross.pdf>

"Stations of the Cross" – Terenure College, Irish Province of Carmelites

<http://www.carmelites.ie/Stations%20of%20the%20Cross%202013.pdf>

"Stations of the Cross" – Food for the Poor, Inc.

<https://www.foodforthe poor.org/prayer/stations/>

"Stations of the Cross for Global Justice and Reconciliation" – Episcopal Church

https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/stations_of_the_cross_global_justice.pdf

"Stations of the Cross" – Creighton University

<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/stations.html>

"Praying in Public for Various Occasions: Catholic Resources for Ecumenical Use"

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship – Vital Worship Grants Event – June 26, 2019

Catholic liturgical books – selected titles [to be discussed during the workshop]

The Liturgy of the Hours. Four volumes. New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975, 1986, etc. [The church's official daily prayer. Revised translation in process.]

See also: *Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours*. New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1976.

The Rites of the Catholic Church, Volume One. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990. ISBN 978-0-8146-6015-7.

The Roman Missal. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011.

The Roman Ritual. *Book of Blessings*. New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1989.

See also: Ronald R. Krisman, *Shorter Book of Blessings*. NY: Cath. Book., 1999. ISBN 978-0899425658.

The Roman Ritual. *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*. NY: Catholic Book Publ. Co., 1983.

The Roman Ritual. *The Rite of Penance*. New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 2002. ISBN 978-0899425283.

The Roman Ritual. *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Study Edition. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1988. ISBN 1-55586-214-4

See also: *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, Revised Edition. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007.

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Books/sources primarily intended for individual use; elements may be adaptable for group or public settings
[Selected from innumerable possible titles]

Agnes M. Kovacs. *A Prayer Book for Catholic Women: Traditional and Contemporary Prayers for Every Season of Life*. Frederick, MD: The Word Among Us Press, 2018. ISBN 978-1-59325-334-9; eISBN 978-1-59325-509-1.

Orientations: A Collection of Helps for Prayer. Collected, adapted, or composed by John Veltri. Guelph, ON: Loyola House, 1979, 1993, 1996. Accessible at http://orientations.jesuits.ca/veltri_orientations.html

"Sacred Space – Your daily prayer online." <https://www.sacredspace.ie/>

William G. Storey and Thomas McNally. *Day by Day: The Notre Dame Prayer Book for Students*. Revised Edition. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2004.

———. *Lord Hear Our Prayer*. Revised Edition. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2000.

Two publications provide texts for daily prayer and the Eucharist (Mass), also devotional readings:

Give Us This Day: Daily Prayer for Today's Catholic – see <https://giveusthisday.org/#book/>

Magnificat – see <https://us.magnificat.net/home>

Et cetera....