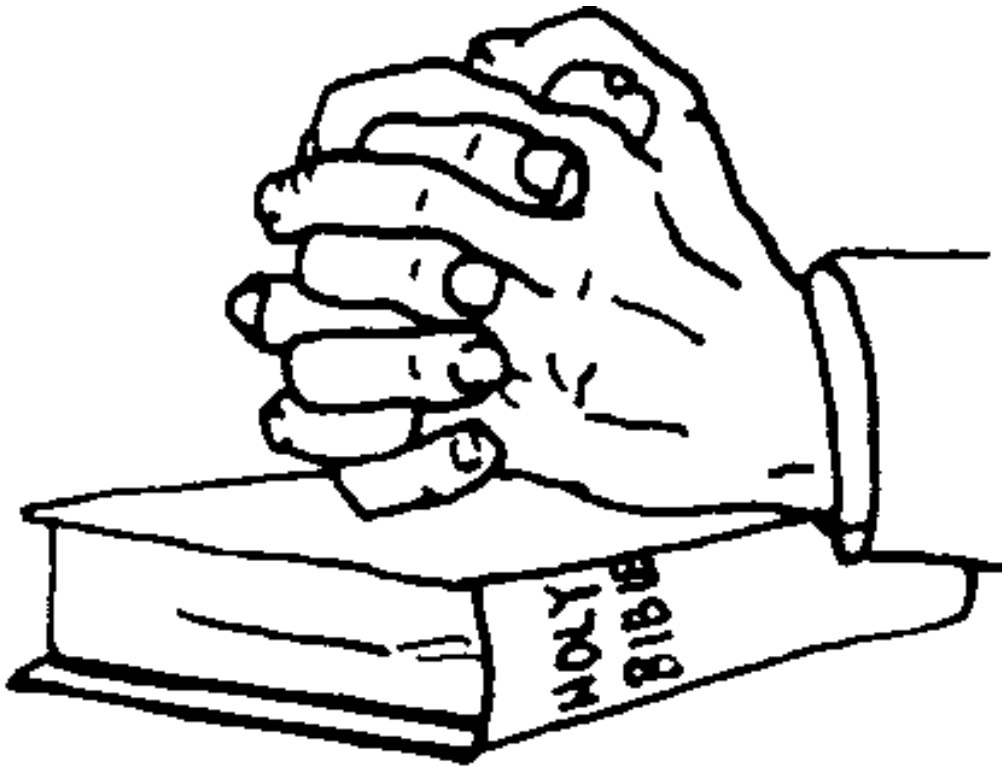


## *Imaginative Contemplation*

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Basically *imaginative contemplation* is about **prayer**, and it is especially useful for praying from the **Gospels**. We read the gospel story, then imagine the scene as though it is happening at this moment and we are active participants in it.



This way of praying the life of Christ stresses the **humanity** of Jesus, the use of the imagination and feelings to enter into an intimate relationship with him. Here we **encounter God** in the midst of our own **experiences** and in this **particular moment** in our lives.

The immediate reaction of many people to this suggestion is, 'But I have no imagination', meaning usually, 'I am not a creative or artistic person'. But if you are capable of recalling even one event of your past life and reliving it in memory, however blurred the details, then you have the ability to pray imaginatively!

**Peoples' imaginative ability varies.** Some can imagine with clear pictorial detail and are able to see the size and furnishings of a room, the colour of walls or the sky, the nature of the lighting, the expressions in people's faces, etc., while others will not see any of these details, the picture being very blurred and indefinite.

The details are not important. What is important is that, through the use of our imagination, we should come to know the reality of God and of the Risen Jesus, as real today as on the days of his life, death and resurrection, and that we might **deepen our relationship with God.**

In general, in this method of prayer you let imagination lead, but **keep focus on your attention on Christ**, so that the imagining does not degenerate into a type of fantasy, in which the focus of attention becomes yourself!

There should be **nothing hurried** in this or any other form of prayer. It may take quite a long time to let the scene build up. Here it is important to remember that there are layers upon layers of consciousness within us. Very frequently the preliminary state before reaching a deeper layer is a feeling of inner emptiness, dryness and boredom. But if we abandon the prayer every time we feel bored, we never reach the deep layers.

We may also experience distractions and because of this we might think that our prayer has failed. But **it has not failed!** Our imagination is revealing an aspect of our own reality, and what are termed 'distractions' can become the substance and subject matter of our prayer—it is in these distractions that we in fact might find God, who is present in every aspect of our lives!

## **Preparatory Prayer**

*In preparation to pray, we place ourselves in God's presence, offer him reverence and ask for his help. To enter God's presence all I need to do is to consider how the Lord sees me. Then I ask for help in a simple prayer, e.g., "Speak Lord, your servant is listening," or St Ignatius' one below.*

Now, I take a few moments to enter God's presence with reverence and humility.

***Lord, I ask for the grace that all I am and all I do may be directed purely to your service and praise.***

## **Introductory Steps**

*In the introductory steps, we read the text to set the basic scene, then we tell God what we want. Our desire needs to be personal, simple and concrete. It is vitally important to our prayer.*

I ask for what I desire.

I read the text slowly.

I imagine as I read and enter the scene.

