

Faith Formation Praying with Scripture

S t . I g n a t i u s L o y o l a P a r i s h

More than Reading

Prayer with Scripture

- A sharper focus, greater depth.
- How are you moved by a particular passage/story? An important part of prayer.
- God speaking with you, will you be willing to tell God what you see and hear, how you feel about the passage?
- Set aside time and place to be attentive to God's word.
- Don't sweat the details, let the heart of the passage speak to you.

Is there a difference between a newspaper article and a letter a dear friend writes to you? While the former is geared towards delivering information, the latter is geared towards developing and maintaining a relationship.

Yes, God does speak to us when we read scripture. Yes, God does offer grace and insight. Yes, reading scripture does count as prayer. But "praying" with scripture allows us to pay better attention, to listen more closely and to let God touch us deeply.

There are several ways or "techniques" for praying with scripture but we will

concentrate here with just two: Lectio Divina and Imaginative Contemplation. There is nothing magical about either technique, they are simply ways of helping us to notice detail, fine points and subtleties. They are also geared towards noticing how the words or images affect us.

As with all types of prayer, time and place do make a difference. Please seek out a space where you are not interrupted by others, by the phone or by noise such as sirens and/or trucks.

Before prayer, pick a scripture passage that you think appropriate. It might be a favorite or it might be seasonal. If it is a long excerpt or story, be prepared to focus on just a portion, seeking quality not quantity.

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Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a technique for prayer who's name simply means Holy Reading. I like Busted Halo's description of this prayer. <https://bustedhalo.com/ministry-resources/lectio-divina-beginners-guide> "It's a way of developing a closer relationship with God by reflecting prayerfully on His words. In Lectio Divina, the chosen

spiritual text is read four times in total, giving an opportunity to think deeply about it and respond thoughtfully. When we practice Lectio Divina, we can imagine we're actually involved in the events of Scripture — for example, hearing God's words to the Israelites in the desert." These are the steps suggested by Fr. Thomas Keating.

- ◇ Prepare a place for prayer.

You may wish to offer a simple prayer of invitation to God.

- ◇ Lectio (Read) My first reading is an opportunity to get to know the Scripture passage. I listen carefully for any words or phrases that seem to jump out.

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St. Ignatius Loyola Parish

St. Ignatius Loyola Church
2309 Gaylord St
Denver, CO 80205

Phone: 303-322-8042
Fax: 303-322-2927
Email: parish@loyoladenver.org

Finding God in All Things

- ◇ **Meditatio (Reflect)** The second reading of the same passage focuses further on the points I become aware of during the first reading. Often I'll just re-read a few verses so I can reflect carefully on where God has nudged me.
- ◇ **Oratio (Respond)** After a third reading, it's time to respond. Some will journal or make notes of what they have heard and how it has touched them. More importantly, this is your time to respond to God's invitation. Speak with God about the passage, tell what moves or excites you, confide what scares or intimidates you. Your prayer may take any form, from free-form to a "standard" prayer like the Magnificat.
- ◇ **Contemplatio (Rest)** After the final reading, I spend around 10 minutes in silent contemplation. This isn't a time of active prayer or analytic meditation — I just sit quietly and allow God to work.

I cannot impress upon you the number of recipes that include a time for rest. This includes the Thanksgiving turkey and the pumpkin pie for dessert. There is just something about letting an idea "gel" to firm it up and help it to last.

Imaginative Contemplation

Ignatius did not invent Imaginative Contemplation. Rather he offers it to us as a way to enter into the stories of scripture and as a way for us to reveal our own internal leanings.

Pathways to God does a very good job in describing this style of prayer in its simplicity.

<https://pathwaystogod.org/resources/questions-answers/what-imaginative-contemplation>

Notice also the companion link to Imaginative Contemplation Exercises

<https://pathwaystogod.org/resources/imaginative-contemplation-exercises>

"I let myself, having taken on a character I feel comfortable with (whether that be disciple, Pharisee, or anonymous bystander), interact with Jesus and the others in the Gospel story. Letting the imagination flow freely..."

The author then adds a number of caveats, warning us "not to

worry if the story develops differently from the Gospel passage or if it takes place in modern day and apostles are friends or work colleagues. There is no need to worry if things are said or done that I would be embarrassed to talk about; the spirit is guiding my prayer; trust God!"

You see, our imagination is the gateway to our hope and dreams, our desires and our fears. It is at this deep, internal place that we are asked to speak with God. So it doesn't matter so much whether a character like Mary Magdalene had blue eyes or green, what matters is how I feel when Mary recognizes Jesus outside the tomb at the Resurrection. (John 20:16). This is the heart of the prayer of Imaginative Contemplation. This is what we talk with God about.

Of course there are many other bits and pieces that sometimes can help us to "connect" with a story. Sometimes it is important for us to try using our bodily

senses to imagine the scene. We might ask, "What does the day feel like?" "How does the new wine at the Wedding Feast of Cana taste?" "What is the smell of the fish roasting on an open fire that Jesus invites us to eat?" A great storyteller will often "spice up" a story, make it interesting with this kind of sensuous detail. We can learn to be a great storyteller to ourselves by involving such sensory imagination.

And, if you are like many of us, we get the joke about 10 minutes after it was told. That, or we remember (imagine) more details at night when we get ready for bed. It is not unusual for a story to continue to reveal itself as time goes on. So be prepared for a story to continue to speak to you. Let this be an opportunity for you to continue to listen to what God is saying and to continue to speak with God as well.

Pray-As-You-Go.org has a number of audio contemplation just right for Advent & Christmas.