

An example to try:

Mark 10:46 - 52 *The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus*

Use the guidelines in this leaflet to pray with this story.

In your imagination, let yourself be in the place of Bartimaeus, but as yourself, with your own name.

As you sit by the roadside, allow the setting to become as vivid as possible, using all your senses - except sight! What do you hear, smell, feel? Allow the action to unfold just as it is told in Mark's account, filling in the details with your imagination.

Some questions to prompt you:

- When you are crying out to Jesus, what is it that you feel? Why do you call out so persistently, wanting Jesus' attention? What do you want him to know?
- You hear that Jesus is calling for you to be brought to him. What's it like to hear that Jesus wants to meet with you?
- Someone comes to help you. You feel them take your hand, pull you up and they lead you to Jesus - is this person known to you?
- Perhaps the most important point in this meditation will come when Jesus asks you the question in v51 ... allow the answer to come instinctively from your heart.
- When you have answered Jesus' question, wait for his response. What does he say/do? If you have a sense of his facial expression, what does it convey to you? Does Jesus have more to say to you? Or something for you to do? Is there more you want to say to him?
- Allow this meditation to come to a natural end. Don't rush away from it. Take time to reflect and/or journal about what has happened.

Feel free to reproduce these guidelines for your own use or to give to others
(David Crawley, 2011)

Praying the Gospels



A way to keep our focus on Jesus

“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory,
are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory”
(2 Corinthians 3:18)

Praying the Gospels (or 'Ignatian' meditation)

In worship people often sing of their love for Jesus. What does "love" mean in this context? Theologian Jim Packer once asked:

"How can we say we love someone at whom we don't look, about whom we don't think, and whose qualities we don't appreciate?"

Challenging questions! But how *can* we look at Jesus? We don't have the privilege of walking with him and watching him at work, like his first disciples did. Or *do* we ...? In the Gospel narratives we can meet Jesus, listen to his teaching and observe his encounters with others. The Gospels don't just tell us *about* Jesus, they present him to us, the one who is "the same yesterday, today and forever."

In his Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius of Loyola (16th C) encouraged people to use their imagination in contemplating Jesus in the Gospels. Actually, we do this already for some limited parts of the Gospels. At Christmas we imagine the circumstances of Jesus' first coming. At Easter we imagine ourselves standing at the cross, or at the empty tomb, to help take in the reality of his death and resurrection. When we celebrate communion, we imagine the events of the Last Supper, we take our place alongside the disciples in the Upper Room, and we hear Jesus' words - "This is my body, given for you" - spoken freshly *to our own hearts*.

Here is a very simplified version of what Ignatius taught. Taking an incident from the life of Jesus in the Gospels, gently and gradually follow these steps ...

1. Pray beforehand

Settle and relax yourself. Deal with any distractions that become evident. Open your mind and heart to God, praying that you might be open and attentive to any way in which Jesus may wish to encounter you. Ask that your heart will be receptive and your will ready to obey.

2. Set the scene

Read the passage through to remind yourself of the story. Now use your imagination to set the scene as vividly as you can. (Don't worry if you are not a "visual" person - it's not so much about seeing pictures

as just imagining what it was really like). Use as many of your senses as you can: what would you hear? what would you see? what would you smell? who is in the scene? what are they doing? what is in the background? what is emotional atmosphere like? Take time to let the scene unfold and come to life.

3. Enter into the story

Now *you* are invited into this scene. Without forcing anything, what are you drawn to in the story? Perhaps you particularly identify with one of the characters, and put yourself in their place. Perhaps you are a bystander, watching and listening to all that happens. When you have found your place it is time to ...

4. Allow the story to unfold

Using the framework of the biblical story, allow the action to unfold, and be present in your imagination. As you enter into the scene, *notice how you find yourself responding* - your thoughts, actions and feelings. It may be that the story unfolds a little differently to the biblical account. Notice what happens, as it may be significant. Do you find yourself interacting with Jesus? Is there anything you want to say to him, ask him, or ask of him? Is there anything he seems to want to say to you, or ask you?

5. Reflection and prayer

Ignatius encourages us to "savour the response." When your journey through the story has come to an end, take time to think back over what happened and especially how you found yourself feeling and responding. It might be helpful to journal your reflections. Allow this to lead into prayer, as seems appropriate.

To address any fear that your imagination will lead you astray, bear these things in mind:

- Much of the Bible is narrative, and we cannot read and enter into narrative without using our imaginations (try *Revelation!*)
- Always begin with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you.
- Use your mind to guard against distorted ideas or outcomes.
- If your meditation *does* lead to unexpected places, that in itself can become a something to pray about.

Continued over ...