

To the greater glory of God

Walking together with Jesus

A Lent Retreat





ENTERING INTO PRAYER



The prayer material is designed to help you pray but you don't need to use every part of the material. Feel free to stay with a particular thought, feeling, phrase or image during your prayer.

It can be hard to set aside your daily cares and thoughts to make time for prayer, especially when trying to fit prayer into your daily life. The following are some suggestions of ways to start a time of prayer. Not all will suit everyone so, during the retreat feel free to use whichever best suits you.

Awareness of breathing

Become aware of your breathing ... Try not to alter its speed or depth ... simply notice... Focus on each breath passing in and out ...

Feel the air as it flows through your nostrils ... giving you life ... Turn your attention to the gift of each breath, and God who delights in giving you being.

Breathe in God's life ... God's love for you ...

Breathe out all that separates you from that love ...

You may wish to use a word or phrase to link with your breathing e.g. 'Come Holy Spirit; I have chosen you.'

Awareness of Sounds

Listen to the sounds you can hear around you.

If you are indoors, allow yourself to notice sounds without and within the room.

Identify each sound as you are able.

Gently, slowly, without judgement, focus your attention on each one.

Return your attention back to where you were before.

If a sudden sound or distraction occurs, acknowledge it and name it. Don't try to ignore it.

When ready, become aware of the sound of your own breathing.

Through the sounds, be attentive to the invitation of God, who dwells in creation...

Awareness of your body

Beginning at the top of your head and passing down through the body to the feet be attentive to each part of the body in turn.

Gently focus in turn on each part ... head ... face ... eyes ... neck ... shoulders etc.

For each part, allow a few moments to become aware of what is being felt, without making judgement upon it. Move on in turn until you have given attention to your whole body.

Then consider your whole self you as a person made in God's likeness ... you in whom God chooses to dwell...

Walking

This is only possible if you have somewhere you can walk right now.

If you are in a church building, is it possible to slowly walk around it without disturbing others? If so, do so.

Walk slowly with awareness of whatever comes to you: the surroundings, thoughts, feelings, how your body is.

If you are outside, do similarly. It usually helps to walk more slowly than usual and to pay attention to what is around you.

Examen style

Look back over the day, or the previous day if it is morning. Spend just a minute doing this. For what do you feel most thankful? Give thanks. For what do you feel least thankful? Give this to God.

Using an object

Hold an object: a stone, leaf, cross, anything you like. Weigh it, feel it, look at it. It is a part of creation and loved by God.

Using beads or your fingers

If you have a rosary or other prayer beads, use these to get started. If you don't have beads, count on your fingers. Call to mind three people or causes you wish to pray for. Limit it to three.

Share your desires with God. Intercede for these people using the beads. Hold the first bead and say a short prayer that you know well. Repeat on another bead and so on up to 10.

Praying a set prayer slowly

Choose a longer prayer that you know well. For example, the 'Our Father'. In time with your breathing, pray each line slowly. Only move on when something of the meaning of that phrase has landed in you.

Catching up with God

Often it is difficult to focus because we're distracted by what has happened or what is coming up. Let this be the start of your prayer today. What have you been up to? As you remember, share this with God. What have you to do today (or tomorrow)? Share this with God.

Be still

In Psalm 46 there is the line: "Be still and know that I am God." It is an invitation to let go of physical and mental activity and to trust deeply in God.

Be still and know that I am God ... Be still and know ... Be still ... Be ... Be ... Be still ... Be still and know ... Be still and know that I am God

Breathing out tension

We usually hold tension in our bodies even when we don't need to. It can be an indication that I am not trusting in God. This prayer uses breath to let go of some of the tension as an expression of letting go and entrusting ourselves to God ...

Identify where there is tension in your body ... feel it ... what do you notice about it? ... as you breathe in, breath in God's love ... as you breathe out, let go of some of the tension you have noticed ... breathe in ... breathe out some of the tension into God ... no need to breathe it all out – that can become a source of new tension! ... breathe in ... breathe out ... do this a few more times.

A place for prayer

Recall a place where you feel at peace ... imagine it if you can ... or in some way get a sense of it ... what do you notice about it ... let the Holy Spirit be there with you ... in the breeze or the air you breathe ...

The Jesus Prayer

This is one of the most famous mantras. Listen to each phrase in your head and then add your voice to it ... Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner ... Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner ... Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner ... continue on your own with this ... the phrase may shorten naturally ...

Using a mantra

A mantra or repeated short phrase can help us to settle ... sometimes we think about the words, but mostly we let go of thinking and trust that simply saying the words, aloud or silently mouthing them is sufficient ... we can repeat the words in time with our walking or breathing or the rhythm of music ... there are many suitable phrases ... here is one to stay with for a while ...

The Lord is compassion and love ... The Lord is compassion and love ... continue to repeat the mantra for yourself ...

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

During this retreat we will introduce you to several different forms of prayer. We have provided some material to help guide and inspire your prayer written by people who pray with scripture regularly, but do not feel you have to use all of it if that does not suit you.

The main ways of praying with scripture as used by St Ignatius of Loyola and his followers the Jesuits are *Lectio Divina* and Praying with the Imagination (Imaginative Contemplation). Your group leader should give you some more guidance on both of these, but here are some basic outlines to get you started.

Lectio Divina

1 Read – *Lectio*: Read the whole passage slowly (aloud if you are in a group)

2 Meditate – *Meditatio*: Read the passage again, stopping wherever a word or phrase seems to say something. Let the words speak to you.

Let the passage touch your own life, your memories. There is no one meaning; the same passage may say very different things to different people.

3 Talk to God – *Oratio*: Speak to God in your own words. Imagine God speaking back to you. Express your own desires.

4 Contemplate – *Contemplatio*: Be quiet and open before God. Rest. Let the mind be still. Allow this fourfold process to continue a number of times until the period of prayer is over. Prayer: Finish with a formal prayer everyone knows like the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

You may be asked to share from your scripture readings so you may wish to take notes in a journal or elsewhere, but you don't have to share if you don't want to, and it is not a test of your knowledge!



Imaginative Contemplation

The most frequent method of prayer that Saint Ignatius uses in his Spiritual Exercises is that of imagining ourselves in a Gospel scene, taking up a character, being with Jesus and being aware of what's going on, and how we are feeling. The purpose of praying with the imagination is to allow Christ in the Scripture to speak to me, to bring the Gospel stories alive for me, to imagine that I were one of the people in the Gospel story. (We are not trying to recreate history. It doesn't matter if my imagination takes the story off in a different direction to the Scripture. It doesn't matter if the story takes place in 1st century Palestine or the United Kingdom in the 21st century). What is important is what God wants to say to me through this passage.

In this retreat we give you some notes to help with imaginative contemplation and your group leader will also lead you through an exercise, but if you like you can also listen to some imaginative contemplation exercises: www.pathwaystogod.org/resources/imaginative-contemplation-exercises

With a little practice most people can read a Gospel story then imagine themselves in the scene. God can touch us very deeply in such prayer.

Imaginative contemplation does not attempt to fill out the Gospel stories or try to understand what the people who met Jesus in Galilee or Jerusalem really thought and felt. Rather, I let myself, having taken on a character I feel comfortable with (whether that be disciple, Pharisee, or anonymous bystander), interact with Jesus and the others in the Gospel story. Letting the imagination flow freely, it is good not to worry if the story develops differently from the Gospel passage or if it takes place in modern day and apostles are friends or work colleagues. There is no need to worry if things are said or done that I would be embarrassed to talk about; the spirit is guiding my prayer; trust God!

Much of the fruit of such prayer comes after the time of contemplation. After a period of prayer lasting from 15 minutes to an hour it is good to briefly look back at the prayer and note what struck me, especially the unusual or unexpected and ask why did I react the way I did? Does it show me anything of the way I see God, myself or others? Did what Jesus said or did in the contemplation make sense?

Sometimes people are suspicious of the imagination and of being 'carried away'. There is no need to be fearful, we can always test the results of the prayer to see whether it is from God. Prayer that is from God will bring us consolation, build us up and encourage us to trust that God will support us, no need to rely on self alone. If our prayer encourages us to feel loved, to be sorry for having hurt or not respected our self or others; if it inspires us to have confidence in ourselves, to want to help others, to be more Christian; to be more in touch with our true self – the person behind the respectable, self-confident mask we often put on – or to see Jesus as more truly human than it is from God. If, on the other hand, we feel depressed and worthless with a sense of 'why bother', then God is not at work.

Find a quiet time and place, read a story, then imagine the events with yourself taking part. Talk in your own words. Reflect a little after the prayer to see what God might be saying. For those who have the opportunity, it is good to go over the prayer with someone you trust especially if that person has some experience in guiding prayer.

For those who are able to imagine Gospel scenes, the most surprising discoveries are those to be made.



ASH WEDNESDAY



Daily Offering

Set me free this day my God from all that holds me back from compassion, all the fear, the hesitation and the doubt. Grant me the grace to show your caring face to one unexpected person today.

Philip Harrison SJ

Entering into Prayer

Find a comfortable position, quieten yourself. Become aware of sounds inside and outside the room. Don't dwell on any particular sound but listen for as many different sounds as possible, particularly the subtle, quieter sounds. Don't let noises annoy you. Just accept whatever you can hear. Enter into the quiet space within. God is Present: God is with you. Ask God to inspire your prayer time. Ask for what you desire. What gift, what grace do you want right now?

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Joel 2: 12–18

Even now, says the LORD,
return to me with your whole heart,
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;
Rend your hearts, not your garments,
and return to the LORD, your God.
For gracious and merciful is he,
slow to anger, rich in kindness,
and relenting in punishment.
Perhaps he will again relent
and leave behind him a blessing,
Offerings and libations
for the LORD, your God.





'Dreams' from the Life of Christ, by Vasilii Polenov

Image for the Day

What does this image say to you?

What would you say to Jesus if you could sit with him today?

What do you think Jesus would say to you?

Food for Thought

Perhaps these words from Paddy Purnell SJ are a good reminder for us this Lent:

'I'm prone to distractions, God.

I find it hard

To keep my thoughts on you.'

God looked down

And sighed:

'I wish I could say

The same about you.

I can't get you out of my mind.'

Patrick Purnell, *The Book of Furrows*

Today's readings invite us to prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These traditional Lenten practices are offered to us each Ash Wednesday as ways to enable us to be more open to God, to ourselves and to others. How difficult it can be for us to refocus ourselves and re-centre ourselves. How uncomfortable it can feel at first, and yet the invitation is to come home – home to God and to the best version of ourselves that we can be.

Suggestions for Prayer

Slowly read the passage. Stop where a word or phrase strikes you. Savour it as long as there is something in it for you.

The passage may trigger off thoughts on your life – that is OK, go with the flow.

Talk to God in your own words. Allow time for a reply. Stay in silence before God.

Move on to the next phrase when you are ready, or if you become distracted, and again, stop when something strikes you.

Take your time.

When your prayer time is nearly at an end, finish with a short formal prayer such as the Our Father, or Glory be...

The idea is not so much to think about the passage as to let it engage your feelings, emotions and life. The questions to ask when looking back on the prayer are:

- What struck me?
- How did I react and feel?
- Does this tell me anything about God, myself, or the way I relate to God or to others?

How are you going to respond today?

Today you might like to recommit yourself to build time for prayer into our day.

Examen (review of prayer)

At the end of your prayer you can look back and ask: Does it have something to say to you?

How does it make you feel? Imagine how God might reply.

Conversation: When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, talk to God about what has come up for you.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY



Daily Offering

Dear Lord, as I meet people today may I feel some of the compassion that you have for them, especially when I am tired.

Tim Byron SJ

Entering into Prayer

Praying a set prayer slowly:

Choose a longer prayer that you know well. For example, the 'Our Father'.

In time with your breathing, pray each line slowly.

Only move on when something of the meaning of that phrase has landed in you.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 30: 15-20

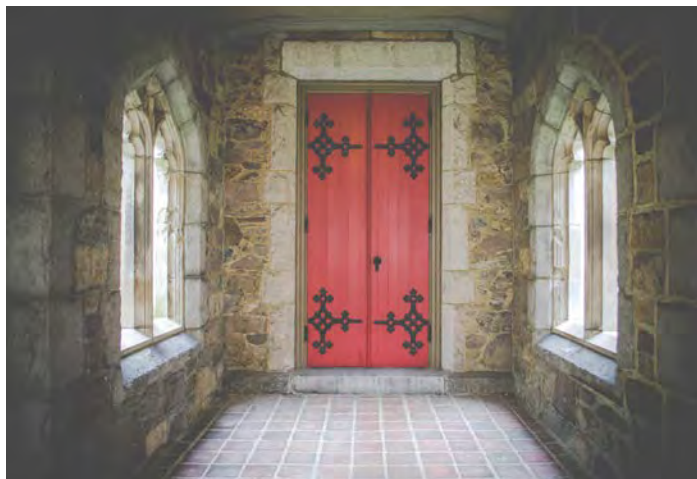
I have set before you life and death,
the blessing and the curse.

Choose life, then,

that you and your descendants may live, by loving the LORD, your God,
heeding his voice, and holding fast to him.

For that will mean life for you,

a long life for you to live on the land that the LORD swore
he would give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.





Christ at Martha's house
by
Henryk Semiradsky

Image for the Day

What does this image say to you?

What would you say to Jesus if you could sit with him today?

What do you think Jesus would say to you?

Food for Thought

Think of the lives of some people whom you admire? What qualities do you associate with that person? How did they live their lives? We are all called to a personal decision to accept or not God's offer of abundant life and to partake and share in God's abundant generosity.

Pope Francis reminds us in 'The Joy of the Gospel' that moved by Jesus' example:

We want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world. But we do so not from a sense of obligation, not as a burdensome duty, but as the result of a personal decision which brings us joy and gives meaning to our lives.

Suggestions for Prayer

Prayerfully look over the last year. Ask God to show you what he wants to show you. When have you felt full of life? Where have you experienced joy? Notice times when you have chosen 'life'.

What did it feel like? What has it led to?

Turn to God in gratitude and speak to him about all that has given you life this year.

How are you going to respond today?

Remember to give thanks to God this day, and remember to thank those you meet for the things they do for you, whether at work, at home or in a café or supermarket.

Examen (review of prayer)

With God: With God I review my day

Thanks: Where do I find joy?

Sorry: Where do I find sadness?

Please: What do I ask from God?

Amen

Examen in twenty-five words

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY



Daily Offering

Lord, help me to take today as it comes and see each moment, good or bad, as a gift from you.

Stephen Noon SJ

Entering into Prayer

Consciously take deep and slow breaths.

You might imagine yourself breathing in the Spirit of God and breathing out this same spirit to others or you might breathe out all that you want to leave behind e.g. jealousy, fear, bitterness. After your time of stilling, take a little time to recognise that you are in the presence of God. Ask God for whatever gift or grace you feel you need at this time.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

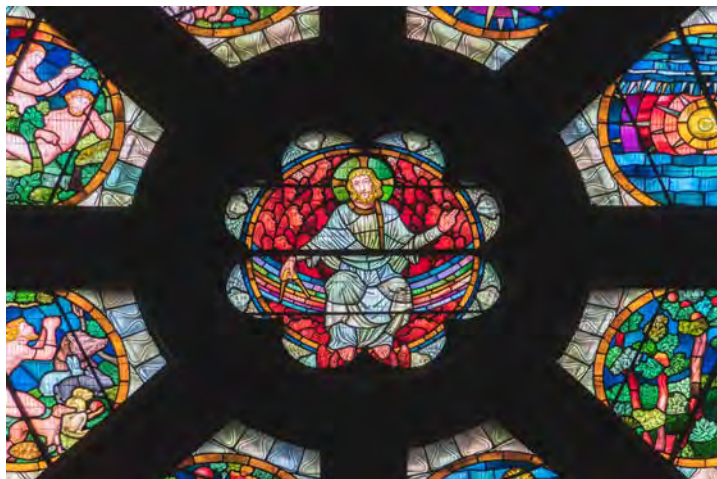
Matthew 9: 14-15

The disciples of John approached Jesus and said,

“Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?”

Jesus answered them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?

The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”





Christ and his apostles
by
Duccio di Buoninsegna

Image for the Day

What does this image say to you?

What would you say to Jesus if you could sit or walk with him today?

What do you think Jesus would say to you?

Food for Thought

John's disciples are uneasy about Jesus. As devout Jews they observed regular obligatory fasts and would also undertake private fasting, by way of praying for God's salvation and hastening the coming of the Messiah. Yet Jesus celebrates and shares meals with everybody, especially the outcasts, the prodigals, the sinners, to let them know that in him the joyful time of salvation had already arrived. The new beginning, symbolised by the wedding, is well and truly under way. But on the journey there will also be a time to fast.

Suggestions for Prayer

Prayerfully look over the last year. Ask God to show you what he wants to show you. When have you felt the bridegroom has been taken away? Where have you experienced emptiness, loneliness, unfulfillment? What did you do? What was helpful?

Turn to God and speak to him about these times asking for healing and forgiveness if it is needed.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer

How are you going to respond today?

Think about ways to bring the good news that the Bridegroom brings to those you meet today. Perhaps find a way to share your food by donating to a food bank, inviting someone to a meal or in some other way.

Examen (review of prayer)

Sit or stand and let God look at you. Breathe in God's love. Breathe out into God how you are right now. Ask for God's light as you look over the day. What makes you glad? Breathe it in.

What makes you sad? Let yourself feel it. Do not be afraid.

Breathe in God's love.

What do you need to help you? Let God know.

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, Amen.*

Stephen Hoyland



SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY



Daily Offering

Lord, I offer my silence to you today, knowing that in the stillness I most easily hear your voice.

Stephen Noon SJ

Entering into Prayer

Stilling: Take a few minutes to become still.

God is Present: God is with you. Ask God to inspire you and lead you in your prayer time.

Ask for what you desire. What gift, what grace do you need right now?

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 5: 27-32

Jesus saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him. Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were at table with them.

The Pharisees and their scribes complained to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners."





Image for the Day

What does this image say to you?

What would you say to Jesus if you could sit or walk with him today?

What do you think Jesus would say to you?

The Calling of Matthew
by
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio

Food for Thought

Jesus calls Levi right in the middle of his work and he follows him. Luke says that Levi had prepared a great banquet in his house. In the Gospel of Mark and Matthew, it seemed that the banquet was in Jesus' house. Either way, Jesus chooses to sit at table with sinners and the 'unclean'. This causes great anger among the religious authorities. It was forbidden to sit at table with tax collectors and sinners, because to sit at table with someone meant to treat them as an accepted family member! Jesus comes to invite us to share life with him in our imperfection and weakness. He has come to gather the dispersed, to reintegrate the excluded, to reveal Abba, the God who accepts and embraces all.

Suggestions for Prayer

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew
back

Guilty of dust and sin.

But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,

Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:

Love said, You shall be he.

I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my
shame

Go where it doth deserve.

And know you not, says Love, who bore the
blame?

My dear, then I will serve.

You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat
So I did sit and eat.

George Herbert

Using the poem:

Note what attracts you. Stay with any image or phrase that strikes you. Let what has attracted you lead you into a conversation with God. What might God be saying to you?

How are you going to respond today?

How can I be aware today of God's mercy to myself and to others?

Examen (review of prayer)

Lord,

let me be still and at peace,

just for a few moments, in the busy-ness of my day.

Let me be attentive to where I have been and where I am headed.

And let me see where you have been present in my life today.

Amen.

Fr Adrian Porter SJ

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT



Daily Offering

Lord, I offer you my corrections, asking that my errors be resolved and mistakes smoothed over.
Peter O'Sullivan SJ

Entering into Prayer

Feel free to choose an exercise from the beginning of the retreat or another way to enter your time of prayer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 4: 4-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone."'

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."'

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."'

Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.





Get Behind me Satan
by
Ilya Repin

Image for the Day

How does this image make you feel?

Are there times in your life when you have been tempted?

What do you think Jesus would say to you about that?

Food for Thought

Jesus enters the desert just before he begins his public ministry and shows his readiness for this service through his ability to know when he is being tempted. It is strange how the evil one tempts Jesus in this passage with a verse from the psalms, a verse which reassures us that God will protect us from harm and will not even let us stub our toes on rocks. The words quoted must have been all too familiar to Jesus but he knows not to trust them, not because they are untrue, but because of who is saying them at that moment. The psalm quoted in today's Gospel reassures us that God will take care of us, even when we feel as though we are in a spiritual desert. However, trust in God does not lead to the quick results the bad spirit offers, it leads us through the desert, out the other side, and onward to service and ministry.

Suggestions for Prayer

In the Spiritual Exercises, St Ignatius warns us to be careful of false consolation, when the bad spirit comes to us under the guise of the good spirit. That seems to be what is happening to Jesus in today's Gospel. The word of God he hears is good, but the one who is speaking to him is not, and the consequences of following this voice would be fatal. It is all too tempting to follow our own interpretation of the scriptures, but we need to discern whether it is really the good spirit which is working through our understanding. The slow leisurely reading of scripture using the method of Lectio Divina can help us come to a deeper understanding of the transforming power of God's word. By letting little nuggets of scripture sink ever deeper into our lives, we can begin to notice where the good spirit is working in our understanding, bringing peace, joy and growth.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, as you read or listen to the Word of God try and listen too to the thoughts and feelings which come to mind as you read. Are they being raised by the Good Spirit or the Bad Spirit?

Examen (review of prayer)

Let God look at you with love. What are you doing for Lent this year? How is that working out? What's going well? And less well? What do you need from God to help you?

Talk with God about your Lent. Be still in God's gaze again.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

MONDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK



Daily Offering

Jesus Christ, let my behaviour today not be modelled on that of the world but of on the new mind which you have given me.

Philip Harrison SJ

Entering into Prayer

Feel free to choose an exercise from the beginning of the retreat or another way to enter your time of prayer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Matthew 25:31-46

‘**W**hen the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’



Image for the Day

Do you find this painting awe-inspiring, frightening, beautiful, or boring? Why?

Are there times in your life when you reflect on what will happen when we leave this earth?

What do you think Jesus would say to you about how you live your life now?

Food for Thought

We all aspire to be holy but the pathway to holiness can sometimes be covered over by brambles. We are offered so many ways to achieve holiness that it becomes easy to neglect the one way which the Lord offers us right at the heart of our lives. Being holy can never just mean following a set of laws, valuable though those laws may be to guide our lives. It must also mean being attentive to those around us, in our families, our workplaces and our communities. For it is there that we encounter those who in need of our care and attention, it is there alone that we will be known by God as his holy people. God would never put holiness out of our reach.

Suggestions for Prayer

This passage would have appealed to Ignatius because it brings together two dimensions of spirituality which he cared about deeply, the divine majesty of the Lord and attention to those in need. In fact, he writes that in becoming friends of the poor, we become friends of the Eternal King. That a king could be a pauper or a pauper a king seems like a contradiction, yet we are invited to believe that we meet Christ the King in the poor. While we often think about the poor as particular marginalized groups in society, we probably do not need to go that far to find someone in need of our attention. Perhaps there is someone close to us who needs to be treated with all the respect and love they deserve.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, can you find a small way to treat a friend or family member so they felt as though they were royalty?

Examen (review of prayer)

Yes, here I am Lord, to have a few minutes quiet time with you. It is good to be here and to think a bit about my day...

Thanks for all the day has been and for all your gifts. These are the moments that come to mind when I think about saying "Thank you".

I'm sorry for the moments of selfishness and unkindness and any other times when I did not manage to be your hands, Jesus, your feet, your eyes, your love, your compassion for the people around me.

Please give me a nudge if there was something you were trying to tell me today when I wasn't paying attention! And promise you'll be with me all through tomorrow too, Amen.

TUESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK



Daily Offering

Dear Lord, please fill me with your radiant presence, so that people see you, not me, today.

Nick King SJ

Entering into Prayer

Listen to the sounds you can hear around you.

If you are indoors, allow yourself to notice sounds without and within the room.

Identify each sound as you are able.

Gently, slowly, without judgement, focus your attention on each one.

Return your attention back to where you were before.

If a sudden sound or distraction occurs, acknowledge it and name it. Don't try to ignore it.

When ready, become aware of the sound of your own breathing.

Through the sounds, be attentive to the invitation of God, who dwells in creation...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Matthew 6:7-15

‘**W**hen you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

‘Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial,

but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.



Image for the Day

Does this painting speak to you and if so, what does it say?

Do you remember being taught your prayers?

What do you think Jesus would say to you about your prayer life?

Food for Thought

If God knows what we need before we pray, why do we pray at all? Perhaps the answer to this question is given right at the start of the Gospel today. We are surrounded by so many babbling voices that sometimes we ourselves do not know what it is that we truly want. We pray not just to ask for what we want but to understand in a deeper way what God wants for us. When we begin to understand what God desires, some of those babbling voices within us will quieten down. We will become still. We will focus. Prayer will become our daily bread, or our daily rice or our daily pasta, a simple meal, but like any staple food, just what we need.

Suggestions for Prayer

In order to quieten down those babbling voices within you, try a stilling exercise to settle down before you pray. Whether you listen to sounds around you, focus on your breathing, or relax the muscles of your body you will begin to centre on your prayer too. Quite early on in my prayer life I was lucky to discover that sometimes it is enough to ask to go deeper in prayer for prayer to begin to deepen. When you have completed the stilling exercise and feel ready to start the prayer, ask for the grace to go that little bit deeper still, perhaps to a place within yourself where you do not normally go, perhaps be closer to the place where God resides in you. Find your own way of asking for this depth and see what happens. You might like to gently pray the Our Father from that deeper place today, asking for whatever it is that you need.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, try to find a way to create a moment of silence and contemplation for yourself or another person.

Examen (review of prayer)

Light a candle. Take a moment to let God look at you. Breathe in God's love.

With your hand on your heart ask Jesus to bring to your heart the moment today for which you feel most grateful.

Recall what was said and done in that moment. Enjoy the gratitude you feel again now.

Breathe in its life.

Ask Jesus to bring to your heart the moment today for which you feel least grateful.

What was said and done in that moment? Let it be. Breathe in God's love just as you are.

Speak to God about what you have noticed. Give thanks to God for your day.

Ask help for tomorrow.

WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord, I offer you my country, asking that you make it a force for good in the world.

Paul Nicholson SJ

Entering into Prayer

The Jesus Prayer

This is one of the most famous mantras. Listen to each phrase and then add your voice to it . . . Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner . . . Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner . . . Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner . . . continue on your own with this . . . the phrase may shorten naturally . . .

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Jonah 3:1-10

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.' So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.'

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.



Image for the Day

Does this help you imagine Ninevah, or do different images come to mind?

When have you asked for God's forgiveness?

What do you think it felt like to be Jonah?

Food for Thought

God threatens the city of Nineveh with a disaster, one which is avoided because the people of the city begin to believe in God, thanks to the arrival of Jonah. They show repentance for their bad conduct by fasting and wearing sackcloth. The writer adds an important detail, that everyone from the greatest to the least of them, even the king himself, demonstrates this change of heart. In the same way, Jesus is a sign for his generation. His arrival must prompt our change of heart, a change which takes place not just among ordinary people but among the highest levels of society.

For us that means that we must involve ourselves in the political process, in our society and our local community. That way we too, by the lives we lead, may become a sign for our own generation.

Suggestions for Prayer

During Ignatius' recuperation after his injury in the battle at Pamplona, he spent a long time just daydreaming. On the one hand he dreamed about the great saints and on the other hand about tales of chivalry. He discovered that his daydreams about the saints brought deeper consolation. Have a go at daydreaming yourself. Make two lists of people in our own world. The first is a list of ten people who are famous or powerful but do not leave you feeling inspired, and the second is of ten people who may or may not be famous, but leave you feeling as though you would want to be like them. What is the difference between these two lists? Note down the character traits of the two groups of people. What might those character traits tell you about yourself and who you are called to be? Take it to the Lord in your prayer.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, find one way to be involved politically, either by reading about a social issue, participating in a political event, or bringing your politics into a conversation at home or at work.

Examen (review of prayer)

An ecological examen

All creation reflects the beauty and blessing of God's image. Where was I most aware of this today?

Can I identify how I made a conscious effort to care for God's creation during this day?

What challenges or joys do I experience as I recall my care for creation?

How can I repair breaks in my relationship with creation, in my unspoken sense of superiority?

As I imagine tomorrow, I ask for the grace to see the Incarnate Christ in the dynamic interconnectedness of all creation.



THURSDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK



Daily Offering

There will be lots to complain about today, I know, Lord; but give me the grace to listen to others instead of moaning at them. Amen.

Nick King SJ

Entering into Prayer

Catching up with God

Often it is difficult to focus because we're distracted by what has happened or what is coming up. Let this be the start of your prayer today. What have you been up to? As you remember, share this with God.

What have you to do today (or tomorrow)? Share this with God.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Esther 4: 17

Queen Esther, seized with mortal anguish,
had recourse to the LORD.

She lay prostrate upon the ground, together with her handmaids,
from morning until evening, and said:

“God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, blessed are you.

Help me, who am alone and have no help but you,
for I am taking my life in my hand.

As a child I used to hear from the books of my forefathers
that you, O LORD, always free those who are pleasing to you.

Now help me, who am alone and have no one but you,

O LORD, my God.

“And now, come to help me, an orphan.

Put in my mouth persuasive words in the presence of the lion
and turn his heart to hatred for our enemy,

so that he and those who are in league with him may perish.

Save us from the hand of our enemies;

turn our mourning into gladness

and our sorrows into wholeness.”



Image for the Day

How might it have felt to be Queen Esther?
When have you asked God for help?
How does this image make you feel?

Food for Thought

Time and time again in the Old Testament, God looks upon the faith of one person as a sign of faith of the whole people, just as he does in today's first reading. Perhaps it is your faith which God is looking upon as he gazes upon the world right now. Faith is strong when there are signs of God's presence in our lives, but must be stronger still when the signs of God's presence do not appear to be there. It is then that we can stand before the Lord on behalf of all those who struggle with faith. This kind of faith keeps knocking upon the Lord's door, confident of receiving what it desires, regardless of whether it is received or not. We do not just believe in God because of what we can receive from him, but because of who he is, the source of all life and gift, the giver of all that we truly need.

Suggestions for Prayer

In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius reminds us to ask for grace at the beginning of prayer and normally tells you what to ask for. In daily life, it can sometimes be difficult to know what grace to pray for, but it is usually enough to ask for one thing we need to strengthen ourselves in the day ahead, whether it is clarity about a decision, forgiveness for some wrong or a deeper closeness to the Lord. At one point in my life, I got stuck and did not know what to ask for, so I imagined Jesus was walking down the street and asked myself: "What do you want to ask Jesus for, for yourself?" Then in prayer, I asked him for what I wanted. It helped me to get in touch with my real and deep desires and avoid the trap of praying for what I thought the Lord wanted for me.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, try to reach out to someone who is struggling with a burden.

Examen (review of prayer)

Take time to become still. Use any method you find helpful, for example, listening to the sounds around you, or breathing in God's love. Enter the prayer with gratitude for all God's gifts. Ask for God's light as you review the day, that God will show you what will be most helpful to see. Let your mind's eye look back over the day, gently noticing whatever catches your attention. There is no need to remember everything. Be relaxed about it and see what comes. Notice especially moments of most life, light and energy and moments when these seemed to drain out of you. For what do you feel most thankful? For what do you feel least thankful? Breathe in the life experienced in your time of consolation. Breathe God's love into your moment of desolation. Speak to God "as one friend speaks to another" about what you have noticed in this prayer. Looking ahead, ask God for what you need to help you respond to God's call.



FRIDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord, I offer you my contentment, may those moments of calm and peace flow into everything I do.

Peter O'Sullivan SJ

Entering into Prayer

Using beads or your fingers

If you have a rosary or other prayer beads, use these to get started. If you don't have beads, count on your fingers. Call to mind three people or causes you wish to pray for. Limit it to three. Share your desires with God. Intercede for these people using the beads. Hold the first bead and say a short prayer that you know well. Repeat on another bead and so on up to 10.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Matthew 5:20-26

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

'You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgement." But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool", you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.





Image for the Day

How does this image make you feel?
Do you imagine Jesus differently? How?
Who were your teachers?

Food for Thought

We normally think of Jesus as being against the Pharisees, but curiously, in today's Gospel Jesus seems to be asking his followers to outdo them, at least in their uprightness. He says this because he wants his followers to go beyond what their religion tells them to do. It is not enough to comply with religious obligations, they must out do even those who are most pious by making the meaning of religious actions visible in their everyday lives. For us, that means that we cannot go to the sacrament of reconciliation without reconciling ourselves with other people, we cannot listen to the Word of God without putting it into practice, we cannot receive the Eucharist without wanting to build up the body of Christ in our lives too. For Jesus, religious practice is never a shortcut to holiness, it must go hand in hand with the challenging task of following him wherever he leads.

Suggestions for Prayer

Drawing to the end of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius reminds us that love shows itself more in deeds than in words. However, love does show itself in words too. The bible is full of poetry and song that seeks to express the loving relationship between God and his people. One helpful way of reflecting on your life is to take one word which expresses who God is asking you to be over the period of time, to take three determined points during the day, and at each point to ask yourself if you are disposed to living up to all that word contains. To discover your word, use the poetry of the bible to help you. This helps us to prepare ourselves for the moments which we cannot control and to know that even when we do not succeed everything we wish to in life, at least we have the disposition to allow God to work through us as he wishes.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, choose a psalm, a song or a poem from the bible and let it inspire you. Reflect on how one word describes who you need to be at this time.

Examen (review of prayer)

Feel free to try an examen from our website PathwaystoGod.org or use any of the examens already used.

At the end of your prayer you can look back and ask: Does it have something to say to you?
How does it make you feel? Imagine how God might reply.

Conversation: When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, talk to God about what has come up for you.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

SATURDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK



Daily Offering

Jesus, give your strength and encouragement to those, today, who are not well in body or mind or spirit. May they know how close you are to them.

Simon Bishop SJ

Entering into Prayer

Use this method or any other that suits you.

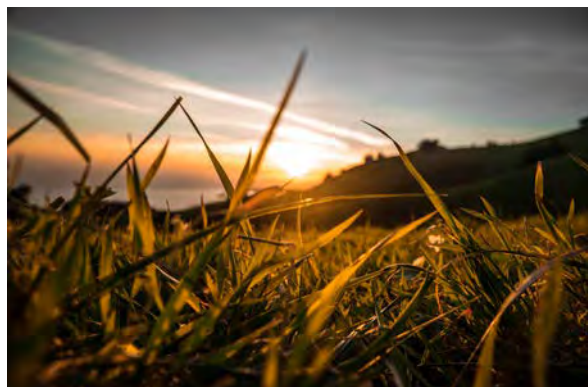
Choose a longer prayer that you know well. For example, the 'Our Father'. In time with your breathing, pray each line slowly. Only move on when something of the meaning of that phrase has landed in you.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Matthew 5:43-48

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.





Jesus teaching
by Vasilii Polenov from the Life of Christ

Image for the Day

How does this image make you feel?

What do you think Jesus might be saying to you if you were there with him?

How do you think the disciples reacted?

Food for Thought

We are taught from a very early age to hate other people. We might not like to acknowledge it, but we all learn that there are people like us, and that there are other people who are definitely not like us. Perhaps it is because they come from a different background, perhaps because they wear different clothes, perhaps because they eat differently from us. We build an invisible wall between them and us and, very politely, begin to hate them. Jesus wants nothing to do with those invisible walls because God makes no distinction between the people he has created. He has allowed his face to shine on each and every one of us without exception. To be more like Him, we must allow ourselves to be brothers and sisters of all and remove the obstacles which keep us from one another.

Suggestions for Prayer

Each one of us has been hurt at some time in the past, and for a long time afterwards, we can hold onto feelings of bitterness towards others. For some, praying with a difficult memory can help to bring healing, but only when it is the right time to do so. Do not choose a memory which is still raw or painful but one which is ready to be examined gently for what it contains. Go back to that moment in your imagination and without probing around too deeply, go through what happened. You may feel drawn to talk to the person who hurt you in order to understand why they acted the way in which they did. What were the factors in his or her upbringing or background that contributed to the incident? What else that day might have happened to provoke that outburst? Try to understand what happened from the other person's point of view. If you can, and only when you feel ready, express forgiveness and ask the Lord what you might receive as gift through this action of forgiveness.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, help someone else understand the importance of forgiveness through your words, actions or gestures.

Examen (review of prayer)

Feel free to try an examen from our website PathwaystoGod.org or use any of the examens already used.

At the end of your prayer you can look back and ask: Does it have something to say to you?

How does it make you feel? Imagine how God might reply.

Conversation: When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, talk to God about what has come up for you.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT



Daily Offering

Holy Spirit, you fill me with joy today. Help me to share that joy with the people I meet.

Stephen Noon SJ

Entering into Prayer

This is only possible if you have somewhere you can walk right now.

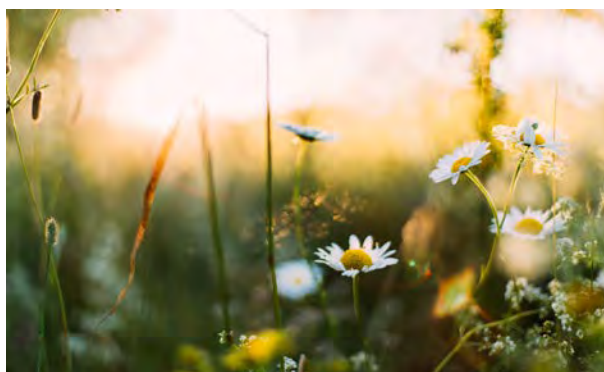
If you are in a church building, is it possible to slowly walk around it without disturbing others? If so, do so. Walk slowly with awareness of whatever comes to you: the surroundings, thoughts, feelings, how your body is.

If you are outside, do similarly. It usually helps to walk more slowly than usual and to pay attention to what is around you.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 9: 28-36

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.





The Transfiguration
by
Alexander Ivanov

Image for the Day

What does this image say to you?

How do you think it felt to be one of the disciples on that day?

How do you think the disciples reacted?

Food for Thought

The Transfiguration happens after Jesus speaks about what will happen to him on the cross and Peter's refusal to accept Jesus' warning. The sight of Jesus in his glory encourages the disciples to persevere with what will happen next. Jesus' physical appearance changes, his clothes become bright, which points towards the resurrection, and coupled with the warning beforehand, Jesus indicates that they will have to go through great strife before receiving abundant glory.

While Peter suggests making tents so they may dwell there longer, the voice from the cloud tells them all to listen to Jesus. Indicating that Jesus is their teacher, they are to learn from him and he will support them.

Suggestions for Prayer

Jesus prays beforehand, in this passage. He does this on only a few occasions in the Gospels, particularly before his arrest in the garden. Think about your prayer life. When do you do it?

What prayers work best for you? What makes you unwilling or uneasy to pray? What times can you think of where prayer has really helped you?

After Jesus warns them of the bad days ahead, they are reassured about who he really is. What things worry about the future? Think about why they worry you and tell God about them.

What can you do to prepare for whatever comes next in your life?

Go back and think about everything you learned from the readings and prayers over last week.

What did you learn and took away from them, about you, your relationship with God and other people? What would you like to thank God for? What else do you need from God. Tell God about it.

Jesus not only appeared in all his glory, showing his transcendent nature, he is also someone who was deeply human, relational and personally knows you. How does knowing Jesus' transcendent nature and his personal nature make you feel? What would you like to tell him?

How are you going to respond today?

Look back over the previous week as if you are rewinding a film. Notice how you have changed over that time. Thank God for what you have received and think about what you need from God to help you for the rest of the retreat.

Examen (review of prayer)

Feel free to try an examen from our website PathwaystoGod.org or use any of the examens already used.

When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, or at the end of your day, talk to God about what has come up for you, what went well and what didn't.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

MONDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK



Daily Offering

After planting seeds, literal or figurative, I have been waiting – thank you, Creator God, for tiny signs of life.

Geoff Te Braake SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a method of entering into prayer that you are comfortable with, or if the mood takes you, try something different. If you're finding it difficult, talk to God about the things on your mind.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Daniel 9: 4-10

I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying,

'Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

'Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. Open shame, O Lord, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

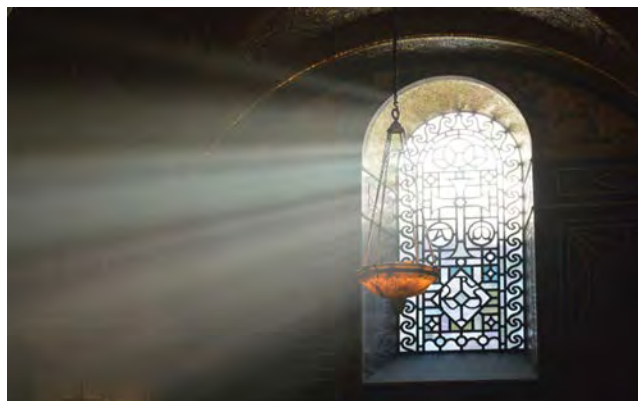




Image for the Day

What does this image say to you?

Have you ever felt like Daniel, surrounded by lions?

Who do you think are the prophets of our day?

Food for Thought

Israel's history, much like our world today, is marked by disaster and then rescue. The Jewish people lived as slaves in Egypt until they were freed by God through Moses. Centuries later, after their exile in Babylon, another disaster loomed. Israel was surrounded by danger. The Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes wanted the Jewish people to lose their identity, to not be themselves, to embrace the Greek culture, at the cost of their own heritage, law and customs. Israel had nowhere else to turn to.

Suggestions for Prayer

The Old Testament book of Daniel dates from this time, and the first reading is a prayer of sorrow made by the people who were and asking for mercy in hope of being rescued from this crisis. Israel's leaders knew that they themselves do not have all the answers. They prayed to God to help the whole people. This prayer is one of many in the Bible where everyone, the people and their leaders, ask for God's help. When you face a daunting situation, what do you pray for? The people of Israel expected their leaders to pray for them and their work, they did so knowing of the previous times where they had been rescued. When you pray, recall all the gifts and help you have received over the course of your life? Who has helped you? Where would you be without that help? The God addressed in the prayer in Daniel is above all the God of compassion, what would you like to tell God that you have not told anyone else?

How are you going to respond today?

What is weighing upon you at the moment? How might you invite God's help? If there is a person you have offended, perhaps you can consider ways to show how sorry you are?

Examen (review of prayer)

Some people find it helpful to keep a prayer journal to help them review their prayer. Keeping a reflective prayer journal can be a great aid towards growth in the spiritual life. Over time it offers a record of experiences that you have had, and what you and God have made of them as they happened. This means that looking back it becomes easier to see how and where you have changed, in outlook or in patterns of behaviour. Such changes are often so slow and almost imperceptible that they can easily go unnoticed.

One way of understanding what to record in such a journal is to ask yourself: 'What has stirred me up, has moved me, over the period that I am considering?' This puts you in touch with what Ignatius Loyola would call 'movements of spirits', and which he saw as being indicators of God at work in a person's life. What has moved you might be a conversation you have had; a book that you've read; a situation that you have encountered; a piece of work that you have done; etc.

The journal offers you a chance to explore in more detail, with God, what the happening meant to you.

TUESDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK



Daily Offering

Heavenly Father, as I begin this day in honour of Saint Joseph, husband of Mary, help me to imitate his gentle care for others and silent witness to your love. Grant me the grace to live the Gospel with my whole heart, my whole soul, my whole mind and my whole strength. I offer you this day.

[Via Click to Pray](#)

Entering into Prayer

Choose a method of entering into prayer that you are comfortable with, or if the mood takes you, try something different. If you are finding it hard to make time to pray, don't forget that God is there with you in everything you do.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:16, 18- 21, 24

Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife.





Image for the Day

How do you think it felt to be Joseph?
Have you ever felt different after a dream or time of sleep?
What would you like to say to God today?

Food for Thought

Joseph went above and beyond in protecting his family and raising a child with Mary. He was obedient three times to the warnings given to him in dreams. He accepted Mary and her child as his own; he went to great lengths to protect them, first by going to Egypt and then going to Galilee. Joseph was following the will of God long before Jesus was calling his followers to do the same. Joseph exercised a “justice that exceeded that of the scribes and the Pharisees” and treated Mary with humanity and mercy when he could have just as easily interpreted the law strictly with rigor and cruelty.

Suggestions for Prayer

Joseph did not just help Mary and Jesus at arm’s length, but remained married, accepting them, staying with them and spending the rest of his life with them. Imagine being with Mary and Jesus, staying with them. When we are invited in people’s homes, we get to really see them, and they see us, in a way that wasn’t possible before. We allow ourselves more and more to be known. What did Mary, Joseph and Jesus do together? What did they chat about? How were they when they ate together? How would you spend the day with Jesus?

Originally, Joseph wanted to informally divorce Mary, to spare her publicity. Maybe recall a time when you have been spared hurt and anxiety. How did it feel to be protected? How would you like to respond to that person now?

Joseph accepted what was asked of him by the Lord, even though it would require a lot of work and would change his life forever, yet, ultimately it was an extremely noble and life-giving act.

When have you decided to follow the more difficult path, but one that allowed you and others to flourish? How did it feel after the decision was made? How did it sit with you? Did your hope, trust and faith in others increase or decrease? Do you notice the same feelings in when you make other decisions?

How are you going to respond today?

If you are a father, today is a good day to reflect on how you can be more like Joseph. If you are not a father, perhaps you can pause to give thanks for the ‘fathers’ in your life – your own, or other father-figures and consider ways to be more like Joseph, who put his trust in God.

Examen (review of prayer)

Feel free to try an examen from our website PathwaystoGod.org or use any of the examens already used.

When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, or at the end of your day, talk to God about what has come up for you, what went well and what didn’t.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord’s Prayer/Our Father.

WEDNESDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord, I offer you my sadness, may it lead to seeing the beauty in the past, present and future.

Peter O'Sullivan SJ

Entering into Prayer

A place for prayer

Recall a place where you feel at peace ... imagine it if you can ... or in some way get a sense of it ... what do you notice about it ... let the Holy Spirit be there with you ... in the breeze or the air you breathe ...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 18: 18-20

Then they said, 'Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah—for instruction shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us bring charges against him, and let us not heed any of his words.'

Give heed to me, O Lord,
and listen to what my adversaries say!
Is evil a recompense for good?
Yet they have dug a pit for my life.
Remember how I stood before you
to speak good for them,
to turn away your wrath from them.

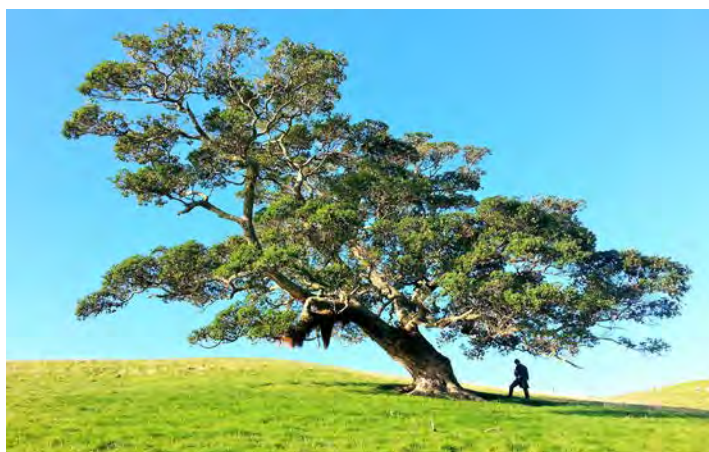




Image for the Day

How do you think it felt to be Jeremiah?

Have you ever felt ignored, ostracised or even that people plotted against you?

What would you like to say to Jesus about this?

Food for Thought

At the beginning of the book of Jeremiah, the Lord called Jeremiah and gave him a mission “to tear up and knock down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant”. He was not promised success; today, we learn of the plots his enemies made against him. He would end up languishing in a dungeon. Later legends tell us that these enemies put him to death. Many have recognised him as a predecessor of Christ. Today we listen to Jeremiah at prayer. Even though he knew that they deserved the consequences of their actions, he still understood that it was his duty to plead to God on behalf of his people.

Suggestions for Prayer

You may wish to read today’s Gospel passage (Matthew 20: 17-28) and compare Jeremiah’s request with the request that the mother of the sons of Zebedee made to Jesus in today’s Gospel. She wanted them to have places at the right and left of Christ in his kingdom. Her misguided prayer receives a rare statement from Jesus which states the purpose of his mission. He had come not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

What words or phrases from today’s readings stand out? Have you ever felt like Jeremiah, beset by difficulties, with people against you? How did you move past that feeling?

Lent is a good time to pray that we may listen to the words of Jesus, not only when they attract us, but also when they are difficult and remind us how much following him might cost as we try to change what is rotten in our society, and to build up and plant the noble and good.

In today’s prayer we may wish to consider how we can serve others. Do we plead for others in our prayer life, or think only of ourselves? Do we think only of the causes of those we know well, or do we also consider the needs of the world and the building of a fairer world?

How are you going to respond today?

During Lent, we try to raise the quantity and quality of our prayer. We should try to pray not only for ourselves, but for the whole world, and especially for those for whom prayer finds no place in life. Through prayer and generous self-giving, we place ourselves together with the distinguished company of the prophets and beside Jesus himself.

Examen (review of prayer)

When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, or at the end of your day, talk to God about what has come up for you, what went well and what didn’t.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord’s Prayer/Our Father.



THURSDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK



Daily Offering

Set me free this day my God from all that holds me back from compassion, all the fear, the hesitation and the doubt. Grant me the grace to show your caring face to one unexpected person today.

Philip Harrison SJ

Entering into Prayer

The Jesus Prayer

Listen to each phrase and then add your voice to it ... 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner ... Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner ... Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner ... continue on your own with this ... the phrase may shorten naturally ...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 16:19-31

‘**T**here was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.” But Abraham said, “Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.” He said, “Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house – for I have five brothers – that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.” Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.” He said, “No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”’



Image for the Day

How does this image make you feel?
Have you ever felt a little like Lazarus?
What would Jesus say to comfort you?
What can we learn from the story?

Food for Thought

There are many good rich people in Luke's writings: Joseph of Arimathea who buried Jesus; Zacchaeus who invited Jesus to his house and undertook to give half his wealth to the poor; women who supported Jesus and his disciples with their resources as they travelled to Jerusalem. In Philippi, the wealthy trader, Lydia, gave hospitality to Paul. But it was the poor and those on the margins who benefited from Jesus' healing ministry and his resources. However, in this Gospel, Jesus is telling an old story; warning those who were lovers of money. Dives, was rich and prosperous, but not blessed, because he failed to notice the beggar Lazarus starving at his gate; he had a heart turned aside from the Lord. The beggar Lazarus, was blessed by God, despite his sores and his hunger, since at his death, angels carried him away.

Suggestions for Prayer

As shown by the many mentions of generosity of people in the Gospel, the attitude towards wealth is more important than having it in the first place. Instead of being in his bubble, how might Dives have changed his ways if he spoken with Lazarus, gotten to know him and then gone on to help him? How would Lazarus have responded? Perhaps think about the times you have been on the receiving end of incredible generosity: how did it feel? Was there anyone who helped you, but you were unable to say thank you? If you had the chance how would you respond to them now? In Jesus' story, Dives would have walked past Lazarus many times, yet did not get to know him. What people do we regularly see or walk past every day or every week or live nearby, and have not gotten to know?

Parables are meant to make us pause and think. Jesus contrasts a rich man, who enjoys fine food and wondrous garments, with a starving beggar, whose only companions are ravenous dogs. Paradoxically the second figure receives a blessing and the first is cursed. What blessings have you received and given? What hurt have you received over time and what hurts have you inflicted on others? Tell God about those emotions and memories, those things that weigh you down.

How are you going to respond today?

Though he was rich, says Paul, he became poor. Lent is a good time to reflect on our own attitude to money and on the use that we make of it. We must not lose sight of the Lazarus who lies outside our gate. company of the prophets and beside Jesus himself.

Examen (review of prayer)

Feel free to try an examen from our website PathwaystoGod.org or use any of the examens already used.

When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, or at the end of your day, talk to God about what has come up for you, what went well and what didn't.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

FRIDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord, help me to be open to your presence in others today.

Stephen Noon SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a method of entering into prayer that you are comfortable with, or if the mood takes you, try something different. If you're finding it difficult, talk to God about the things on your mind.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, 'Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.' He answered, 'Here I am.' The man said, 'They have gone away, for I heard them say, "Let us go to Dothan."' So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. They said to one another, 'Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams.' But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, 'Let us not take his life.' Reuben said to them, 'Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him'—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers, 'What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.' And his brothers agreed.

When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.



Joseph sold by his Brothers
by
Giovanni Maria Bottala

Image for the Day

How does this image make you feel?

Have you ever felt betrayed like Joseph? What would Jesus say to comfort you?

What can we learn from the story?

Food for Thought

We find time on this day of Lent to consider the story of Joseph because for the Christian, Joseph is a figure of Christ. Stephen, the first martyr, in his long speech in the Acts of the Apostles, proves this at length. The parable which Jesus tells in today's Gospel about the wicked tenants of the vineyard who killed the agents and eventually the son of its owner, also echoes the Joseph story because Joseph's brothers plotted to kill him.

In fact, Joseph was not killed. Like Jesus in his infancy story, he was taken down to Egypt.

Through his various adventures, God kept him safe until he became the saviour of his brothers who were driven from their country by famine. All this anticipates what Christ would achieve by his death and resurrection for all humanity. And this includes each of us; with Paul, we can say that Christ loved us and gave himself for us.

Suggestions for Prayer

Today is a good day to reflect on the innocent suffering that goes on in our world, particularly in countries where government is bad and where corrupt legal systems result in miscarriages of justice. The fact that Joseph was persecuted by his own brothers, reminds us too of the problems of family breakup and divisions. The subsequent exaltation of Joseph and the resurrection of Jesus, console us that human situations are not the end of the story and encourage us to hope.

We might reflect on our own families and other communities. Have there been times of strife or enmity? Were we part of the cause or were we peacemakers, more like Reuben?

Even though Joseph was persecuted and Jesus died on the cross, both returned, but not to seek vengeance against those who killed them, but appearing in love to those around them. No matter what you have done, who in your life loves you regardless of what you have done? What would like to say to them? Looking back over your prayer over the past few days and when you have been reminded of your faults and failings, how does it feel that they love you no matter what?

Knowing that others love you no matter what, what commitments would you like to make in your life or what commitments would you like to make efforts to keep?

How are you going to respond today?

We pray for all those who struggle on behalf of the innocent and we pray for all those unjustly condemned or punished, mindful of Jesus who, though innocent, accepted death.

Examen (review of prayer)

When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, or at the end of your day, talk to God about what has come up for you, what went well and what didn't.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

SATURDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK



Daily Offering

Jesus, help me to slow down and reach out to others today.

Stephen Noon SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a method of entering into prayer that you are comfortable with, or if the mood takes you, try something different. If you're finding it difficult, talk to God about the things on your mind.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate. 'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"



Image for the Day

The Prodigal Son
Washington National Cathedral
by Heinz Warneke

How does this image make you feel?

Spend some time imagining the loving father's embrace today.

Food for Thought

In his parable about the father who had two sons, Jesus gave a portrait of this God of faithfulness and mercy. The father was watching out for his unfaithful son; he ran to greet him; he refused to allow him to complete his speech of repentance. Instead he rewarded him with a robe, a ring and sandals, and put on a lavish banquet as well. But his other son had been far too busy in the fields to watch out for his brother, so the father had to go off in search of him, and when he found him, was treated more like an employer than a father. This elder son had to be cajoled to return to the family to which he belonged. We still do not know whether he went into the banquet and shared its joy.

Suggestions for Prayer

Lent invites us to check out how we view God and sin. Do you repent like the younger brother, or by a spontaneous sympathy for the elder, do we resist the appeal of the father to take our place at the banquet of the kingdom and to share in the joy of the Father?

Take a few moments to become still and quiet and ask God to work through your imagination as you pray with the passage about the Prodigal Son.

Ask God for what you want, perhaps "To know you more clearly, love you more dearly, follow you more nearly".

Read through the text two or three times until you are thoroughly familiar with the story.

Then let the scene gradually build up in your mind's eye.

Take your time, see everything that is around, maybe hear the celebrations or sounds of people working in the fields, feel the dust beneath your feet, smell the fattened calf being cooked, or taste the husks.

From what angle are you watching the scene in your mind's eye?

Take your own place in the unfolding scene. You may start as a bystander, or one of the central characters, or simply enter into the action as yourself. Let yourself be drawn naturally into conversation with one or other of the participants, or with Jesus after the story has finished.

