

RESCUED

PALM SUNDAY † MAUNDY THURSDAY † GOOD FRIDAY † EASTER SUNDAY

Praying with the Imagination in the seasons of Lent and Easter

Prayer is one of the most fundamental of all the spiritual disciplines Christians practice. It is not surprising, therefore, that as we approach some of the most significant events in the life of Jesus, engaging with them from a prayerful place will be valuable to us not only in understanding the gospel but in appropriating its truth in our own life here and now.

There are many ways to pray. One contemporary teacher on prayer, Father Laurence Freeman, suggests we think of prayer “as a great wheel”. “The wheel,” he says, “turns our whole life to God... [and] the spokes of the wheel represent different types of prayer.” The important thing is that we turn our life toward God, using whatever “spokes” help us.

One type of prayer or “spoke” that can help us engage more fully with the gospel stories in the time leading up to, and including, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is Imaginative Prayer. This involves entering into a gospel story as if we were there. This is a form of prayer often associated with St Ignatius of Loyola, and is used extensively in his “Spiritual Exercises”.

In imaginative Prayer we use our imagination to put ourselves into the scenes we are reading about. We might imagine ourselves in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus and his disciples; or we enter into the experience of Simon Peter as he denies Jesus; we watch Jesus before Pilate, listening to Pilate’s questions and Jesus’ responses; or we follow Jesus and the governor’s soldiers into the Praetorium and observe what happens. We enter the story using all the faculties of our imagination to think about what it is like to actually be there, and noticing how that impacts us.

A simple method for this form of prayer involves the following steps:

- Choose a passage (see suggestions below)
- Intentionally turn your heart and your mind towards God, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide you in your time of prayer.
- Read through the passage a few times until you are reasonably familiar with the events that are taking place and the people involved.
- Using all your senses, let the Gospel passage gently unfold in your awareness – imagine you are in the scene, so you can see the people, hear the voices, taste, smell, touch and so on.
- Then enter the story yourself – perhaps as an observer,

or someone helping another; perhaps near the action, or hiding behind a wall. You might want to talk to Jesus or to one or more of the other characters in the story. Let the story unfold and allow yourself to be part of it in whatever way feels right for you.

- Pay particular attention to Jesus and your responses to what is happening to him, and how he is responding to what is going on. Talk to Jesus about what is happening for you as you engage in the scene.
- Finish your time of imagination with some silence and allow some space to reflect on your experience. You may like to write something about it in a journal or find some other way to savour the experience of prayer. You can also repeat the prayer using the same text on another day.

Some passages that can be used in this way in Lent and Easter are:

John 13:1-20 The Washing of the Feet

Matthew 26:30-56 Moving out from the Upper Room to Gethsemane

John 18:12-27 Jesus before Annas and Peter’s denial

Mark 14:53-72 Jesus before the Sanhedrin

Matthew 27:1-2, 11-14 Jesus before Pilate

Matthew 27:15-26 Jesus or Barabbas

Matthew 27:26-32 Jesus handed over, scourged, crowned and mocked

Matthew 27:33-38 Jesus crucified

Matthew 27:39-50 Jesus in darkness: passers-by jeer, priests mock, Jesus cries out.

John 19:31-42 Jesus taken down from the cross and buried

Mark 16:1-11 He is risen, he is not here

Luke 24:9-12 The witnesses

Luke 24:13-35 Jesus meets with two disciples on the road to Emmaus

John 20:24-29 Jesus meets with Thomas

John 21:1-17 Jesus comes to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias