



Praying in the Way of
St. Ignatius of Loyola

THROUGH ADVENT

Praying in the Way of St. Ignatius of Loyola Through Advent

Session 1: Just As If I Were There

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 of John. He read clearly in a leisurely manner verses 13-22 of chapter 2. He 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 again 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 or 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 color. 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 a 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.

"When the time of the Jewish Passover was near Jesus went up to Jerusalem, 14. and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting there. 15. Making a whip out of cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, sheep and cattle as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over 16. and said to the dove sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop using my Father's house as a market.' 17. Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: I am eaten up with zeal for your house. 18. The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us that you should act like this?' 19. Jesus answered, 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' 20. The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple: are you going to raise it up again in three days?' 21. But he was speaking of the Temple that was his body, 22. and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and what he had said."

John 2:13-22

Gospel Contemplation in 7 Steps:

1. Select a short concrete/action passage
First, from one of the Gospels, select an action passage, preferably fast-moving and colorful in detail. When you first begin to use this method do not attempt to pray a parable or 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 the 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 these 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, 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 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.

Praying in the Way of St. Ignatius of Loyola Through Advent

Session 1: A Way to Pray With Scripture

Excerpted from Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation 11/2/20196

Practice: **Midrash**

The best way in which a Christian can interpret Scripture is to do so as Jesus did! It almost sounds too simple, doesn't it? Yet, ironically, this has not been the norm for most of Christianity. So, what does it mean to read the Bible as Jesus did?

Jesus approached the Hebrew Scriptures with the assumption that God had been dialoging with humanity since the beginning. He used the Jewish practice of *midrash* as a way of participating in this dialogue. *Midrash* is a method of interpreting Scripture that fills in the gaps, by questioning and imagining a multitude of possible interpretations. *Midrash* allows the text and the Spirit of God to open up the reader to transformation, instead of resisting change by latching onto one final, closed, and certain interpretation. This open-horizon approach was common for most of the first 1300 years of Christianity, where as many as six levels of interpretation and numerous levels of truth were perceived in any one Scripture text.

The traditional forms of *midrash* demand both a prayerful approach and scholarly familiarity with the Bible and commentaries which have formed the tradition over the centuries. However, it is possible for someone who is not a biblical scholar or theologian to get a sense of the practice of *midrash*.

The following practice, drawn from Teresa Blythe's book *50 Ways to Pray*, offers an interactive experience with the Bible through openness, contemplative attitude, and critical thinking. This practice invites us to trust that God will meet us where we are and will take us where we need to go as we consider the meaning of the text. We

could engage in this dialogue often, even with the same text, since there will always be more discoveries about the meaning(s) of sacred texts.

Dialoguing with Scripture:

Choose one of the following Scriptures for reflection:

- *Exodus 1:8-22 — The Hebrew midwives fear God*
- *Exodus 18:13-27 — Jethro's advice to Moses*
- *1 Samuel 3 — The call of Samuel*
- *Mark 9:14-29 — Jesus heals the afflicted boy*
- *Luke 8:22-25 — Jesus calms a storm*
- *Luke 10:29-37 — The good Samaritan*

Read (or listen to) your selected Scripture passage slowly. You may want to read (or hear) it more than once.

Consider which character in the story you would like to interact with. It could be a person you find agreeable, or a person with whom you want to question or debate. Who are you drawn to? When you decide on a character, write the name at the top [of a piece of] paper.

Hold an imaginary conversation—on paper—with the character in the story. You may want to stick with the theme of the Scripture and talk about that, or you may want to discuss other topics. It is completely up to you. Let your imagination roll free and see what transpires. (20 minutes)

When you are finished, read your dialogue out loud.

What is it like to have a conversation with a biblical figure? Why did you choose the character you chose? Did anything in the conversation surprise you? Did anything in the conversation move you? Did you feel any inner blocks to doing this sort of exercise? Did you feel the presence and guidance of God in the dialogue? What did you learn about yourself as you engaged this biblical figure? How easy or difficult is it for you to have these kinds of imaginary conversations? How useful would you say such conversations are for you?

End your reflection time with a prayer of gratitude for what you experienced.

Tip—You don't have to be an excellent writer to enjoy this exercise. No one but you has to read what you've written. Just write from the heart and imagination. [1]

[1] Teresa A. Blythe, *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times* (Abingdon Press: 2006), 17-18.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Hierarchy of Truths: Jesus' Use of Scripture* (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2013), [CD](#), [MP3 download](#).

Image credit: *Palm Sunday* (detail), Sinkiang, 683-770 CE, Nestorian Temple, Qocho (Xinjiang), China.

