

# Gospel Contemplation: The Man Born Blind

## 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

At this point in the gospel of John, Jesus has already had several run-ins with the Pharisees and others who challenge his teachings and doubt his authority to preach and to heal. At the end of the previous chapter, he has been threatened with stoning and gone to hide. He has already healed once on the Sabbath and been criticized for it. Here, he does it again, provoking the Pharisees to once again question if Jesus can possibly be from God. The Pharisees also focus on the man's blindness as a sign of his sinfulness, which Jesus emphatically denies.

## 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 that Jesus bring you to deeper faith in him.

## 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 9:1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said to

him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshiped him. Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.

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

## Imaginative Contemplation

See the scene described in the Gospel. Jesus is passing by somewhere when he encounters the man born blind. Where do you imagine that he is? In a town, or walking along a road between villages? What kind of scene do you imagine?

Notice everything around you, be it buildings or trees or fields. How many people are around, and what do they look like? What are they doing? Is it ancient times or a more contemporary scene? What kind of day is it – is the sun out or is it cloudy? Is it warm or cool? Is there a breeze? What kinds of sounds can you hear, close by or in the distance? What can you smell?

[Pause to use all of your senses to see the scene]

Place yourself in this scene. Perhaps you are walking with Jesus, one of his disciples, or a bystander, or perhaps even the person born blind. Where are you in this scene?

Be present in the scene as events unfold. As Jesus approaches the one born blind, what do you notice about Jesus? What does he look like, what is his attitude?

How do you react as Jesus makes clay from dirt and his own saliva, applying it to the eyes of the one born blind. What emotions do you feel?

You go to the Pool of Siloam – what happens as the one born blind washes there?

Go also to the Pharisees and listen as the one born blind testifies to what happened and the Pharisees express their doubts. What do you notice during this interaction? How do you feel?

Afterwards, Jesus seeks you out. See him coming toward you... He asks, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" How do you respond? Continue talk with Jesus – share with him your feelings and reactions about everything that has happened with the one born blind. Let him respond and continue to converse with him.

As your conversation comes to a close, 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?