

IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

(Also known as Ignatian Contemplation or Scriptural Meditation)

Through imaginative prayer we step into a gospel story and imagine ourselves to be there in that scene. Rather than reading the Bible abstractly, we enter the story to more deeply experience and encounter Jesus in the scene. We might be a disciple in the boat with Jesus, one of the crowd at the feeding of the five thousand, or the woman at the well asked by Jesus to draw up water for him. In these and many other gospel stories, we use our God-given imagination to listen to see, hear, taste and smell the scene around us. As we do we observe what we are thinking and feeling as the events unfold around us, inviting God to speak to us through that.

An imaginative prayer invites us to become a part of the gospel story being played out in our own lives and neighborhoods. Not everyone finds this easy or natural. But God is at work no matter whether we feel or experience anything. The most important thing is our desire to know God more deeply, something which will always be treasured by God.

Imaginative prayer is not complicated, and the few simple steps involved are outlined below:

- Begin prayerfully, asking God to bless your imagination and the Holy Spirit to guide and protect you. You might like to prepare yourself with a couple of minutes quiet before starting.
- *Come, Holy Spirit, enlighten my heart and mind to listen to your Word.*
- Choose a gospel passage in which Jesus is active and present.
- Read through the passage several times until it becomes familiar. It may help to read it aloud. Pause for 30 seconds or so between each reading to let the story soak in and begin to imagine the scene.
- Use all your senses to let the gospel passage unfold in your imagination...
 - What is the location like?
 - What time of day is it?
 - Who are the people there?
 - What can you hear... smell... touch... taste...
 - What emotions are evoked throughout?
- Try to let the story unfold naturally. You may be an observer or one of the main characters talking with Jesus. That's ok. Let the Holy Spirit guide you through without striving to make anything happen.
- Try to avoid analyzing actions or finding applications (e.g. "I should be more like Peter when he..."). The blessing comes through experiencing the story with our whole being, not just our mind.

- Stay in the story as long as feels natural, and then end with a period of silence in Jesus' presence.
- End by spending a few minutes reflecting on what took place, perhaps by journaling.
- Give thanks to God for being with you during this time.