Praying in the Way of St. Ignatius of Loyola Through Advent

Session 1: Gospel Contemplation with Psalm 139:1-18

Theme:

Our creaturely dependence on God – God created us and continually is creating us – God shares personally with us.

Grace:

To ask for what I desire – amazement at my existence and at how personally God relates to me.

1. [For the choirmaster Of David Psalm]

Yahweh, you examine me and know me,

2. you know when I sit, when I rise, you understand my thoughts from afar.

3. You watch when I walk or lie down, you know every detail of my conduct.

4. A word is not yet on my tongue before you, Yahweh, know all about it.

5. You fence me in, behind and in front, you have laid your hand upon me.

6. Such amazing knowledge is beyond me, a height to which I cannot attain.

7. Where shall I go to escape your spirit? Where shall I flee from your presence?

8. If I scale the heavens you are there, if I lie flat in Sheol, there you are.

9. If I speed away on the wings of the dawn, if I dwell beyond the ocean,

10. even there your hand will be guiding me, your right hand holding me fast.

11. I will say, 'Let the darkness cover me, and the night wrap itself around me,'

12. even darkness to you is not dark, and night is as clear as the day.

13. You created my inmost self, knit me together in my mother's womb.

14. For so many marvels I thank you; a wonder am I, and all your works are wonders. You knew me through and through,

15. my being held no secrets from you, when I was being formed in secret, textured in the depths of the earth.

16. Your eyes could see my embryo. In your book all my days were inscribed, every one that was fixed is there.

17. How hard for me to grasp your thoughts, how many, God, there are!

18. If I count them, they are more than the grains of sand; if I come to an end, I am still with you.

Closing:

My existence is rooted in mystery, and at the heart of this mystery are three profound truths: God's holiness (transcendence) – Isaiah 6:1-3; my nothingness – Job 1:21; God's desire to have an intimate relationship with me – 1 John 4:10. I am a dependent being of love. To experience this is to say with Augustine, "I tremble with fear and burn with love." Our response to this love is praise in word and deed; in word, because praise spontaneously springs to our lips when we experience this love; in deed, because the one who is thus loved perceives one's lover in all things and desires to respond in kind.

Why might God have called you to [this prayer practice]? Perhaps because of the great delight, esteem, honour and profound love in which God holds you? – David Howells

From Orientations: Volume 2 Part A by John A. Veltri, SJ

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Session 2: The Incarnation

Gospel Contemplation with Materials from 19th Annotation

Theme:

God chooses to fulfill God's deepest desires through the Word made flesh.

Grace:

To ask for what I desire – a deep-felt knowledge of how God has chosen to fulfill the dream of God's heart through Jesus' conception and an intimate knowledge of the Trinity's deep desires for ourselves and for our planet.

Today's prayer:

Using a pondering approach – that is, pondering the prayer material concerning the Incarnation as you would a love letter - ask God the kinds of questions about the story that are likely to evoke reactions and responses in your heart. Allow the mysterious and wonderful truth of the Incarnation to fill your mind and heart. Here are some questions to help with your wondering:

- a. What was God's dream behind these historical events?
- b. What happened?
- c. Why did it happen that way?
- d. How could it be?
- e. If the historical conception was to take place today, what would be the circumstances?
- f. In what way is this mystery taking place in our present time?

Prayer Material (From Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, 19th Annotation)

THE SETTING:

[106. 107, 108]

I try to enter into the vision of God, in his triune life, looking upon our world: men and women aimless, despairing, hateful and killing, men and women sick and dying, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the happy and the sad, some being born and some being laid to rest. The leap of divine joy: God knows that the time has come when the mystery of his salvific plan, hidden from the beginning of the world, will become manifest.

Prayer Period

COLLOQUY:

[109]

As I find myself immersed in the setting of this mystery of the Incarnation, I may want to speak out my joy, my thanks, my wonder, or my praise. According to the light I have received, I beg for the grace to know and be able to draw close to Jesus, my Lord. I close my prayer period with the Lord's Prayer.

Closing Thoughts:

The dream of God's heart for the world is expressed in Jeremiah 31:31 where the covenant is imaged as being placed in each person's heart replacing stony hearts. The effect of this dream is recorded in Zechariah 14:20-21 which images everything in life becoming sacred, even the pans in the kitchen and the bells on the horses. In Micah 6:8, God's hopeful dream is fulfilled by our doing justice, in our loving tenderly, and in our walking humbly with our God.

Verses:

"Look, the days are coming, Yahweh declares, when I shall make a new covenant with the House of Israel (and the House of Judah), 32.but not like the covenant I made with their ancestors the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt, a covenant which they broke, even though I was their Master, Yahweh declares. 33.No, this is the covenant I shall make with the House of Israel when those days have come, Yahweh declares. Within them I shall plant my Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I shall be their God and they will be my people. 34.There will be no further need for everyone to teach neighbor or brother, saying, "Learn to know Yahweh!" No, they will all know me, from the least to the greatest, Yahweh declares, since I shall forgive their guilt and never more call their sin to mind"
Jeremiah 31:31-34

"When that Day comes, the very bells on the horses will be inscribed with the words, 'Sacred to Yahweh', and the cooking pots of the house of Yahweh will be as holy as the sprinkling bowls before the altar. 21.Yes, every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be sacred to Yahweh Sabaoth, and all who come to offer sacrifice will help themselves and do their cooking in them, and there will be no more traders in the Temple of Yahweh Sabaoth, when that Day comes."
Zechariah 14:20-21

"You have already been told what is right and what Yahweh wants of you. Only this, to do what is right, to love loyalty and to walk humbly with your God."
Micah 6:8

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Session 3: The Annunciation

Gospel Contemplation with Luke 1:26-38

Theme:

God chooses to fulfill God's deepest desires through the Word made flesh.

Grace:

To ask for what I desire – a deep-felt knowledge of how God has chosen to fulfill the dream of God's heart through Jesus' conception and an intimate knowledge of the Trinity's deep desires for ourselves and for our planet.

Today's Prayer:

THE SETTING:

[107, 108]

This is the context of the Annunciation scene, which we find in the text of Scripture (Luke 1:26-38). I try to stay with the eyes of God, and look upon the young girl, Mary, as she is greeted by Gabriel.

I let myself be totally present to the scene, hearing the nuances of the questions, seeing the expressions in the face and eyes, the gestures and movements which tell us so much about a person.

I notice how our triune God works – so simply and quietly. A world goes on, apparently oblivious of the total revolution which has begun. I look at Mary's complete way of responding to her Lord and God.

Scripture:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27.to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28.He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.' 29.She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, 30.but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. 31.Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. 32.He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; 33.he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' 34.Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' 35.The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. 36.And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, 37.for nothing is impossible to God.' 38.Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her. Luke 1:26-38

Prayer Period

Closing Prayer:

COLLOQUY:

[109]

As I find myself immersed in the setting of this mystery of the Incarnation, I may want just to stay with

Mary or with our Lord, who has now become man for me. Sometimes I may want to speak out my joy, my thanks, my wonder, or my praise. According to the light I have received, I beg for the grace to know and be able to draw close to Jesus, my Lord. I close my prayer period with the Lord's Prayer.

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Session 4: The Nativity

Gospel Contemplation with Luke 2:1-19

Theme:

The birth of Jesus.

Grace:

To ask for what I desire – a deep-felt knowledge of God become human for me so that I might love Jesus more and follow his Spirit more closely.

Today's Prayer:

Lose yourself in this very familiar story. Let the power of the story engage your imagination. By 'remembering' in this way with your active imagination, you are not going backward in time. Rather a part of the mystery of Jesus' life is brought forward into your present life.

THE SETTING:

[111, 112, 114]

The familiar story of the Nativity should allow me the more easily to be present fully to the persons and places of this mystery. Whatever methods help me enter into the whole scene and to be with the persons involved I should embrace.

To be able to enter into the deep-down stillness of this night,

[115,116]

to be able to see this very human baby with all the wonder which comes from eyes of faith, to watch how Mary and Joseph handle themselves, their own response to God at this time – these are various aspects or focuses of the mystery to which I may find myself drawn.

I should take note of the hardship which is already so much a part of Jesus' presence in our world. The labors of the journey to Bethlehem, the struggles of finding a shelter, the poverty, hunger, thirst, heat and cold, the insults which meet the arrival of God-with-us – all this that he might die on a cross for me.

Scripture:

"Now it happened that at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be made of the whole inhabited world. 2.This census -- the first -- took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, 3.and everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. 4.So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judaea, to David's town called Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line, 5.in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6.Now it happened that, while they were there, the time came for her to have her child, 7.and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the living-space. 8.In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over their sheep during the watches of the night. 9.An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, 10.but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. 11.Today in the town

of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12.And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' 13.And all at once with the angel there was a great throng of the hosts of heaven, praising God with the words: 14.Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favours. 15.Now it happened that when the angels had gone from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us.' 16.So they hurried away and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. 17.When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, 18.and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds said to them. 19.As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2:1-19

Prayer Period

Closing Prayer:

Spend a few minutes with each person in this holy scene. Close your prayer time with the Lord's Prayer.