



Meditating on the gospels

If you want to draw fruit from these mysteries, you must offer yourself as present to what was said and done through our Lord Jesus Christ with the whole affective power of your mind, with loving care, with lingering delight, thus laying aside all other worries and care.

Hear and see these things being narrated, as though you were hearing with your own ears and seeing with your own eyes, for these things are most sweet to those who think on them with desire, and even more so to those who taste them.

And although many of these things are narrated as past events, you must meditate on them all as though they were happening in the present moment, because in this way you will certainly taste a greater sweetness. Read then of what has been done as though they were happening now. Bring before your eyes past actions as though they were present. Then you will feel how full of wisdom and delight they are.

**From the preface to
The Life of Christ by Ludolph of Saxony**



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Ignatian Contemplation



An introduction
to praying with
the gospels in the
Ignatian tradition

What is Ignatian spirituality?

In his *Spiritual Exercises* St. Ignatius Loyola introduces us to imaginative contemplation, a kind of prayer that can deepen our personal relationship with Christ, bring us to a more intimate knowledge of Him, and so to a deeper love of Him and a closer adherence to Him. This is how Ignatius himself came to know and love and give himself to the Lord during his yearlong recuperation at Loyola. He read *The Life of Christ* by Ludolph of Saxony and followed the instructions of the author not just to read or to think about the gospel stories, but to imagine them, visualize them, enter into them, and experience them firsthand as if he were there as a witness and participant.



How to pray this kind of prayer

How do we pray this kind of prayer that many people find easy and relaxing as well as profitable?

- As with any form of prayer, begin by becoming quiet and centered and aware of being in the presence of God, Who looks on you with love. Ask God for help in making this prayer and for any particular grace you may wish to gain from it.
- Select a gospel story. Read the story a couple of times to let the details sink in. When you first begin using this kind of prayer it is better to choose a story where Jesus is doing something rather than speaking, teaching or telling a parable.
- Now close your eyes and imagine the scene or setting of the story. What is it like? Is the road straight or winding? Is the sea smooth or choppy? Is the house humble or grand?
- See the persons, see what they are doing, hear what they are saying. And gradually let the story unfold.
- Put yourself into the scene so you can observe it more closely and take part more easily. Let yourself feel and react emotionally as you would in real life.
- Use all your interior senses. See other things besides the people. *Hear* also the sea and the wind, birds and animals, and music at the feast. *Feel* the cool breeze and the heat of the day, the pebbles underfoot, the flung spray and the pitching of the boat in the storm at sea. *Smell* the fish and the fishermen, the food and the lilies of the field. *Taste* the wine at Cana and the loaves and fish that Jesus multiplies. Use even deeper spiritual senses to taste the sweetness of the newborn Child or the bitterness of Peter's remorse.
- Don't be afraid to let your heart and your creativity lead you beyond what the gospels describe. You will experience the story in a way unique to yourself and more personally meaningful to you. What you see may not be factual (e.g., Jesus dressed in blue jeans), but it could be symbolic of some deeper truth.
- Don't try to reflect on your experience or analyze the prayer or draw lessons for yourself while the prayer is going on, but stay in the experience of the moment.
- If you are moved to do so, speak with Jesus or some other person in the story about what you feel or are experiencing; talk the way a friend talks to a friend.
- End your contemplation with an appropriate or familiar prayer like the Our Father.
- Afterward, take some time to reflect on your prayer to see what affected you most, what the prayer meant, what you have learned about yourself or about Christ, or where God seems to be leading you.