Stay in the scene for as long as you have chosen to, and then draw the prayer to a close.

How are you going to respond today?

Knowing all the love that God has you, despite everything you have done, is there someone in your life who has disappointed you? Can you forgive them and reach out to them? Perhaps you, like the older brother, feel resentment that another person is unjustly favoured. Can you let go of feelings of bitterness and resentment and learn to be loving and merciful like the Lord?

Examen (review of prayer)

When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, or at the end of your day, talk to God about what has come up for you, what went well and what didn't.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT



Daily Offering

Dear Lord, I really don't feel like praying today; but I'll give it a go.

Nick King SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a method of entering into prayer that you are comfortable with, or if the mood takes you, try something different. If you're finding it difficult, talk to God about the things on your mind.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 4: 5-42 (abridged) - Alternative Gospel

Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar. Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'What? You are a Jew, and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?'—Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied, 'If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you: Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.' 'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered, 'and the well is deep: how could you get this living water?' Jesus replied: 'Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again; but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside them, welling up to eternal life.' 'Sir,' said the woman, 'give me some of that water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water.' 'Go and call your husband,' said Jesus to her. The woman answered, 'I have no husband'. He said to her, 'You are right to say, "I have no husband"; for although you have had five, the one you have now is not your husband. You spoke the truth there.' 'I see you are a prophet, sir,' said the woman. '... I know that Messiah – that is, Christ – is coming; and when he comes he will tell us everything.' 'I who am speaking to you,' said Jesus, 'I am he.'

At this point the disciples returned, and were surprised to find him speaking to a woman. The woman put down her water jar and hurried back to the town to tell the people, 'Come and see a man who has told me everything I ever did; I wonder if he is the Christ?'

Many Samaritans of that town believed in Jesus on the strength of the woman's testimony; and they begged him to stay with them. When he spoke to them many more came to believe; and they said to the woman, 'Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world.'



Image for the Day

How does this image make you feel?
 Spend some time conversing with Jesus today.

Food for Thought

Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman. Samaritans were Jews who interbred with foreigners brought by the Assyrian conquerors in 722BC to settle the land with loyal inhabitants. Jews considered Samaritans and their possessions ritually unclean. Jacob's well still exists. It is not, as were many other wells, a cistern filled with collected rain water that became stale and polluted in hot weather. It is fed by underground springs, so the water remains fresh and cool. People called the water from this well 'living water'. As well as the literal meaning of this phrase, it is an Old Testament expression meaning 'divine revelation' or vitality. In St John's Gospel, it indicates the Holy Spirit. Most women would collect water in the cool early morning, but Jesus and the woman meet in the midday heat. The woman may have avoided the earlier time, feeling ostracised because of her past. Jesus ignores traditional social barriers where men spoke directly in a public place only to women who were blood relatives. Jesus counteracts societal divisions: gender discrimination, ritual purity, religious hostility, the moral stigma attached to many marriages. Jesus's gift of life is open to everyone.

Suggestions for Prayer

As I begin my prayer, I try to become still and quiet in the presence of God. I take all the time I need; God welcomes me in love just as I am – there is no need to rush. I ask the Holy Spirit to help me.

I read the Gospel passage again slowly, perhaps several times, noticing the details of the encounter between the woman and Jesus. Perhaps I try to imagine myself sitting by the well in the quiet noontide heat that surrounds the weary, thirsty Jesus, and the Samaritan woman with her empty water jar. I hear their words, notice their tone of voice. I see how Jesus wins her trust and awakens her thirst for another kind of water.

What does living water mean for me? I let Jesus look at me and speak with me. I allow myself to be surprised that Jesus asks me for something to satisfy his thirst. What can I offer? What would I like Jesus to offer me in my tiredness, in my seeking; for what am I thirsting ...? I speak with Jesus. I wait before him, trusting that he knows my deepest needs. After a while, I end my time of prayer by thanking the Lord for his presence with me.

How are you going to respond today?

The woman is surprised by her encounter with Jesus, and the town dwellers come to believe in Jesus on the strength of the woman's testimony. Today may be a day to notice how God becomes present to me in my daily life in surprising, unexpected ways. How might I be able to share this Good News with others who are thirsty and searching for meaning in their lives?

Examen (review of prayer)

When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, or at the end of your day, talk to God about what has come up for you, what went well and what didn't.



MONDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK



Daily Offering

Holy Spirit, help me to see your surprises today and to welcome them with open hands.

Simon Bishop SJ

Entering into Prayer

Today is the Feast of the Annunciation, so you might like to begin your prayer with the 'Hail Mary' or another prayer connected to Mary, the Mother of God.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 1: 26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus.

He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,' the angel answered, 'And the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary, 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.



The Annunciation
by Henry Ossawa Tanner



There is a Praying with Art Video featuring this painting:

pathwaystogod.org/praying-art

Pathways
TO GOD

Image for the Day

How does this image make you feel?

Spend some time meditating on this scene today and Mary's 'Yes'.

Food for Thought

From the earliest recorded history, the feast of the Annunciation has been celebrated on 25 March. In writings as early as AD 240 it is suggested that Creation, the Incarnation and the death of Jesus took place on this date. Similar calculations are found in the early and later Middle Ages. The dates of the feasts of the Annunciation and of Christmas owe their origin to these writings.

A betrothal in Jewish Law is the first part of the marriage ceremony, and betrothed couples are considered man and wife, joined in a spiritual union. Later, marked by a second ceremony, the husband and wife come to live together and their marriage is consummated. Mary would already have regarded Joseph as her husband. To become pregnant in such circumstances risked being accused of adultery, for which the penalty was death. We witness Mary's faith and courage in accepting to conceive a child by cooperating with the power and plan of God – a plan that cannot be fulfilled without her.

Suggestions for Prayer

I read this familiar story, asking the Holy Spirit to show me what it is that God wishes to reveal to me today. Then, putting the text aside, I try to be present in the scene, watching the story unfold in my imagination or, if this is difficult for me, describing it as if to a small child. I listen to the words spoken by the angel and by Mary; I notice their reactions – Mary's surprise and confusion, the angel's joy and conviction; Mary's acceptance. Perhaps I speak to Mary or to the angel about what is happening. The angel tells Mary, 'Do not be afraid ... Listen!' Are there areas in my life now where I am fearful, where I need to listen and to trust more fully in God? Or can I see places or times where God has given me courage to listen and to persevere? I share these with the Father or Jesus or Mary. The angel tells Mary of the son she will conceive and, while Mary is focused on the practicalities of how this might happen, the angel promises the Holy Spirit's overshadowing presence. I take time simply to rest quietly in the presence of God, setting aside for a while my concerns and activities for today, which I entrust to the Lord.

Can I pray with Mary, accepting to be God's servant, or is this challenging for me? Perhaps there are others, like Elizabeth, who will help me? I ask for whatever grace I need.

How are you going to respond today?

As I go through today, I may like to notice whether there are times when I am held back from serving God our Lord more fully by my fears, my doubts or uncertainties. Where I perceive this and without self-recrimination, I simply offer these times to God who loves me just as I am, asking for the grace of Mary's courage and faith. Where my trust in God is strong today, I rejoice and thank him for inspiring this faith in me.

Examen (review of prayer)

When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, or at the end of your day, talk to God about what has come up for you, what went well and what didn't.



TUESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK



Daily Offering

Let me recall some of the good memories that I have today, Lord, the memories that sustain me on my journey through life. I offer each of them to you with my thanks.

Paul Nicholson SJ

Entering into Prayer

Before I read the psalm, I settle down in my favourite place; maybe outside, or maybe indoors surrounded by things that help me come to quiet: a candle, a cross, a favourite picture or icon. I focus on my breathing, without changing it. The air I breathe is God's special gift to me. Gradually, I try to leave all my everyday concerns behind.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Psalm 24 (25), vv 4-10, 14 (Grail version)

R. / Lord, make me know your ways.

Lord, make me know your ways.

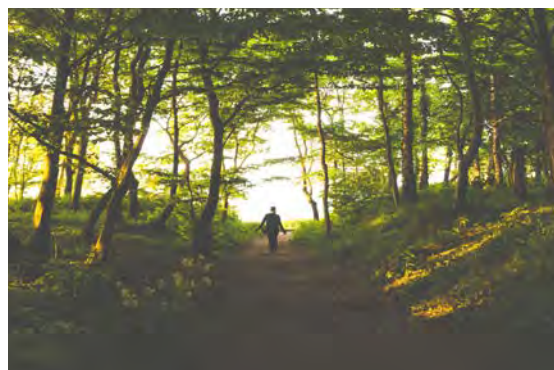
Lord, teach me your paths.

Make me walk in your truth, and teach me:
for you are God my saviour. (R.)

Remember your mercy, Lord,
and the love you have shown from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth,
because of your goodness, O Lord. (R.)

The Lord is good and upright.
He shows the path to those who stray,
he guides the humble in the right path;
he teaches his way to the poor. (R.)





The Hilly Path, Ville d'Avray
by Alfred Sisley

Image for the Day

What do you see in this image?

What do you feel about the path before you? Where is God leading you?

Food for Thought

The text we are praying today is one of the psalms; texts that we know Jesus prayed. He probably knew them by heart. Perhaps I can picture his mother Mary teaching him the words. How does that make me feel?

The structure of this psalm is that of an acrostic. In the Hebrew version each verse started with a different letter following the order of the alphabet. It made it easier for people to memorise.

In this extract, the psalmist addresses the Lord personally in the first two stanzas and then speaks about God's qualities and work in the third, perhaps addressing people in the synagogue. The key themes are a surrender to God and an entreaty for him to show, teach and lead us in his ways.

The psalmist begs the Lord to forget his past, and in his goodness to remember him. Praying this psalm can be a useful preparation to the sacrament of reconciliation.

Suggestions for Prayer

If circumstances allow, I read the text out loud, or on my breath. I listen to its rhythm. I stop when I feel drawn and ponder. Maybe I am struck by the way the psalmist speaks to the Lord in the first two stanzas. How do I speak to him?

I reflect on my journey so far. Has it been easy to follow the way of the Lord or have I needed him to guide my steps on his path?

Perhaps the Spirit leads me to focus on the 'sins of my youth'. Was I able to speak to the Lord about them at the time? How have things changed now? With hindsight, in what ways have his mercy and his love helped me to grow? How has God's faithful love shaped my life?

Before concluding my prayer, I thank God for his steadfast love and ask for forgiveness and healing for my failures to love. I might him how grateful I am for his gentle guidance every time I have strayed away from his path.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, perhaps I can look around me and discover the 'humble' ones. I ask the Lord to show me how in simple, practical ways, I can show them his mercy, love and faithfulness.

Examen (review of prayer)

Hopefully you are in a habit now of reviewing your prayer, but if you find this difficult, you might find the audio examens on our website useful (<https://www.pathwaystogod.org/my-prayer-life/examen>).

You could also write about your prayer in a prayer journal.



WEDNESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord Christ, Alpha and Omega, may my life centre on you and be fulfilled in you.

Tom Shufflebotham SJ

Entering into Prayer

As previously, find a way to enter into a prayerful frame of mind.

“Before I read the scripture, I focus on today: ‘Lord, what do you want to show me today?’ You may find it helpful to read the text two or even three times...

TODAY’S SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 4: 1, 5-9

Moses said to the people, ‘And now, Israel, take notice of the laws and customs that I teach you today, and observe them, that you may have life and may enter and take possession of the land that the Lord the God of your fathers is giving you. See, as the Lord my God has commanded me, I teach you the laws and customs that you are to observe in the land you are to enter and make your own. Keep them, observe them, and they will demonstrate to the peoples your wisdom and understanding. When they come to know of all these laws they will exclaim, ‘No other people is as wise and prudent as this great nation’. And indeed, what great nation is there that has its gods so near as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call to him? And what great nation is there that has laws and customs to match this whole Law that I put before you today?’

‘But take care what you do and be on your guard. Do not forget the things your eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your heart all the days of your life; rather, tell them to your children and to your children’s children.’

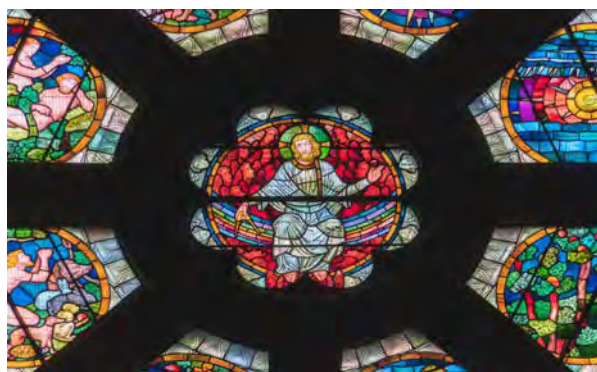




Image for the Day

How do you feel about this image?

Were you taught the Ten Commandments by other people, or did you read them in scripture?

Do you pass them on to others in your life? Talk to God about that.

Moses and the Ten Commandments
by
Rembrandt

Food for Thought

As a younger man, Moses gave God several reasons why he wasn't remotely suitable to lead the people of Israel. But in today's reading (part of a monumental 'sermon' that occupies the whole of Deuteronomy), we hear him gathering up some of the strands of his lifelong mission with great conviction.

Moses, now very aged, has brought the Israelites to the very last leg of their forty-year journey through the wilderness. They will soon reach the land that God has promised them as their very own, even though Moses himself will not go with them. But first they are urged to remember and pass on all the details of the Law that God has revealed to them through Moses. These laws and customs will give you life, Moses tells them. They will enable you to enter the promised land, to know that God is close to you, and lead others to see that you are a great, wise nation. Hang on to these laws; live by them; keep them in your heart; teach them to your grandchildren: they are for you, today!

Suggestions for Prayer

I read and reread the text slowly, reverently. I notice any word or phrase that seems to 'light up' for me, and allow it to sink deeper.

Perhaps I picture Moses standing high up on the Plain of Moab near the River Jordan, addressing this great crowd that he has led through the wilderness. I may choose to stand with them, sensing that God is very close, watching over his chosen people ... watching over me. He is there if I call to him ... and if I need to, I call on him now, with confidence.

Moses is still revered as one of history's great leaders. Who are the important leader figures in my own life, or who have they been? Perhaps I think particularly of those who have guided me through a period of wandering, or who have helped me 'arrive' at a certain place. I give thanks to God for his gift of these people.

Moses speaks of the Law not in terms of tedious rules and regulations, but as a God-given gift that brings life and wisdom. I ponder this. What are the 'laws and customs' that enable good things in my own life ... in others' lives ... and what are those that bring challenges? I speak to the Lord of this ... and allow space to listen to him. Moses reminds God's people of their responsibility to future generations. What are the things within my heart that I most wish to pass on to others? I ask the Lord for any grace I need.

As I end my prayer, I thank God for all that gives us life, and ask for the wisdom and discernment that I need to follow Jesus this day.

How are you going to respond today?

Today I might take time to pray especially for those in positions of leadership who have featured in the news this week, especially those who occupy prominent positions on the world stage. I give thanks for all who try to make good laws and live by good customs that bring life to others, especially those whose lives are marked by suffering.

Examen (review of prayer)

When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, or at the end of your day, talk to God about what has come up for you, what went well and what didn't.



THURSDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK



Daily Offering

Holy Spirit, help me to hear your voice in the all the sounds and silences of today.

Simon Bishop SJ

Entering into Prayer

Listen to the sounds you can hear around you.

If you are indoors, allow yourself to notice sounds without and within the room.

Identify each sound as you are able.

Gently, slowly, without judgement, focus your attention on each one.

Return your attention back to where you were before.

If a sudden sound or distraction occurs, acknowledge it and name it. Don't try to ignore it.

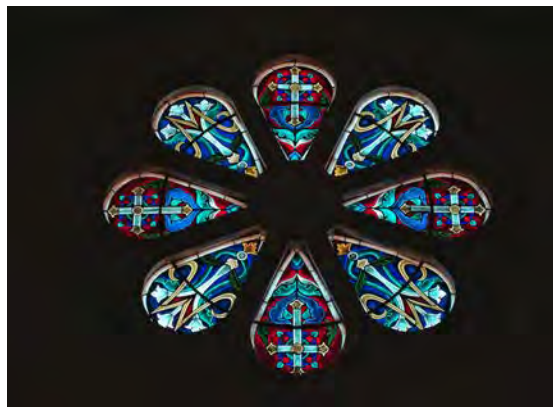
When ready, become aware of the sound of your own breathing.

Through the sounds, be attentive to the invitation of God, who dwells in creation...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 7: 23-28

These were my orders: Listen to my voice, then I will be your God and you shall be my people. Follow right to the end the way that I mark out for you, and you will prosper. But they did not listen, they did not pay attention; they followed the dictates of their own evil hearts, refused to face me, and turned their backs on me. From the day your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until today, day after day I have persistently sent you all my servants the prophets. But they have not listened to me, have not paid attention; they have grown stubborn and behaved worse than their ancestors. You may say all these words to them: they will not listen to you; you may call them: they will not answer. So tell them this, 'Here is the nation that will not listen to the voice of the Lord its God nor take correction. Sincerity is no more, it has vanished from their mouths.'



Jeremiah
by
Enrico Glicenstein



Image for the Day

How do you feel about this image?

Have you ever felt that others did not listen to you?

Perhaps you are aware that you do not always listen to God?

Talk to Jesus about that.

Food for Thought

The prophet Jeremiah lived in very turbulent political times. During his life, Babylonia succeeded Assyria as the dominant power in the Middle East. Jeremiah was a witness to the return to worship of the Lord, instituted by the Judean king Josiah; after Josiah's death, Jeremiah also witnessed the return of many to paganism. Yet true to his Covenant – 'I will be your God and you shall be my people' (Leviticus 26:13) – the Lord sends Jeremiah to help the people in Judah. What can this difficult political situation tell us about our world today? Are there parallels to be drawn? Is the Lord continuing to be true to his covenant to us? Who are the prophets he sends us?

Suggestions for Prayer

What immediate reactions come to me as I read Jeremiah's words? Maybe I feel I have nothing in common with these ancient peoples, or think that they received their just desserts for not listening to the Lord. Or perhaps I respond in another way? I acknowledge my feelings and thoughts. I try not to judge them. Perhaps I feel prompted to look at myself and at the way I respond to what seems to me to be the will of God. Do I listen to him? When in the last few days have I felt his presence in my life?

In the evening, I might want to reflect on my day and bring to mind the times when I felt him close to me, but also the times when I turned my back or did not want to accept that he was near.

For these times, I give thanks or express my sorrow.

I look around me ... at my family, my work colleagues, my community, my church. How far do they listen to the Lord? How could following 'the way marked out for them' help them to make a positive difference?

After a few moments of pondering, I turn to the Lord and tell him what is in my heart, what comforts me, what I find difficult. I ask for his help, confident that he loves and understands me as I am. I listen to him. I conclude my prayer with a slow, reverent sign of the cross.

How are you going to respond today?

