

Ignatius on Praying the Scriptures

Exercise #6

Ignatius introduced his followers to a particular method of praying the Scriptures.

First, select a short passage, and read through it slowly and attentively; maybe reading aloud or in a whisper in rhythm with your breathing – a phrase at a time – with pauses and repetitions when and where you feel like it. Don't hurry; be unconcerned as to how many verses you cover.

The “key”: As the passage recounts an event in the life of Jesus, enter into the scene as one of the participants (or maybe, even as an onlooker). See yourself as being there. Speak with the person(s) involved: the disciple as he/she encounters Jesus, the lame person being cured, the one who dines with Jesus, or even Jesus Himself. Let your imagination go...seeing and imagining all else that might have been present: the scene itself, what others might have said, then respond to whatever you sense you ought to respond to.

Nearly all the Gospel passages take more time than a simple reading of them implies. By *stepping into the scene*, you fill in the blanks, imagining what else took place, was said, etc.

Certain words or phrases may carry special meaning for me. Savor those words, maybe repeating them out loud, turning them over in your heart. Carefully ponder each of the words or phrases. Who said it? What does it mean? To whom was the word or phrase addressed? What was the speaker feeling and, importantly, what else might have been happening in the scene that is not recorded?

Whenever something strikes you, pause. Pause, for example, when

- You sense yourself experiencing new meaning or a new way of being with Christ (for example, maybe you imagine what it means to be healed by Jesus)
- You experience again God's love for you.
- You are moved to think, write, do, etc. something good
- I feel peaceful...and don't want the moment to break

- I am happy or content just to be in the presence of God
- or maybe, when you are struggling with or disturbed by what the words are saying and just need time
- and there could be any number of other reasons to hesitate.

And then believe that this is God speaking directly to you in the words of Scripture. Don't hurry to move on (who would do that with God speaking to him/her). Rather, wait until you are no longer moved by the experience.

Also, don't get discouraged if nothing seems to be happening. I know that sometimes God let you feel dry and empty in order to let you realize that it is not in your own power to experience consolation. God is sometimes very close to you in such a seeming absence (Psalms 139:7-8). Know that God accepts you as you are, with all your limitations – even with your seeming inability to pray. A humble attitude of listening is a sign of love for God and a real prayer from the heart. At these times, remember the words of Paul: “The Spirit, too, comes to help us in our weakness, for when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit Himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words” (Romans 8:26-27).

And relax. Remember that God will speak to you in His own way. It is not for you to orchestrate. “Yes, as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes forth from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do” (Isaiah 55:10-11).

And spend time in prayer just being conscious of God's presence in and around me. Speak with God about the things you are interested in or wish to be thankful for – your joys, sorrows, aspirations, etc. All along, or as you are coming to the end, think about what this all means to you: to your personal history, your world, your life.

All the while believing that the Scriptures themselves...yes, even the specific stories, are *your* story. Enter into them believing that, in a sense, you are entering again into *your own story*. It is how you come to a better

understanding of yourself...and what God is trying to do in and through you.

Summary: 5 “P’s” of Scripture Meditation

Prepare a passage from Scripture and have it marked already.

Place - seek to be alone...where you will be uninhibited in your response to God’s presence.

Posture – Relaxed and peaceful. A harmony of body with Spirit.

Presence of God – Start...believing and being aware of God’s being with you. Acknowledge and respond to it. Then, when you are ready, turn to the...

Passage – Read it slowly...listen attentively...enter into the scene...wait on God to speak...

[Don’t be anxious! Don’t try to look for implications or lessons or profound thoughts or conclusions or resolutions. Just be content to be like the child who climbs into its father or mother’s lap and listens to their words and stories.

Simply carry on a conversation with God about what you have read, heard, sensed, imagined, etc. Think of God in the second person singular (“You”). Tell God what you are thinking and feeling. What might you give to God? What do you want from God?

Praying Scripture has nothing to do with “getting through” passages or books; it has everything to do with letting the meaning and the values of every single word sink into your life.

Your Journal...is an invaluable tool when meditating on Scripture. Some write verses out one by one...hesitating for as long as necessary...and then writing out their own thoughts, prayer, etc. Such writings often take the form of entries in a diary: personal, conversational, intimate, etc.

Journal writings slow us down and often help one better notice what the Lord is doing in the meditation. Such entries also provide a record as to what the Lord has been doing...and help the retreatant to see the progression of God's work on their behalf as the retreat progresses.