In the body of the prayer we read the text slowly, piece by piece. We enter into the scene and, through our imagination, become present to Jesus and to the events of that scene. All the details are important. I can be myself there or be one of the people. St. Ignatius divides the points into persons, words and actions. In practice we imagine these as they happen together.

Let the scene unfold as it will. Stop at those places when you feel engaged. Talk, rest, interact. St Ignatius advises, 'where I find what I desire, I will settle down, without any anxiety, until I have satisfied myself.' So it is not important to "do" the whole text. The aim is to enter into relationship with Jesus, to receive an intimate heartfelt knowledge. What about distractions? When you realize you are distracted, simply let go and return to the scene. Repeating your desire can help to bring you back as well.

## **Concluding Prayer**

*Our prayer culminates in a conversation with God. As with a friend, we share and we listen. We give and we receive. We seek the best way forward in Christ.*

As friend, I converse with Jesus, the Trinity or Mary.

I conclude with the *Our Father*.

## Reflection after prayer

1. What happened in my prayer? Where was I most engaged?
2. What were my stronger feelings, hot or cold spots?
3. What word, image or action gave rise to those feelings?

### **Zacchaeus tries to see who Jesus is Luke 19:1-10**

**What I desire: *to see you, Lord***

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it.

A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich.

He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature.

So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today."

So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be guest of one who is a sinner."

Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much."

Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.

For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

### **Prayer Points**

The scene is in Jericho – a large city on a rounded hill overlooking the plains. . .

*How is this day? Is it hot? Muggy? Touched by a lovely breeze?*

*What do the streets look like? What do they smell like?*

*What are the buildings like?*

#### **I see the persons. I watch and contemplate them.**

*How are they dressed? How large is the crowd? Are there many children around?*

*What does Zacchaeus look like? And Jesus? How does he move? What is the expression on his face? Do I see myself in the crowd? Who am I? Where am I standing?*

*Could I be Zacchaeus?*

#### **I watch, notice, and consider what they are saying.**

*What does the crowd say about Jesus? How does Zacchaeus address him? How does Jesus respond? What does his voice sound like? Do you hear your own voice in the voices of the crowd, Zacchaeus, Jesus? Does Jesus talk to the crowds? How does he talk to Zacchaeus? How does he talk to you?*

#### **I watch and consider what they are doing.**

*What is the crowd doing? Are people talking to one another? Are they selling their wares? Are children running around and playing? Can you see Zacchaeus running ahead, climbing the tree? As Jesus arrives, what does he do? What do you do?*

#### **I take time to reflect within myself and draw some fruit from it.**

*How do I feel as I watch what is happening? How do I feel as I hear Jesus’ words to Zacchaeus? How do I feel as I listen to the grumbling of the crowds? How do I feel as I welcome Jesus to my home? How do I feel as Jesus talks to me? When Jesus says to me “what do you want”? What is my response?*

**taken from:**

[www.yaim.jesuit.org.au/spirituality](http://www.yaim.jesuit.org.au/spirituality)



*Texts for Imaginative Contemplation*

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Here are some more biblical texts for imaginative contemplation. Look them up in your Bible and follow the same procedure to pray with them or go to the mentioned website and do it online.

*General*

<b>Genesis 3</b>	The Adam and Eve story, when imaginatively contemplated, will be found to be very contemporary, describing the nature and effect of all sin – it separates us from ourselves, from others, from God.
<b>Luke 15</b>	Parable of the lost sheep, the lost drachma and the prodigal son.
<b>John 8:34-41</b>	Sin enslaves and blinds to truth.

<b>Romans 7:14-25</b>	Paul acknowledges his own helplessness.
<b>Matthew 23:13-26</b>	Christ's indictment of the Pharisees, included in the Gospel because the early Church was aware of its own danger of falling into Pharisaism.
<b>Luke 18:9-14</b>	The Pharisee and the tax collector at prayer

*In particular on social sin*

<b>Matthew 25:31-46</b>	Jesus describes the Last Judgment.
	The rich man and the beggar, Lazarus.
<b>Luke 16:19-31</b>	The parable of the rich man who stores up treasure for himself.
<b>Luke 12:16-21</b>	

*Texts with particular emphasis on God's mercy and forgiveness*

<b>Luke 7:36-50</b>	The sinner who washes Jesus' feet in the house of Simon, the Pharisee.
<b>John 8:3-11</b>	The adulterous woman about to be stoned.
<b>John 13:36-14:1</b>	Christ, immediately after foretelling Peter's denial says: ' <i>Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me</i> '.
<b>Isaiah 55:1-9</b>	God is rich in forgiving.

*Some healing miracles*

<b>Mark 1:40-5</b>	Curing a leper.
<b>Mark 2:1-12</b>	Curing the paralytic whose friends lower him through the roof of the house where Jesus is staying.
<b>Mark 3:1-6</b>	Curing a man with a withered hand.
<b>Mark 5:1-20</b>	The Gerasene demoniac.
<b>Mark 8:22-6</b>	Curing a blind man.
<b>Mark 9:14-29</b>	Curing an epileptic boy.
<b>John 5:1-18</b>	Curing the man at the pool.
<b>John 9</b>	Curing a blind man on the Sabbath.
<b>John 11:1-44</b>	Raising of Lazarus.