Today, I might want to be more consciously aware of the presence of God in me and around me by listening to others with a sincere heart and paying attention to their needs. My desire will be not to turn my back to the Lord, but to follow him more closely and love him more nearly day by day.

Examen (review of prayer)

Sit or stand and let God look at you. Breathe in God's love. Breathe out into God how you are right now. Ask for God's light as you look over the day. What makes you glad? Breathe it in.

What makes you sad? Let yourself feel it. Do not be afraid. Breathe in God's love.

What do you need to help you? Let God know.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit

As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, Amen.



FRIDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK



Daily Offering

Father, as day breaks, open my heart to those who I will meet today so that they may glimpse in me the heart of your Son.

Philip Harrison SJ

Entering into Prayer

Listen to the sounds you can hear around you.

If you are indoors, allow yourself to notice sounds without and within the room.

Identify each sound as you are able.

Gently, slowly, without judgement, focus your attention on each one.

Return your attention back to where you were before.

If a sudden sound or distraction occurs, acknowledge it and name it. Don't try to ignore it.

When ready, become aware of the sound of your own breathing.

Through the sounds, be attentive to the invitation of God, who dwells in creation...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Mark 12: 28-34

One of the scribes came up to Jesus and put a question to him, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?' Jesus replied, 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.' The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true: that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice.' Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'. And after that no one dared to question him any more.





Image for the Day

How do you feel about the idea of loving your neighbour?

What helps you follow this commandment?

What if anything hinders you from loving your neighbour? Talk to Jesus about that.

Food for Thought

In today's Gospel we witness an unexpected encounter between Jesus and a scribe – a man expert in all the traditional complexities of Jewish Law. These two very different teachers face one other. Do we expect their conversation to be hostile? If so, we might be surprised by the level of mutual respect. The scribe wants Jesus's opinion on a really burning question. Of the hundreds of commandments to be obeyed, which is the greatest? Jesus seems to hear a deeper searching behind this enquiry, and his answer leads this learned man to much greater understanding.

The first commandment (the Shema Yisrael, still prayed daily by orthodox Jews) is that we love God as our one and only Lord, with every fibre of our being, says Jesus. And it is paired with a second – that we try to love others in the way we'd like to be loved ourselves.

The scribe now begins to see: it is not the details of Temple rituals and sacrifices that matter, but loving. And Jesus encourages him warmly, for however outwardly different this man may seem from the disciples, Jesus knows his heart is very close to God.

Suggestions for Prayer

I take time to read this short passage slowly, reverently. Perhaps I imagine myself present in the Temple as this conversation between two respected leaders takes place ... the learned scribe questioning the young itinerant preacher. I look from one face to the other, noticing their expressions; what passes between them; the different nuances in their speech. What has drawn this man to Jesus? What is it that draws me?

Jesus has no difficulty cutting through the raft of legal complexity to the real essentials of being a disciple. It's all about trying to love in the way that Jesus loves. I ponder this bedrock of our life with Christ Jesus.

Perhaps I think of times when I haven't found it easy to love God single-mindedly, or I've been more concerned with legalities or details. I speak to the Lord of this from my heart, remembering that love is God's gift to me; it is not my own work. Now I hear Jesus speaking about loving my neighbour as myself.

Who in my own life has helped me to experience and learn about love, or led me to know that I am loved? Gratefully, I bring them to the Lord. Who are my neighbours, including people who may seem 'different' from me, or hold very different views? I ponder what it means to love them.

I ask the Lord to help me see his own face in all those around me.

As I draw my prayer to a close, I give thanks anew for God's great gift of love, and ask for the grace to respond to his invitation to love ever more deeply and generously this Lent.

How are you going to respond today?

Today I might learn from the scribe by trying to come to any conversation I have, including unexpected ones, with openness and generosity. I ask to be particularly aware of God's presence, and that God might deepen the gift of his love within me and all those I encounter today.

Examen (review of prayer)

Let God look at you with love. What are you doing for Lent this year? How is that working out? What's going well? And less well? What do you need from God to help you? Talk with God about your Lent. Be still in God's gaze again.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.



SATURDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK



Daily Offering

Breath of God, speak within me today so that with my words I may create harmony and peace with those you send me. Let not a violent word pass through my lips.

Phil Harrison SJ

Entering into Prayer

Beginning at the top of your head and passing down through the body to the feet be attentive to each part of the body in turn.

Gently focus in turn on each part ... head ... face ... eyes ... neck ... shoulders etc.

For each part, allow a few moments to become aware of what is being felt, without making judgement upon it. Move on in turn until you have given attention to your whole body.

Then consider your whole self you as a person made in God's likeness ... you in whom God chooses to dwell...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 18: 9-14

Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else, 'Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, 'I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of mankind, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get.' The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner'. This man, I tell you, went home again at rights with God; the other did not. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted.'





Image for the Day

What do you see in this image? Does it remind you of anyone or any group of people? How might it help you reflect on what it means to be virtuous? Talk to Jesus about that.

Food for Thought

Today Jesus speaks of our response to God through the gift of prayer. A little earlier in Luke's Gospel the disciples had begged Jesus, 'Lord, teach us to pray!'. So now Jesus continues their education with a witty account of two very different characters who pray in very different ways. Outwardly the Pharisee prides himself on being a paragon of virtue, outdoing everyone else by fasting and paying tithes at a level well beyond what the Law requires. But he also knows just how marvellous he is. His wordy prayer is completely focused on himself and he dismisses others out of hand. By contrast, the scorned tax collector can think of nothing but his own unworthiness. His short prayer is full of remorse, but it comes from deep within his heart. He pleads with the Lord and trusts that he'll be heard – and he goes home vindicated.

What matters, Jesus seems to say, is that if we come before God just as we are, in complete honesty and trust, we will discover God's generous heart. Regardless of our failings and shortcomings, here in prayer we meet the God who yearns only to love us.

Suggestions for Prayer

I might like to spend a moment pondering how my own prayer is going this Lent. I imagine Jesus telling this parable himself, perhaps with a touch of humour. I picture the Pharisee, proud to be in the public gaze, and the tax collector cowering behind him. What do I notice about the way each of them prays? Perhaps I take a moment to notice where my own attention is focused ... towards God, or inwards at myself? I ask the Lord to gently direct my gaze, and in turn to help me be aware of his loving gaze upon me.

The Pharisee spends much time making comparisons, though it gets him nowhere. I reflect on how I regard others. Do I tend instinctively to judge, or do I find it more natural to respond with compassion and tolerance? I speak to the Lord about this, asking for any help I need.

The tax collector, in contrast, approaches God with great sorrow. Trusting in God's love and mercy, I share with him anything that troubles me, or I know troubles someone else I know. I may like to make my own the 'Jesus Prayer' inspired by the tax collector's own words: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me'. As I end my time of reflection, I give thanks that my prayer is never just my own work, but the gift of the living God who loves me enough to die for me.

How are you going to respond today?

Today might be a day to put aside any concerns I have about praying in the 'right way', or with the right words. Rather than focusing on my achievements or failings, I simply offer myself with an open heart, trusting in the God who loves me and yearns to meet me just as I am.

Examen (review of prayer)

With God: With God I review my day

Thanks: Where do I find joy?

Sorry: Where do I find sadness?

Please: What do I ask from God?

Amen



FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT



Daily Offering

Bless this day, Lord Jesus. May all I think or do or say be in your Holy Name.

Tony Nye SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate. 'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."'



Image for the Day

The Prodigal Son
by
Rembrandt

What do you see in this image? How does it make you feel?
Does this parable help your image of God, or is it a hindrance?
Talk to Jesus about that.

Food for Thought

Today's Gospel might best be described as the parable of the generous father and his two lost sons. A son who left home and returned and another son who was always "at home" – or was he? The father divides his property equally between the two sons, keeping nothing for himself – literally: "he divided his life between them." The father represents God's boundless grace, and the two sons embody the different attitudes that prevent us from experiencing God's abundance. The younger son is lost in his wasteful lifestyle, and the older son is lost in self-righteousness. The younger son thinks of himself as a servant, a sinner, who can never again be accepted as a son. He makes the first move, turning around and moving toward the father. That's all he needed to do. The father's joy in response creates a scene of overwhelming love and forgiveness. Though the son seems identified with the stigma of his sin, the fine robe, the ring, the sandals and the feast all proclaim the lost sinner as the father's true son.

The older son has been "out in the field." But the father who ran towards one lost son now comes out after the other lost son. The older son complains, "All these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders." He doesn't see himself as a son but as his father's servant who obeys his commands. Rather than living the joyful life of a beloved son, he has become a self-pitying victim, filled with bitter resentment.

Suggestions for Prayer

As you read the parable, is there a phrase that speaks directly to you? Place yourself in the situation of each son, and consider how you respond to the generous love of the father. Jesus' parable addresses two groups mentioned at the start. The tax collectors and sinners are mirrored in the attitude of the younger son. The Pharisees and scribes are mirrored in the mindset of the older son. Yet the parable is addressed to us all. We are all lost children who have been found by our Father. Do we have a slave mentality that deprives us of joy in our Father's presence? Do we identify ourselves with our past sins and so are unable to accept that we are really sons and daughters, or do we follow orders with obedience and can't believe that the Father's love is unmerited and free?

What prevents you from experiencing and celebrating the abundant love of God? To experience the Father's forgiveness, all we have to do is turn back in the direction of God. We never have to crawl back or make up for our past. When we turn back, God's love meets us more than halfway.

How are you going to respond today?

In what way does God want you to turn back to him this Lent? Imagine the ecstatic joy of the father who spotted his son walking towards him. Place yourself in that scene and savour God's wildly joyful love for you.

Examen (review of prayer)

When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, or at the end of your day, talk to God about what has come up for you, what went well and what didn't.

MONDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord I offer you my generosity. Let me never see a need without doing something about it.

Chris Brolly SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 4:43-54

When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honour in the prophet's own country). When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival.

Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, 'Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.' The official said to him, 'Sir, come down before my little boy dies.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your son will live.' The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, 'Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.' The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.' So he himself believed, along with his whole household. Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.





Image for the Day

What do you see in this image?

How does this story and picture help you reflect on faith, humility and healing?

Food for Thought

In today's Gospel we hear of an official at the court of Herod Antipas. As you read the Gospel, try to put yourself in the official's shoes. He hears about Jesus and sets off for Cana, a day's walk, about 20 miles uphill, to ask Jesus to come down to Capernaum to heal his dying son. Even though he is a royal official with authority, he is powerless to prevent his son from dying. In his need he walks about 20 miles uphill to ask a carpenter for help! What does that tell you about this official? He believes – or at least hopes – that Jesus has the power to heal his son.

The official does not respond to Jesus' words about signs and wonders, he has only one thing on his mind, the life of his child. He accepts Jesus' word that his son is healed, even though this is not something he can immediately verify. How do you think he felt? There is no visible sign or wonder to testify to a healing; there is only Jesus' word that his son lives. The official believes Jesus' word and acts on it by going home.

When the master's son unexpectedly gets well, his servants set out for Cana to tell him. They meet him on the road as he is returning home and give him the good news that his son would live. The official does not express surprise that his son has recovered from his life-threatening illness, for he believed Jesus' word. Instead he asks when it occurred. They tell him and the father realizes that the boy recovered at the very time that Jesus said he would. This confirms for the official what he had taken on faith.

The official is not named and does not reappear in this Gospel, yet he is held up as a model of faith. Even though he wanted Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son, he accepted Jesus' word that his son would live, despite there being nothing to immediately verify it. He acted on Jesus' word, going back to Capernaum. He realized the significance of Jesus' restoration of life to his son; he came to believe that Jesus is the source of life. He shared his belief with those closest to him, bringing his whole household to faith.

Suggestions for Prayer

Have you had faith-testing moments in your life? How did you respond? How is the official a model of faith for you? What kind of faith are you being called to this Lent? Today? How do you feel about sharing your faith with others? Ask Jesus for what you most need at this present time.

How are you going to respond today?

Consider a way in which you can show or share your faith today. If you can, reach out to others whose faith in God (or other people) may be tested, to strengthen them.

Examen (review of prayer)

At the end of your prayer you can look back and ask: Does it have something to say to you? How does it make you feel? Imagine how God might reply.

Conversation: When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, talk to God about what has come up for you. End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

TUESDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord, I offer my work today. May it help me come closer to you.

Stephen Noon SJ

Entering into Prayer

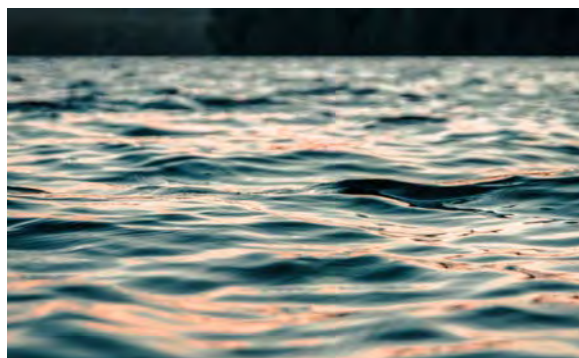
Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 5:1-3, 5-16

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Bethesda, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids - blind, lame, and paralysed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be made well?' The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.' Jesus said to him, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, 'It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.' But he answered them, 'The man who made me well said to me, "Take up your mat and walk."' They asked him, 'Who is the man who said to you, "Take it up and walk"?' Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.' The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath.





The Pool at Bethesda
19th century sketch

Image for the Day

What do you see in this image?

How does this story help you reflect on your need for, or experience of, healing?

Food for Thought

The name Bethesda is traditionally interpreted to mean “house of mercy”, but a reference to this pool in the Dead Sea Scrolls suggests it probably means “place of two reservoirs.” Recent excavations revealed two pools side-by-side, with five porticoes along their sides and between them. One pool was a ritual bath for the many Jews who came to Jerusalem for feasts and who needed to ritually bathe to purify themselves in order to be able to enter the inner precincts of the Temple. This pool was periodically filled by a flow of water from the other pool, which may account for the water being “stirred up.” Some believed that the first person into the pool after its waters were stirred would be healed. Many ill, blind, lame and crippled people came to the porticoes in the hope of healing. Their infirmities made it difficult for them to work and support themselves. They were reduced to begging from pilgrims.

Imagine Jesus coming to this place near the temple and he meets people with chronic illness, the ones that the temple did not want. The gospel does not tell us why he came to the pool, we’re simply told that Jesus saw a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years lying there. That’s is a long time to be incapacitated – virtually a lifetime in terms of life expectancy at that time. The man was one of a “large number” of afflicted lying there, but Jesus focuses on him. Jesus knew he had been ill for a long time. When he saw him and knew his condition he said to him, “Do you want to be well again?”

You might say “what an odd question! Of course those who are ill want to get well, don’t they?” But Jesus asked the question knowing he had been ill for a long time. Had the man lived with his condition for so long that it had become part of his who he was, and a life free from his infirmity almost inconceivable? Was a different life, with the adjustments it entailed, a daunting prospect?

Suggestions for Prayer

There is a sense in which Jesus asks every one of us, Do you want to be well? Do I want to be freed of the sins and addictions that I have accommodated for so long that they are now part of my makeup? Do I want to leave my old self behind and become a new person?

How are you going to respond today?

For Jesus, nobody is unchangeable. He has great respect for each of us and believes we can always grow in freedom and in faith. Sometimes we prefer to remain as we are rather than change for the better. We fear what the change will bring, or we have grown comfortable with our “illness.” Imagine Jesus asking you, right now, “Do you want to be well?” What is your response?

Examen (review of prayer)

At the end of your prayer you can look back and ask: Does it have something to say to you? How does it make you feel? Imagine how God might reply.

Conversation: When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, talk to God about what has come up for you. End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord’s Prayer/Our Father.

WEDNESDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK



Daily Offering

Jesus, may my life today be drawn from you, the Vine: may I live and love as you would wish.

Tom Shufflebotham SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 5:17-30

But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is still working, and I also am working.' For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.

'Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

'I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.



Image for the Day

Do you identify with this image of Jesus, or do you see him in a different way? Talk to Jesus about that. Perhaps spend a few moments contemplating Jesus as you see him.

Food for Thought

Jesus' relationship to God was threatening to those who saw God differently. Jesus carries out works on the Sabbath and speaks of God as a loving father with whom he relates closely, confidently. He says to those who accuse him of making himself equal to God "My Father goes on working, and so do I."

Jesus says: "the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing." In the society of the time, sons normally took up the work of their fathers, whether it was farming or fishing, carpentry or another trade. There were no trade schools. The only way a son could learn how to carry on his father's work was by observing what he did and imitating him. Similarly, Jesus the Son "can do only what he sees the Father doing." Jesus does not act independently. Jesus sees his Father as no one else can and knows what he is doing. Jesus does only what his Father does and in today's reading he spells this out with a number of statements that begin with the word "for." Look out for them. What do they tell you about the relationship of Jesus and the Father? Whatever his Father is doing, Jesus is likewise doing. There is a difference, though, between any son imitating his father and Jesus doing what his Father is doing. While a son may observe his father and then imitate his actions, Jesus and his Father are so intimately united to each other that they act simultaneously in what they do. The Father acts through his Son; the works of the Son are the work of his Father. Jesus goes on to say that he will show works "that will astonish you" and that he has come to bring us "from death to life."

Suggestions for Prayer

Notice Jesus' striking statement "My Father goes on working, and so do I." God is present among us now; can you sense His presence in your life today? Have there been times in your life, perhaps on this Lenten journey so far, when God has astonished you?

Such is the unity of the Father and Jesus that the work of one is the work of the other. Think about this for a moment: Jesus trusts me enough to call me into the same closeness and intimacy with God. How do I respond to that trust?

How are you going to respond today?

At the end of today's reading Jesus says: "My aim is to do not my own will, but the will of him who sent me." As Holy Week approaches, we are reminded of Jesus' prayer in the garden to his Father: "Not my will, but yours be done." Can I share in that prayer, by praying the Our Father and reflecting particularly on the words "Your will be done, on earth as in heaven."

Examen (review of prayer)

Sit or stand and let God look at you. Breathe in God's love. Breathe out into God how you are right now. Ask for God's light as you look over the day. What makes you glad? Breathe it in.

What makes you sad? Let yourself feel it. Do not be afraid. Breathe in God's love.

What do you need to help you? Let God know.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit

As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, Amen.

THURSDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK



Daily Offering

Father of Mercy, I pause for a moment to consider your love for me. May your merciful love give me renewed hope and strength, ready to cooperate in your mission each and every day.

[Via Click to Pray](#)

Entering into Prayer

Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 5:31-47

If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But I have a testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent.

'You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept glory from human beings. But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?'



John the Baptist
by
José Leonardo



Image for the Day

What do you see in this picture of John the Baptist?
How do figures like John the Baptist help our faith?
Do we ever point the way like he did for others?

Food for Thought

Have you ever been in a courtroom? Have you ever been called as a witness? What was that experience like for you? The context of today's reading is that Jesus is accused of making himself equal to God. The Jewish authorities are seeking the death penalty. In his defence, Jesus calls several witnesses on his behalf.

Jesus points out that "Were I to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid." In Jewish legal proceedings, a defendant's unsupported testimony was not considered evidence, so Jesus calls other witnesses. Several witnesses were required when the death penalty was involved. Jesus calls first on John the Baptist. Jesus then points to the works that he himself does as well as to the Father, the Scriptures and Moses.

Jesus reminds his accusers of what they have seen and the witnesses they have heard. One obstacle blocking Jesus' accusers from believing in him is their love of being honoured and praised, of receiving the approval of others. Jesus' stresses that his honour does not lie in how others look upon him but in how his Father looks upon him.

Suggestions for Prayer

Jesus' mention of the specific obstacles preventing people from believing in him did not apply to all Jews of his time, much less to all people of all time, nor are they a complete list of obstacles to belief. His words do, however, invite me to examine my heart. What are the obstacles to my belief in Jesus? Jesus knows us through and through. He focuses on the potential in each of us. But that potential comes to fulfilment only when we get to know him. Do I seek the approval of others too much, forgetting where my true value lies? When have I compromised my beliefs because of social pressure? St Ignatius was a wise old bird in the manner of relating with God. "Don't rush into it" he would say. "Instead, first consider how God is looking at you." The Spanish word is *mirar* which signifies a steady gaze, and it is a gaze of love, a contemplative gaze. The word "admire" is drawn from the word *mirar*, "to gaze." Could it be that God actually admires me? After all, am I not his handiwork....? Such is the unity of the Father and Jesus that the work of one is the work of the other. Think about this for a moment: Jesus trusts me enough to call me into the same closeness and intimacy with God. How do I respond to that trust?

How are you going to respond today?

Just as John the Baptist prepared the way of Jesus by his testimony and by the way he lived, some people we meet make it easier for us to recognize Jesus. Who has been, or is today, a John the Baptist figure in my life? How can I be like him for others?

Examen (review of prayer)

Lord,
let me be still and at peace,
just for a few moments, in the busy-ness of my day.
Let me be attentive to where I have been and where I am headed.
And let me see where you have been present in my life today. Amen

Fr Adrian Porter SJ

FRIDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK



Daily Offering

Creator of all things in heaven and on earth, direct my attention to your presence in creation.

Kensy Joseph SJ

Entering into Prayer

Using an object

Hold an object: a stone, leaf, cross, anything you like. Weigh it, feel it, look at it. It is a part of creation and loved by God.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. Now the Jewish festival of Booths [Tabernacles] was near.

But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret.

Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, 'Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.' Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, 'You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.' Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come.

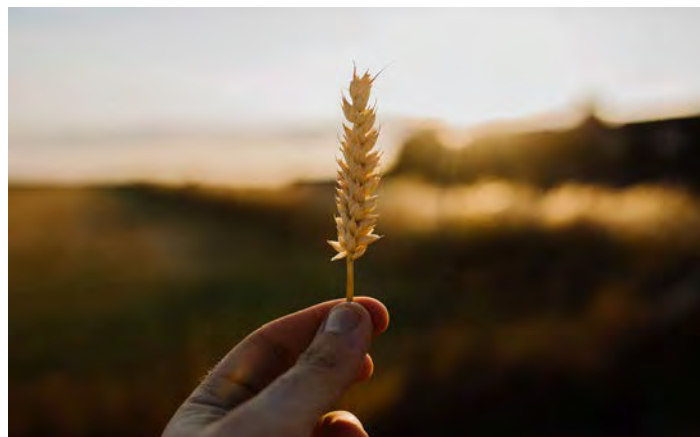




Image for the Day

Do you find this image of Jesus preaching helpful?

What do you see in the image?

Talk to God about that.

Food for Thought

The last time Jesus was in Jerusalem in Judea, Jewish authorities sought his death because he healed on the Sabbath and claimed that, just as his Father worked on the Sabbath, so did he. He is aware of the hostility of the Jewish authorities towards him and although he is avoiding Judea, the law of Moses called for pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles. Would he follow Jewish custom and attend the feast, or would he remain in the relative safety of Galilee? Jesus goes up to Jerusalem, but without drawing attention to himself.

Despite this, we next find him teaching in the Temple and attracting a crowd, some of whom – perhaps pilgrims just come to Jerusalem – are not aware that the authorities are seeking his death. Others are aware of the plot and are amazed that he is speaking openly despite the threat to his life.

Some say they know nothing about him, others that they know everything and so Jesus cannot be the Messiah. Some reject Jesus because they say “We all know where he comes from.” It is much easier having a carpenter around the place than the Messiah; it is much easier talking about broken chairs than broken lives. The temptation is to keep Jesus at the level they can handle him at; they want to keep him reasonably harmless.

Jesus knew throughout his passion where he came from – the heart of God the Father. He knew he would return there. He always knew he was not on his own.

Suggestions for Prayer

In the person of Jesus the mystery of God has a face, a voice, a language, a love, a life. In the Gospel we meet Jesus’ friends and enemies, his enthusiasms and dislikes; we are caught up in his struggle for what is right; we are challenged to keep alive the values he cherished. Can I walk with Jesus in his passion of today? Take a moment to consider this.

It’s human to find excuses not to believe, not to accept, not to follow God in Jesus. Do I prefer to keep Jesus at a harmless level? Who do I see when I look at Jesus? Who does Jesus see, when he looks at me?

How are you going to respond today?

No matter how much I know about somebody there always remains much which is hidden and known only to God. Can I pray for a deeper reverence towards those around me – especially for those I think I know well.

Examen (review of prayer)

With God: With God I review my day

Thanks: Where do I find joy?

Sorry: Where do I find sadness?

Please: What do I ask from God?

Amen;

Examen in twenty-five words

SATURDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord I offer you my loyalty. Allow me to be a constant to others in an ever-changing world.

Chris Brolly SJ

Entering into Prayer

Recall a place where you feel at peace . . . imagine it if you can . . . or in some way get a sense of it . . . what do you notice about it . . . let the Holy Spirit be there with you . . . in the breeze or the air you breathe . . .

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 7:40-52

When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, 'This is really the prophet.' Others said, 'This is the Messiah.' But some asked, 'Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?' So there was a division in the crowd because of him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, 'Why did you not arrest him?' The police answered, 'Never has anyone spoken like this!' Then the Pharisees replied, 'Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed.' Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, 'Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?' They replied, 'Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.'

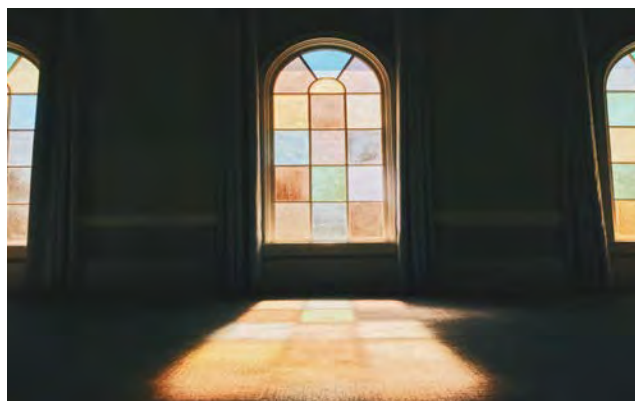




Image for the Day

What do you see in this image?

Can you be with Jesus in the way that Nicodemus is here, attentive and listening?

Talk to God about all that is on your mind today.

Food for Thought

Continuing from yesterday's reading, the arguments about Jesus' origins continue among the people. In today's Gospel reading we hear of the guards who had been sent by the chief priests and Pharisees some days earlier to arrest Jesus. They now report back empty handed. When questioned why, the guards reply, "Never before has anyone spoken like this one." The Pharisees accuse them of being deceived. Furthermore, while the Pharisees think they themselves are above being deceived, they accuse the crowd of ignorance and of being accursed according to the Law. Nicodemus interrupts the smug mutterings of his fellow leaders and reminds them that the Law they are so keen to uphold does not condemn a person before first hearing him and finding out what he is doing. They cannot deny this, instead they heap abuse on Nicodemus and try to put him down by asking if he too is from Galilee. They tell him to look to Scripture and see that no prophet comes from Galilee – much less the Messiah. (Despite this confident claim, at least one prophet came from Galilee: "the prophet Jonah, son of Amittai, from Gath-hepher" (Jonah 1:1), a village about three miles from Nazareth. Those who urged Nicodemus to look at the record in Scripture should have first done so themselves!)

Finally, while they dismiss Jesus as a Galilean, his birthplace was Bethlehem in Judea and so he was from God: they are ignorant of his origin as about everything else. Ignorance is pardonable for those in the fallible human condition, but being dogmatic in one's ignorance and intolerant of the views of others is harder to forgive.

Suggestions for Prayer

Some people who heard Jesus could not believe that God might work powerfully in such ordinary and familiar circumstances. As I reflect on my own situation, can I recognise God at work in my daily life? Nicodemus is an honest man, ready to speak up for truth. When have I had the courage to speak up for someone who was being denigrated, put down or treated unfairly? What may I need to do to stand for justice?

How are you going to respond today?

When have I been absolutely sure of something only to find out later that I was wrong? How tolerant am I of those who see things differently than I do? Perhaps today I may find a way today or this week to stand up for justice in some way.

Examen (review of prayer)

At the end of your prayer you can look back and ask: Does it have something to say to you? How does it make you feel? Imagine how God might reply.

Conversation: When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, talk to God about what has come up for you. End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT



Daily Offering

Lord, I offer you whatever challenges I am facing today. Don't let them lead me to lose sight of your love.

Paul Nicholson SJ

Entering into Prayer

The Jesus Prayer

This is one of the most famous mantras. Listen to each phrase in your head and then add your voice to it ... Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner ... Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner ... Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me, a sinner... continue on your own with this ... the phrase may shorten naturally ...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 8:1-11

Early in the morning he came again to the Temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'

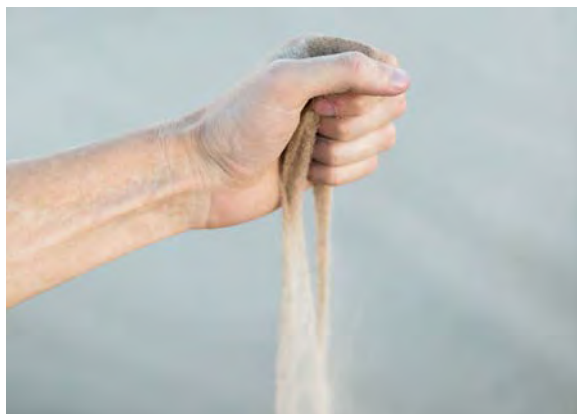




Image for the Day

What do you see in this image? How does it make you feel?

This artist has set this scene in biblical times. Does this help you imagine the scene, or would you have painted it differently if it was set in your own time and culture?

Food for Thought

In today's reading, Jesus is teaching people who have come to learn: scribes and Pharisees come to ask him about crime and punishment. They present a woman who has committed adultery and point out that the law of Moses stipulates that she should be punished by being stoned to death. Today the finger is surely pointed at those who sexually abuse the vulnerable, including children.

Suggestions for Prayer

Try to visualise the scene. Jesus is seated, willing listeners crowd around him to hear his news of the Kingdom of God. Enter the self-appointed judges with their victim, a woman deeply embarrassed to have her failings paraded in front of strangers.

Find a place to stand in your imagination so you can quietly watch what unfolds for a moment, then decide which of the faces is yours. Perhaps you would not want to identify with the woman, or with the scribes and Pharisees. Maybe you are one of the people listening to the teaching of Jesus. Try to relax for a moment and make the most of being in the presence of Jesus, listening to the good news he brings. How does that feel?

Your learning session is interrupted. Do you mind? You turn away from Jesus to address this new issue. How do you feel about the woman, about the scribes and Pharisees, about the need for punishment? Jesus has stopped teaching; His eyes are on the floor writing in the sand. You are on your own. Jesus challenges the men. It takes two to make love. Sin is never committed by one person in isolation, the person caught is never solely responsible.

The accusers have stones in their hands, but they drop them and slink away ashamed of themselves. You turn back to Jesus. He is staring straight at you. What does his gaze convey?

Is it easy to return it? Is there anything about your response to this situation that you would like to change?

Ask Mary, mother of Jesus to help you understand yourself and the adulterous woman better. Remember, she was told to 'sin no more'.

How are you going to respond today?

Stand before God, with Jesus and Mary at your side. Feel God's grace and their loving kindness today. Let that grace change you.

Examen (review of prayer)

At the end of your prayer you can look back and ask: Does it have something to say to you? How does it make you feel? Imagine how God might reply.

Conversation: When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, talk to God about what has come up for you. End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

MONDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK



Daily Offering

Light of love, you shine in the darkness to illuminate our lives with hope. Bring me close today to those who need me so that I may be a light to them too.

Philip Harrison SJ

Entering into Prayer

Praying a set prayer slowly

Choose a longer prayer that you know well. For example, the 'Our Father'. In time with your breathing, pray each line slowly. Only move on when something of the meaning of that phrase has landed in you.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 8:12-20

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'

Then the Pharisees said to him, 'You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.' Jesus answered, 'Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgement is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.' Then they said to him, 'Where is your Father?' Jesus answered, 'You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.' He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

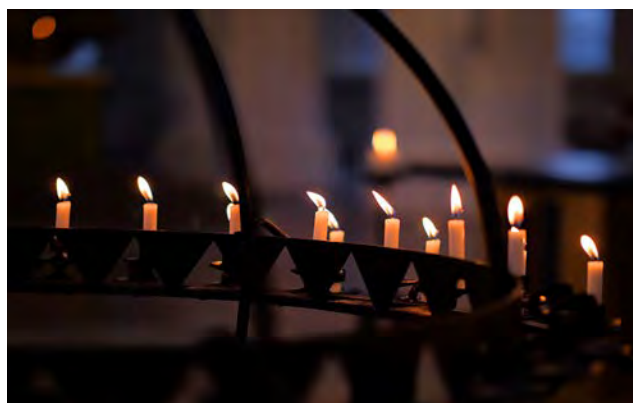




Image for the Day

What do you see in this image? How does it make you feel?

Spend a few minutes reflecting on how Jesus brings you light, and how you might bring light to others, with His help.

Food for Thought

Again, Jesus is teaching and the Pharisees interrupt. This time they challenge his authority directly. Yesterday Jesus seemed to be teaching the Pharisees, but his teaching had a message for the disciples too. Today the questioning Pharisees give Jesus opportunity to teach his disciples his true nature while also revealing the false heart of their arguments. His teaching is for disciples and Pharisees alike, although each will take home a different message. Yesterday He refused to condemn one woman, today he says, "I judge no one".

Suggestions for Prayer

Spend a few moments imagining yourself in the Temple precincts enthralled by the beauty of the teaching. Gradually you start to consider the words the evangelist has remembered:

Words that might make the soul sing:

'I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark'

'My testimony is valid because I know where I come from, and where I am going'

'My judgement will be sound because I am not alone; the one who sent me is with me'

'I may be testifying on my own behalf, but the father who sent me is my witness too'.

Let these words roll around your mind, savour them, reflect on how they apply to you too.

The scribes and Pharisees prefer the dark. In the dark they can claim to make the rules that help us get about safely and avoid offending God, which give them authority to punish those who do not obey; in the light we can all see what needs doing. The law of Moses states, wisely, that the judgement of one person should be supported by at least one witness. Jesus has God as His witness, but the Pharisees cannot see Him in the dark of their own choosing. We all have a touch of the Pharisee in us. The words of Jesus quoted above lift our souls into the glory of discipleship; the arguments of the Pharisees drag us into the dark. We should learn to tell the difference.

How are you going to respond today?

Say the Apostle's creed today, focusing on every phrase and its meaning.

Examen (review of prayer)

Let God look at you with love. What are you doing for Lent this year? How is that working out?

What's going well? And less well? What do you need from God to help you?

Talk with God about your Lent. Be still in God's gaze again.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

TUESDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord I offer you my blindness. May your light shine on my life and illuminate areas I don't wish to see.

Chris Brolly SJ

Entering into Prayer

A place for prayer

Recall a place where you feel at peace ... imagine it if you can ... or in some way get a sense of it . . . what do you notice about it ... let the Holy Spirit be there with you ... in the breeze or the air you breathe ...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 8:21-30

Again he said to them, 'I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.' Then the Jews said, 'Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, "Where I am going, you cannot come"?' He said to them, 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.' They said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus said to them, 'Why do I speak to you at all? I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.' They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.' As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

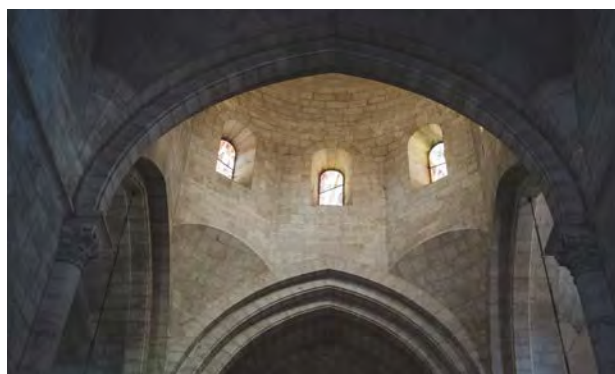




Image for the Day

What do you see in this image? How does it make you feel?

Do you find this image of Jesus helpful?

How can we listen to Jesus better?

Food for Thought

Jesus says, 'Where I am going you cannot come'. The Pharisees are delighted. They think he is going to die and between the dead and themselves they believe there is an unbridgeable chasm – they would love to have Jesus on the other side of it! Jesus tells the Pharisees they will die in their sin. That's a warning, a bit like those that parents and teachers do it all the time saying, "Go on like that and you will wind up in big trouble". Jesus wants to save the Pharisees too, to give them a chance.

Suggestions for Prayer

We have heard the song of the Good News and long to dance behind Jesus through the door to the Kingdom of God. We do not want to be left behind. Jesus came to heal the blind, the deaf, the lame. This may be a good moment to reflect on your possible need for healing and ask for it.

Jesus' authority comes from the Father.

'What the Father has taught me is what I preach; he who has sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself, for I always do what pleases him'

The evangelist tells us that as he was saying this, many came to believe in Him.

Try to watch Jesus confronting the Pharisees and asserting the authority that comes from obedience to the will of the father. It's not just the words he uses, it's the way he stands and looks, the gestures he makes. If you find it hard to visualise it, maybe you can feel it. How badly do you want to follow him?

How are you going to respond today?

Read a psalm from the Bible, from the Missal or the Prayer of the Church. Sing praise in your heart of the love and forgiveness of God.

Examen (review of prayer)

Light a candle. Take a moment to let God look at you. Breathe in God's love.

With your hand on your heart ask Jesus to bring to your heart the moment today for which you feel most grateful.

Recall what was said and done in that moment. Enjoy the gratitude you feel again now. Breathe in its life.

Ask Jesus to bring to your heart the moment today for which you feel least grateful. What was said and done in that moment? Let it be. Breathe in God's love just as you are.

Speak to God about what you have noticed. Give thanks to God for your day.

Ask help for tomorrow.

WEDNESDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK



Daily Offering

Come, Lord, dwell in my heart and heal it so that I can help others and the world around me.

[Via Click to Pray](#)

Entering into Prayer

Using an object

Hold an object: a stone, leaf, cross, anything you like. Weigh it, feel it, look at it. It is a part of creation and loved by God.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 8:31-42

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' They answered him, 'We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, "You will be made free"?''

Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.'

They answered him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does.' They said to him, 'We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.' Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me.'



Image for the Day

What do you see in this image?

Do you find this image helpful?

How do you feel about being part of the Christian family? God's family?

Talk to Jesus about this.

Food for Thought

The evangelist has brought together conversations that happened at different times, but let's imagine that the whole of John 8 is one long conversation triggered by the situation of the woman caught in adultery. Here we are, all Jews together, some captivated by Jesus, some who believe in him, but clearly have reservations, and some who just find him annoying. The church gives us the whole of chapter 8, verse by verse, all except that last few verses of this passage. The punch line is missing, and there's a reason for that.

Suggestions for Prayer

Jesus offers freedom to those who believe in him and it is thrown back at him. These 'believers' put their membership of the group before their respect for the God who made it. They think that being Jews gives them rights, confers privilege.

Arguments about paternity are not likely to have a peaceful end. Jesus asserts that the father they claim is not their father, they take this to mean they are illegitimate. That's quite an insult. How do you feel as this argument unfolds?

Jesus says he speaks of what he has seen with his father and that these people are putting into action what they have learned from theirs. Who is that? They claim, rightly, to have God as their father.

We are taught to be open, to listen, to be humble and accept that we might be wrong. Confronted by arguments which twist the truth into falsehood we may feel we have nowhere to go. Do we have the authority to say, 'You're lying', or 'that's not what it means'? Jesus says it for us.

In the verses not included in this meditation Jesus tells these people that their father is the devil and that he is a liar and a murderer. It is not for us to use such language.

Jesus is son of the father, if we make his word our home we become children of the household too. God the father will watch over us as good fathers should, protecting us from harm. When the twisted comments of others strike at the heart of our being and belief we can only keep silent and let God speak for us.

How are you going to respond today?

Say the 'Our Father', focusing on a sense of belonging in God's family.

Examen (review of prayer)

St Ignatius tells us to review the time we have spent in prayer. Take time to do this. today.

Review your feelings, ask Jesus and Mary to give you what you may need and let God teach you what you need to learn. Ask for help for tomorrow.

THURSDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord I offer you my temper. Replace it with your patience. Let me see those who anger me as my brothers and sisters.

Chris Brolly SJ

Entering into Prayer

Awareness of your body

Beginning at the top of your head and passing down through the body to the feet be attentive to each part of the body in turn. Gently focus in turn on each part ... head ... face ... eyes ...neck ... shoulders etc. For each part, allow a few moments to become aware of what is being felt, without making judgement upon it. Move on in turn until you have given attention to your whole body. Then consider your whole self you as a person made in God's likeness ... you in whom God chooses to dwell...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 8:51-59

‘**V**ery truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.’ The Jews said to him, ‘Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, “Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.” Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, “He is our God”, though you do not know him. But I know him; if I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.’ Then the Jews said to him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.’ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

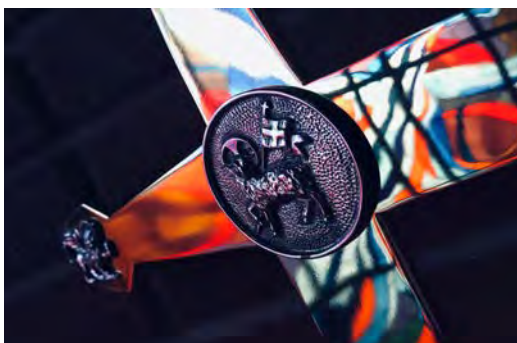




Image for the Day

What do you see in this image? (It's a sketch so may be a bit blurry!)

Do you find this image helpful?

What does today's gospel passage or this picture remind you of? Talk to Jesus about the conflict in his life or yours.

Food for Thought

As his death approaches Jesus prepares his disciples for the reality of resurrection but the other Jews are infuriated. If even Abraham had to die, how can Jesus claim that ordinary folk like us will not? Does Jesus think he is better than Abraham? Well, the short answer to that is 'Yes'. 'Who do you think you are', they ask. The answer is devastating.

Jesus does not claim his authority directly:

'If I were to seek my own glory that would be no glory at all'

Does the child of the headmaster strut about telling everyone who his dad is? I think a lot of children in that position would rather their friends did not know. Jesus has repeatedly stated that God is his father, but that reality is unthinkable for people who claim authority for themselves.

Suggestions for Prayer

Try to sit comfortably. Listen to the sounds outside and accept them. Listen to your body from toes to top of head. Are you feeling stressed? Pay attention to your breathing: breathe in the love of God, breathe out your love of the world...

Quietly review the story so far: the woman who was not condemned, but told to sin no more, Jesus who knows where he comes from, and where he is going, the possibility of joining Jesus in the kingdom of heaven, the protection of God the Father. What matters most to you?

Now ask yourself how you felt as the conversation progressed. Did you feel the heat? Like the heat of the blacksmith's furnace, the assertions of Jesus landing like hammer blows on white hot metal.

Now he makes the statement from which there is no hiding place:

"Before Abraham ever was, I Am"

In God there is no flow of time, past and future are absorbed into an eternal present.

The Jews picked up stones to throw at him. What use are stones against the armour of faith, forged in the fire of love?

Try to stay completely still and let thoughts drift away. Let God reveal himself.

How are you going to respond today?

Listen to some music you find gives you energy; a rousing favourite hymn, Beethoven's 9th, Verdi's 'Dies Irae', or whatever lifts you out of the daily grind.

Examen (review of prayer)

In your examen today you might find it helpful to think of times of anger, conflict or disagreement in your life, but if this feels too uncomfortable give these thoughts to God to look after. Sit for a while with Jesus.



FRIDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK



Daily Offering

Lord – you know what I have to do today, and I don't think that I can do it. Here and now I am handing it over to you, that it may happen to your greater glory.

Nick King SJ

Entering into Prayer

Listen to the sounds you can hear around you.

If you are indoors, allow yourself to notice sounds without and within the room.

Identify each sound as you are able.

Gently, slowly, without judgement, focus your attention on each one.

Return your attention back to where you were before.

If a sudden sound or distraction occurs, acknowledge it and name it. Don't try to ignore it.

When ready, become aware of the sound of your own breathing.

Through the sounds, be attentive to the invitation of God, who dwells in creation...

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 10: 31-42

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, 'I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?' The Jews answered, 'It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.' Jesus answered, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, you are gods"? If those to whom the word of God came were called "gods"—and the scripture cannot be annulled— can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, "I am God's Son"? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands.

He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, 'John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.' And many believed in him there.

The Jews took up rocks to stone him
by
James Tissot



Image for the Day

How do you feel about this picture?

Do you find this image helpful?

How do you think Jesus felt or reacted in this moment?

Food for Thought

Today's reading is a new conversation: other things have happened in the meantime, other things have been said. Stone throwing threatens again, and Jesus challenges:

'I have done many good works for you to see, works from my Father; for which of these are you stoning me?'. Jesus does not distinguish between action and speech; if his works come from God, so does his authority, and his claim to sonship.

At the end of this passage Jesus goes back across the Jordan to where his cousin John had once been baptising. The people join him and comment: 'John gave no signs, but all he said about this man was true'; and many believed in him.

Suggestions for Prayer

Spend some time reflecting. Pay attention to the good things Jesus has done in you. Look at what kind of a person you were five, ten, fifteen years ago. Has anything changed for the better? It can be hard to remember bad things you have done if you have learned better since. Thank God for helping you to improve.

Jesus heals the deaf, blind and lame, thank him for the things he has healed in you so that you can do good things. Look at all the good things you have done. Do you ever think it is not enough? Have you made mistakes? Ask God to show you what your gifts are and give you strength and perseverance to make use of them.

Look at the world around you: parts of it are gloriously beautiful, others ugly and sad. How will you help to build the best environment for the future? Ask God to show you how to clear up mess in our world, and protect what is good.

John the Baptist gave no signs, but he gave sound advice and pointed out the truth so that others would know and follow Jesus. Ask God to help you to guide others to the truth.

How are you going to respond today?

The prophecies of the past can sustain us in dealing with the present. Read the first reading for today – Jeremiah 20:10-13

Examen (review of prayer)

At the end of your prayer you can look back and ask: Does it have something to say to you?

How does it make you feel? Imagine how God might reply.

Conversation: When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, talk to God about what has come up for you. End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.



SATURDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK



Daily Offering

I remember today, Lord, all those who have helped me to know you better. I offer thanks for their witness, and ask you to fill them still further with your gifts.

Paul Nicholson SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 11: 45-57

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, 'What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.' But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.' He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples.

Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, 'What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?' Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.





Image for the Day

How do you feel about this picture?

Do you find this image helpful, or a little scary?

How do you think Lazarus, his friends and family reacted to this scene?

Food for Thought

Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead and the people are naturally impressed. The Pharisees fear a mass movement and imagine Roman reprisals that might destroy their holy places. We meet Caiaphas, the high priest, guardian of the holy places. He is a useful recruit to the work of getting rid of Jesus. He offers the argument of sacrifice saying, 'it is better for one man to die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed'. This is another twist to the truth and the evangelist points out that the nation in question comes from bringing together in unity the scattered children of the whole world.

Jesus knows that they are determined to kill him as there is no way they are going to get him to change his teaching, but he still has things to do so he goes somewhere people are not likely to look for him – a town called Ephraim in another district. He will return when it suits God's plan, and not before.

Suggestions for Prayer

The situation is chilling. Those who wish to kill Jesus have a watertight case, their logic is above question and they will achieve their ends by proceeding through legal channels. How did we get to this point?

In the 'Meditation on Two Standards' in the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius warns us that we can get caught in this way. Temptations are subtle and one small thing leads to another. Nobody wants to wind up enslaved by evil, but it happens just the same. Saul thought he was doing a good job by persecuting Christians, it took a dramatic miracle to put him right, but at least it worked. We are told that pharaoh's heart was hardened so that even the plagues would not let him release the people of Israel, although they got away just the same. Jesus' death on the cross will not stop Christianity catching on like a spark on tinder and what Ignatius calls 'the enemy of our human nature' cannot succeed in binding me to sin if I am bound to the love of God.

Have you ever had a gift thrown back in your face, or treated with contempt? How did that make you feel? Think about or visualise all the things that God has given you: the beauty of the world, the excitement of human learning and understanding, the healing of hurts, the consolation of the good news, your own gifts and strength. Reflect on these things. Ignatius said somewhere that it is impossible for a grateful person to sin, but it is very easy to get into the habit of finding fault and noticing what is wrong instead of holding on to gratitude wherever possible. A good way to keep up your spirit of gratitude is to make a habit of the examen.

How are you going to respond today?

Thank God for three good things that have happened today, and try to do that every day.

Examen (review of prayer)

Try to focus on gratitude in your review of your prayer and your day.

PALM SUNDAY

HOLY WEEK



Daily Offering

An offering with ‘the owner of a colt’ (Mark 11: 1-10): Sometimes I can’t understand why I have to give up this thing or that thing that I value, but Lord, if you need it for your service or someone else’s, then it’s yours - and so am I. I know you give me your very self in return. Amen.

Tom Shufflebotham SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY’S SCRIPTURE

Luke 19: 28-40

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, “Why are you untying it?” just say this: “The Lord needs it.”’ So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’ They said, ‘The Lord needs it.’ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, ‘Blessed is the king

who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven,

and glory in the highest heaven!’

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, order your disciples to stop.’ He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.’





Flevit super illam
 'He wept over it [Jerusalem]'
 by
 Enrique Simonet

Image for the Day

How do you feel about this picture?

Can you imagine being there with Jesus, as he is about to enter Jerusalem?

How do you think the disciples felt?

Food for Thought

Today, with the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, after the long journey up from Galilee through Samaria, we enter the solemn drama of Holy Week, the climax of the Church's year, as we move towards our greatest feast of Easter. He comes from the East, where the Messiah is supposed to appear; and he comes, not to the Temple but to the Mount of Olives, which in Luke's gospel functions as a kind of counterpoint with the Temple. Then, rather daring, and in accordance with a preordained code ("say, 'the Lord has need of it.'"), he mounts "a foal on which no one has yet ridden", which might have been expected to throw him off, but does nothing of the kind. Then there is a crowd, singing from Psalm 117, and repeating what the angels sang to the Christmas shepherds ("on earth peace, and glory in the highest") back at the beginning of the gospel.

Suggestions for Prayer

One thing you might do is to watch the various characters who appear. There is, firstly, Jesus himself, effortlessly leading the way up to Jerusalem, giving coded instructions to his disciples, sitting on an untamed animal, greeted in Old Testament terms as "Blessed is the Coming One, the King in the Lord's name". Then, when his opponents rebuke him for the noise the crowds of disciples are making, he makes the opaque judgement that "if these shut up, the stones will cry out". Finally, the very next thing that Jesus does, which is not in our gospel, but is very much part of the story, is weep over Jerusalem for its failure to recognise "the things that lead to peace". The stones are, of course, the stones of the Temple, which will soon be destroyed...

Secondly, there are the disciples, who are not up to much beyond collecting the animal and repeating their instructions; but once the procession starts they put their garments on the beast of burden and on the road ahead of Jesus. They are in a position to rejoice as Jesus goes down from the Mount of Olives, and praise God "at the top of their voices about all the miracles they had seen". But how bright do you think they are?

Thirdly, there are the owners of the foal, who interrogate the disciples about what they are doing, and when they hear the message they let the animal go. What is their part in the story?

Finally, in the crowd there are some of Jesus' opponents, "some of the Pharisees", who want Jesus' disciples shut up. They will of course get their way next Friday. How do they feature in your prayer?

How are you going to respond today?

One thing you might do, as you contemplate the list of characters, is to decide now, once and for all, which side you are on. There are the apostles, gallantly making the effort to cope, but shortly to abandon Jesus when things get tough; then there are the crowds, today shouting their joy, but a few days later baying for blood. There are the foal's owners: how do they look to you? Finally, there are Jesus' opponents. Do they win the battle, do you think? And what about you today?

Examen (review of prayer)

Use any style of examen you prefer to review your prayer and your day.

MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK



Daily Offering

An offering with Mary of Bethany (John 12: 1-11): Lord, I was keeping this for a special occasion. I now offer it to you. Others may think I'm being overgenerous or foolish, but so long as you understand, I'm content. Amen.

Tom Shufflebotham SJ

Entering into Prayer

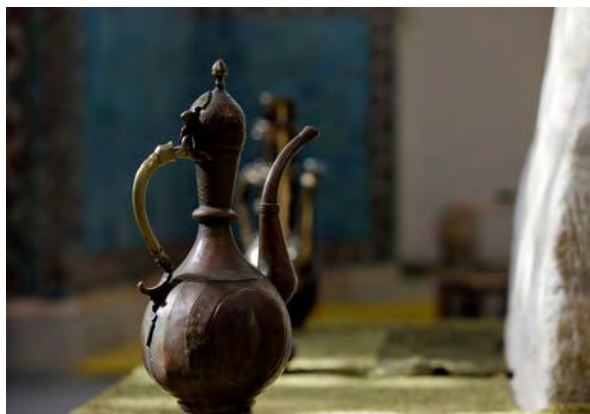
Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.





There is a Praying with Art Video featuring this painting:

pathwaystogod.org/praying-art

Pathways TO GOD

Image for the Day

How do you feel about this picture?

How do you feel about this act of humility and service?

How do you think that Jesus felt?

Food for Thought

In today's gospel, we go deeper into the drama of Holy Week. We are actually given a date: 'six days before the Passover'; this is the third Passover in the Fourth Gospel, and there is a mounting sense of menace. Today's reading brings together several important characters: Lazarus, whom Jesus loved, and had raised from the dead; his sister Mary, also beloved by Jesus; Judas Iscariot, whom presumably Jesus also loved, but who was about to betray him, 'a great crowd of the Judeans', and, finally, the Chief Priests who have decided to kill not only Jesus but also Lazarus.

Suggestions for Prayer

You might simply opt to 'be there', and gaze contemplatively at the scene, through the eyes of the characters involved. The heart of the story is an anointing; the setting is a dinner-party, apparently given to thank Jesus for having raised Lazarus. Lazarus himself is simply lounging about with the rest of the guests. Then there is his sister, Martha, who by contrast is 'serving' at the dinner-party.

The next character is Mariam, the other sister. What kind of person do you imagine her to be? You might observe the intimacy and the generosity of what she does: "a litre of myrrh, nard, the real thing, very precious" is generous; and for intimacy what do you think of her anointing Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair? Then you might exercise your nose: "the house was filled with the scent of the myrrh". Does this say anything to you?

Then there is Judas Iscariot's angry response: "why was the myrrh not sold and given to the poor?", and the evangelist's sour comment that this was "because he was a thief".

Next the crowd, who "came not for Jesus alone, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead" (they were spiritual tourists, you see).

But the story begins and ends with Jesus; at the beginning he comes to Bethany (a safe place, as opposed to the threat posed by Jerusalem); at the end 'many Judeans came to faith in him'. In the middle he rebukes Judas for his hostility: "leave her alone, for her to keep it for the day of my burial".

As you pray, consider this question: which character(s) do you identify with in this story? Which would you like to identify with? What difference might that make to the way you live today?

How are you going to respond today?

Think of a way in which you can show care and attention to another person like Mary did with Jesus.

Examen (review of prayer)

Use any style of examen you prefer to review your prayer, or your day.

TUESDAY OF HOLY WEEK



Daily Offering

An offering with Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57-60): Lord, I know I've been envied for my wealth, and I did wonder was I providing for myself too well, but I sense that these coming days will need me to be courageous and generous. May all I am and all I have be ready at your service. Amen.

Tom Shufflebotham SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 13:21-33, 36-38

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.' The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples - the one whom Jesus loved - was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'Do quickly what you are going to do.' Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival'; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come."'

Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus answered, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterwards.' Peter said to him, 'Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' Jesus answered, 'Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.'



Image for the Day

How do you feel about this picture?
Can you imagine being there with Jesus?
How do you think the disciples felt?

Food for Thought

In today's gospel, we find ourselves at the Last Supper, the dramatic setting of some of Jesus' most powerful teaching in John's Gospel. It comes immediately after he has performed the extraordinary gesture of washing the feet of the disciples, and has explained his actions to them. Then, remarkably, we hear that "Jesus was disturbed in the Spirit". What is the source of the disturbance? It is that "one of you is going to betray me", an almost unimaginable outcome to such a meal!

Suggestions for Prayer

Find yourself present in the room with them, and look around at the others, "puzzled as to who he was talking about". Then watch the signal between Simon Peter and the "Beloved Disciple", for the one who was "lying on Jesus' bosom, to find out who he was talking about". Listen to Jesus' answer, and see if you are as baffled as they obviously were, even when Jesus gives "Judas son of Simon Iscariot a morsel". Then there is the interchange with Judas: "what you are doing, do it quickly", and the evangelist's dark comment on Judas' exit: "taking the morsel that one went out immediately. And it was night".

But there is something else going on here: Jesus, apparently commenting on Judas' departure, five times refers to it as "glory", for the Son of Man and for God. As you pray, ask what is meant by that: how can it possibly be so?

And there is more, for Simon Peter is now sulking, "Lord – where are you going?" And when he is told "you can't come with me, he stamps his foot and asks, petulantly, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I'm going to lay down my life for you!" Then listen to Jesus' response: is it humorous or sad? "You're going to lay down your life for me, are you? Amen, amen I'm telling you: the cock is not going to crow until you deny me three times".

How are you going to respond today?

Now ask: which character in this story am I most like? Have I betrayed others or been betrayed? Do I deny others in my life? How can I better follow Christ today?

Examen (review of prayer)

At the end of your prayer or your day, whatever works for you, you can look back and ask:
Does it have something to say to you?

How does it make you feel? Imagine how God might reply.

Conversation: When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, talk to God about what has come up for you.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer/Our Father.

WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK



Daily Offering

An offering with ‘So-and-so in the city’ (Matthew 26: 14-25). Yes, Lord, I was expecting you but sometimes your timing takes me by surprise, or when you come I don’t recognise you. I’d like to be always at your disposal: prepare my heart. Amen.

Tom Shufflebotham SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY’S SCRIPTURE

Matthew 26:14-25

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I betray him to you?’ They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?’ He said, ‘Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, “The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.”’ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.’ And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, ‘Surely not I, Lord?’ He answered, ‘The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.’ Judas, who betrayed him, said, ‘Surely not I, Rabbi?’ He replied, ‘You have said so.’





Image for the Day

What do you see in the picture?

Can you imagine what it was like for the disciples?

Imagine the scene.

Food for Thought

Today is sometimes called “Spy Wednesday”, when Judas is thought to have offered to betray Jesus. Only in Matthew’s account does it mention that he actually asked for money; and the alert reader will notice that what he gets is the contemptible price, “thirty silver coins”, offered to the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 11:12).

Suggestions for Prayer

How are we to pray this grim moment? First, you might try and drink in the atmosphere that Matthew creates, “then comes one of the Twelve, the one known as ‘Judas Iscariot’, to the High Priests, and said, ‘What are you willing to give me? Then I’ll betray him to you.’” Then the evangelist comments “from that moment, he started to look for a window of opportunity to betray him”. You cannot get grimmer than that.

But it gets worse; rather belatedly, the “disciples” wake up to the fact that they should have done something about organising eating the Passover, and they are given a coded signal: “The Teacher says: my moment is at hand. I’m doing Passover at your place with my disciples”. You might be there with those disciples as they scratch their heads and wonder what they have got wrong.

Then the Passover meal, the moment of greatest joy in the Jewish year, turns sour as Jesus, “lying down with the Twelve” predicts that “one of you is going to betray me”, and in turn they ask, “It’s not me, is it, Lord?”; while last of all Judas calls him “Rabbi” (a title which has already been forbidden to Jesus’ followers, and which he will use again when he leads the arresting party), while asking “It’s not me, is it?” You might reflect on the mood created by Jesus’ response: “you said it”.

How are you going to respond today?

How will you live through today? Feel the mood of this reading, and allow the Lord to speak to you through it. Reach out in prayer and perhaps ask “It’s not me, is it?” Then listen for the answer.

Examen (review of prayer)

At the end of your prayer or your day, whatever works for you, you can look back and ask: Does it have something to say to you?

How does it make you feel? Imagine how God might reply.

Conversation: When you come towards the end of your time of prayer, talk to God about what has come up for you.

End with a formal prayer, such as the Lord’s Prayer/Our Father.

HOLY THURSDAY



HOLY WEEK

Daily Offering

An offering with St Paul (1 Corinthians 11: 23-26). Lord, I offer you my heart and mind, praying that I may faithfully pass on the message of love that I have received from you in the Eucharist and the washing of feet. Amen.

Tom Shufflebotham SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Exodus 12: 1-8, 11-14; Psalm 115: 12-13, 15-18 r. cf. 1 Corinthians 10: 16; 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26; John 13: 1-15

Choice of readings: for the text of the other readings see your Bible, Universalis, or missal.

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.'



Jesus washes his disciples feet

Mosaic, Monreale

Image for the Day

What do you see in this image?

Can you imagine what it was like for the disciples to be there?

Imagine the scene.

Food for Thought

Today we enter the Sacred Triduum, the climax of our Lenten journey, and the readings and the ceremonies are almost too rich to digest; tonight's service is a reminder of the institution of the precious gift of the Eucharist, which is a gift on more levels than we can easily grasp.

Suggestions for Prayer

In your prayer today, you may find yourself led in several different directions. Here are four possibilities. First, the reading from Exodus takes us back to the greatest feast of the year for our Jewish forebears, and reminds us of that great act of deliverance from their oppressors. You might want to pray about what is currently oppressing you, and what you are asking the Lord to do about it. Secondly, the psalm is a song of praise for God's unshakable fidelity: "the Lord will bless the house of Israel...Praise the Lord". Here you might prayerfully reflect on what you and your community are giving thanks for, this evening; and make your own the line from Paul that is our response: "the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing in Christ's blood?"

Then, thirdly, there is the reading from I Corinthians; Paul is very cross because of their divisions, and to correct them he reminds them of what Jesus did on this very night, before he died, taking bread, giving thanks, and saying (with unmistakable reference to his death) "this is my body for you", and likewise with the cup "this cup is the new covenant in my blood". We hardly understand what he is saying, but dimly we grasp that this is for us, and that it is costly. "As often as you eat this loaf and drink the cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death – until he comes". Does that give you a way into prayer on this rich night?

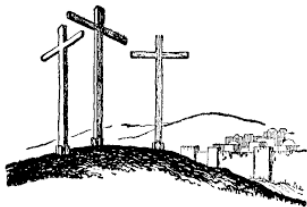
Finally, you might choose to gaze in astonishment at the acted parable with which John has chosen to begin his account of the Last Supper, not the institution of the Eucharist, but Jesus, to Peter's horror, performing for all the disciples, including Judas, an act that was thought too lowly even for slaves to do, the washing of their feet. And the evangelist explains what is going on: "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end". The name of the game, you see, is love.

How are you going to respond today?

How might tonight's rich liturgy affect the way you are going to celebrate these three days? Spend some time on reflecting how it would feel to have your feet washed, and consider opportunities to wash the feet of others. How will it change the rest of your life?

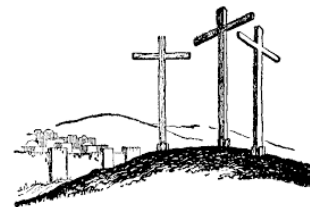
Examen (review of prayer)

If you are going to Mass tonight you may take some time to reflect there instead of saying an examen at home, or you may prefer to pray the examen at some other time, as you feel works best for you.



GOOD FRIDAY

HOLY WEEK



Daily Offering

An offering with Simon of Cyrene (cf Mark 15:21). Lord, that day when I was just going about my business I didn't expect you to choose me to help you with your cross. It's changed me for ever and it's been a joy to share with Alexander and Rufus and everyone I meet.

Tom Shufflebotham SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 52:13-53: 12

See, my servant shall prosper;
he shall be exalted and lifted up,
and shall be very high.

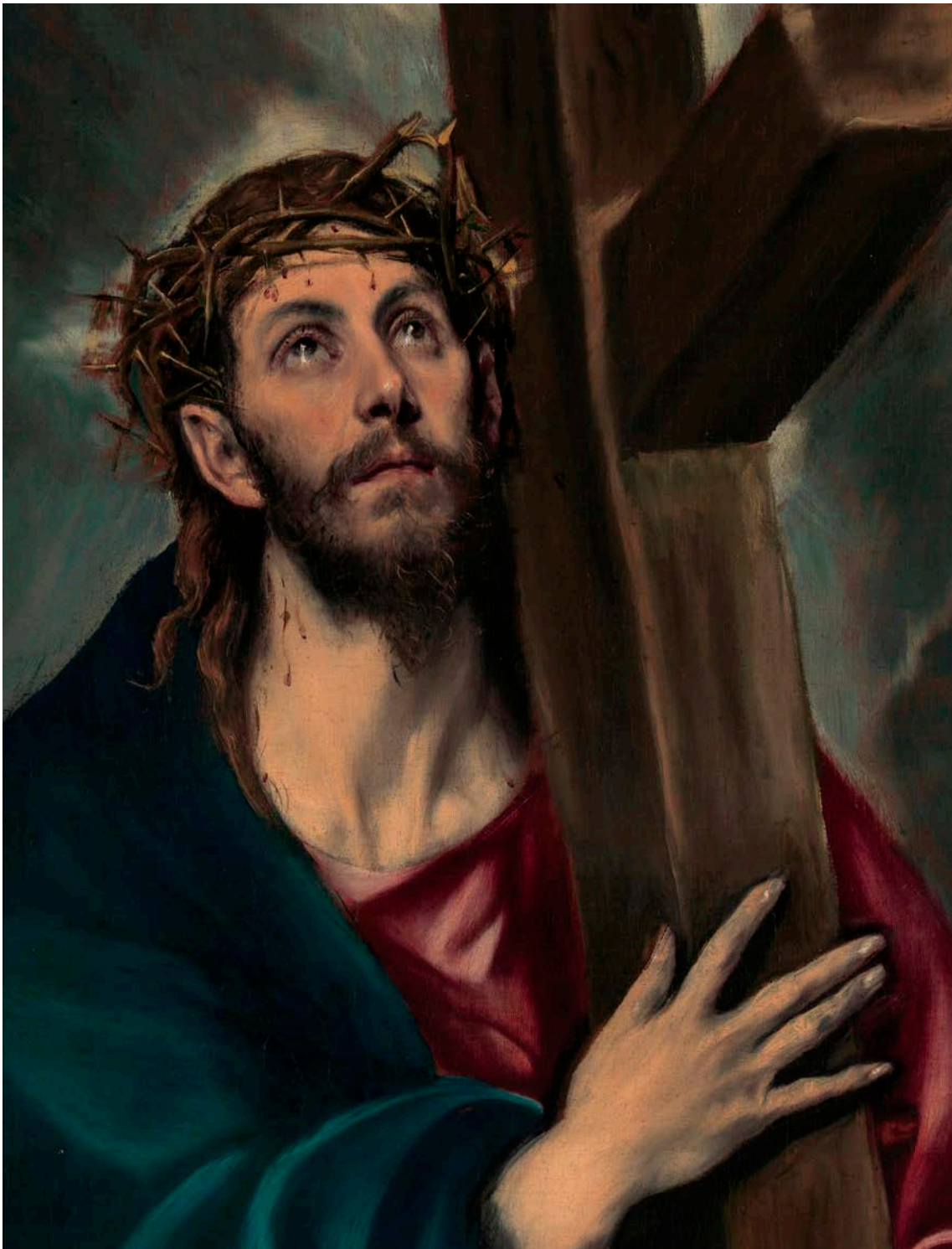
Just as there were many who were astonished at him
– so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of mortals –
so he shall startle many nations;
kings shall shut their mouths because of him;
for that which had not been told them they shall see,
and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

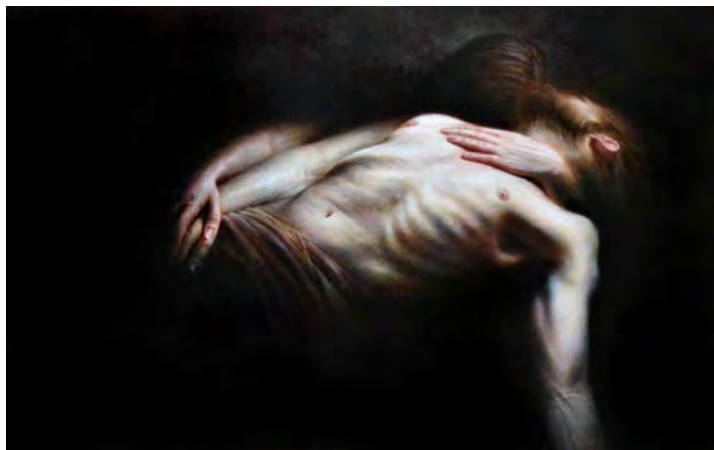
He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.
They made his grave with the wicked
and his tomb with the rich,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain.
When you make his life an offering for sin,
he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;
through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.
Out of his anguish he shall see light;
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because he poured out himself to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.



Christ carrying the cross

El Greco



There is a Praying with Art Video featuring this painting:
pathwaystogod.org/praying-art

Pathways TO GOD

Image for the Day

What do you see in this image?

Can you imagine what it was like for Mary and the other disciples?

Food for Thought

Today we have the solemn emptiness of Good Friday, and Jesus' appalling death. The gospel is the story of Jesus' Passion from John's Gospel; and as you listen or read it, you might like to notice how John makes it the cross a throne of glory, in contrast to the bleak account of Luke which you will have heard on Palm Sunday.

Suggestions for Prayer

But it is the first reading that I suggest you might like to pray through on this momentous day; if you do this, you will be following the instincts of the very earliest Christians, possibly including Jesus himself, as they grappled to make sense of his death.

Our passage is the fourth of what are known as the "Songs of the Suffering Servant", which we find in that part of the Isaiah scroll that was written for the Jewish exiles in Babylon; the author is well aware of the suffering that can come with answering God's call (have you experienced this?), and is reflecting on it in the presence of God. We do not know who the author was, nor do we know who the "Servant" was, though there have been plenty of learned guesses. But this is a text to help us pray through the sadness of today.

There are several points that might help you go deeper into the mystery:

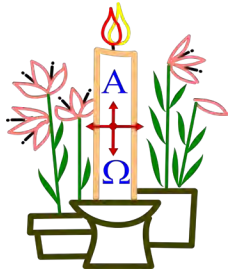
- First, we hear God speaking of "my servant". This tells us that the victory is won.
- Next, no punches are pulled in revealing what has happened to the "servant": "his appearance was disfigured...his form marred"
- The servant, whoever he was (but it fits Jesus very well) is "a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering"
- What happened to him was done for us "he took up our infirmities, carried our sorrows"
- Our part in it brings us no credit: "our transgressions, our iniquities...we have gone astray"
- The Servant (and here we must of course think of Jesus) did not resist: "did not open his mouth...a lamb to the slaughter",
- Even though he did not deserve what happened: "he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth"
- But God is in there ("it was the Lord's will") and therefore all shall be well: "he will see the light of life...therefore I shall give him a portion among the great".

How are you going to respond today?

Today I suggest that you simply sit with this extraordinary passage, reading it slowly, several times over, and see what it says to you. The Lord will be there with you.

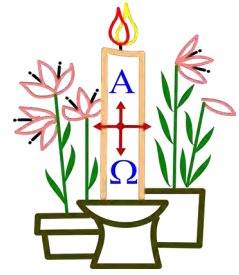
Examen (review of prayer)

Choose an examen, or simply sit in silent reflection.



HOLY SATURDAY

HOLY WEEK



Daily Offering

An offering with Peter. Lord, that Saturday is etched on my heart for ever. I would have been in total despair had not your Mother come and laid her hand on mine. Strengthen me to help others to rise from what seems like total failure and utter disgrace. Amen.

Tom Shufflebotham SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.





Image for the Day

What do you see in the picture?

Can you imagine what it was like for the disciples, for the women?

Imagine the scene.

Food for Thought

Tonight's gospel reading is Luke's account of that first Easter Sunday. One of the striking things about all the Resurrection stories is the question-marks that hang over them: can it really be true?

Suggestions for Prayer

We start our prayer by noticing the bravery of these women, who dare to come to the tomb "in the deep dawn"; but we also observe that they do not believe in the resurrection as yet, since they are intending to anoint a corpse.

But God is there, and someone has "rolled the stone from the tomb". Then we see that there are divine messengers, who address the women as they scratch their heads in puzzlement, and gently rebuke them: "Why are you looking for the Living One among the corpses? He's not here – no, he's risen"; and they have to be reminded that Jesus had predicted this turn of events.

But faith in the Resurrection does not stop there; it has to be shared: and the women, who are named ("Mary the Magdalene, and Johanna and Mary of Jacob, and the rest...") have to return "to the Eleven". That number, which should of course be Twelve, serves as a reminder that from its very beginning the Church has been deficient; Judas has gone his own way. (Have you gone your own way recently?)

And not only that: these Resurrection witnesses are not believed; for the male apostles thought that "these words were babbling, and they would not believe them". You might reflect that this has been the fate of women in the Church ever since.

But there is more; for Peter, always one to take us by surprise, "rose up and ran to the tomb".

Now the urgency of his going tells us something: does he after all believe that the one whom he had denied only a few hours before might have survived death? It does not sound very promising, though, for all he found was an empty tomb, and some "grave-cloths on their own" (which means that it was not grave-robbers); but he has not quite got there yet, for, "he went off home, wondering what had happened".

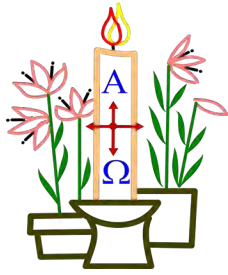
How are you going to respond today?

And what has happened, in your view? The Resurrection is the central doctrine of Christianity, according to Paul. What is the Lord telling you about it in your prayer today?

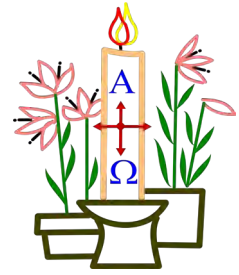
Examen (review of prayer)

As you pray your examen today reflect on the meaning of the resurrection to you in your life of prayer and your deeds.

EASTER SUNDAY



ALLELUIA!



Daily Offering

An offering with Mary of Magdala (John 20:11-18) Lord, you saw me desolate there, you read my heart, you spoke my name, you gave me a mission to tell the others. And my life was changed for the rest of my days and all eternity. If sometimes it feels like having to wait for ever, cherish our loyalty and give us living faith. Amen. Alleluia.

Tom Shufflebotham SJ

Entering into Prayer

Choose a way to enter into prayer from earlier in Lent or any method that you prefer.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

John 20: 1-9

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.





Image for the Day

What do you see in the picture?

Can you imagine what it was like for the disciples?

Imagine the scene, and hold the resurrection in your heart.

Food for Thought

Easter has come, the central feast of our year; we have been making ready for it since Ash Wednesday, six and a half weeks ago, with an increase in intensity over the last two weeks, and then the mounting drama of Holy Week, and especially of the Sacred Triduum, just ended. We shall be celebrating the feast for the next seven weeks, so we might in our prayer ask to be shown what it means.

Suggestions for Prayer

Perhaps today's gospel is the way into the meaning of it. What you might do is to imagine yourself accompanying that brave woman, "Mary the Magdalene" on her lonely walk through the darkness to the empty tomb. Try to imagine what she is feeling as she sees that "the stone has been rolled away". