

Gospel Contemplation: An Encounter with Jesus at the Well

Introduction

Gospel Contemplation is a way of praying that St. Ignatius proposes quite frequently in his *Spiritual Exercises*. You are invited to use your imagination to enter the scene, to take part, to let the scene unfold. As Ignatius suggests, notice the people, listen to them, watch what they do [SE, 106, 107, 108]. Perhaps you may sense an invitation to be one of the individuals in the scene and engage in a conversation with one of them. You can do this on your own, or use the text below as a guide.

If this way of praying is new – simply relax and try to become engaged in the scene. Try not to worry about what you are “supposed to” be doing. If you find yourself distracted during your prayer, very gently bring yourself back to the scripture text or your imaginative contemplation.

Background to the Text

In this Sunday's Gospel a Samaritan woman encounters Jesus at a well. Scholars comment on the fact that she visits the well at noon – when no one else would be there in the heat of the day. Perhaps this is because she was rejected in the community because of her many husbands. The woman is a Samaritan, a descendant of Israelites left behind during the Babylonian exile who intermarried with Gentiles. They had their own temple and Torah and disagreed with the Jews as to the proper place of worship.

Quiet your body and mind

- Choose a position where you can be relaxed but alert.
- Breathe deeply several times and let your body relax
- Breathe out any worries or stressful thoughts and put them in God's hands
- Become aware of God's presence here with you now, looking at you with love.

Ask for a grace

- Ask God for whatever you need at this time during this prayer period. If you can't think of anything, ask for a heartfelt encounter with Jesus.

Read the scripture passage

Read the passage slowly, savoring the words and beginning to imagine the scene. Read it twice if that helps you to visualize it.

John 4:5-42

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.'

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'

[\(bible.oremus.org/\)](http://bible.oremus.org/)

Imaginative Contemplation

In your mind, see the scene described in this Gospel. See the well – what does it look like? Perhaps it's a well in the desert in the Holy Land, or perhaps one closer to home.

Widening your focus a bit, what's around the well? Is it in the middle of a town, or in a forested area, or in the desert?

(Pause to let yourself see the scene)

And what kind of day is it? Is there sun or clouds? Is it hot or cool? Is there a breeze? What can you hear – and there birds chirping or voices in the distance? What can you smell?

(Pause to use all of your senses)

Place yourself there by the well. You have just arrived. Take another moment to see and hear and smell everything.

Notice that Jesus is sitting on the far side of the well. How does he look? Are his clothes ancient or contemporary? Can you imagine his face clearly, or not quite?

You approach him and he greets you. How does he greet you?

He asks you for a drink. How do you respond?

As you continue the conversation – do you draw near and sit down or remain standing?

You wonder if there is any insight about your own life that Jesus has to offer you? Ask him. How does he respond? Let your conversation continue for a while.

It is almost time for you to leave the well. Is there anything you haven't gotten a chance to say? Say it now.

As you get ready to go, how do you say farewell to Jesus?

When you are ready, close with your favorite prayer.

[End of Gospel Contemplation]

Review of Prayer

St. Ignatius recommends that we review our prayer. A written review has many advantages. It enables us to look back on our prayer experience, and to notice what happened. It allows us to be fully present to our experience of prayer. We do not write while we are praying. The review of prayer enables us not to judge ourselves or look for how well we are doing. It helps us to become more sensitive to how God is speaking to us in the here and now. It is also a precious record of our journey with God, which nourishes wholeness and integration.

Some questions to assist with your review:

What happened in your prayer?

What feelings did you experience?

During the prayer period, when did you feel encouraged?

When did you feel discouraged?

Did you receive the grace you asked for?

What did you receive?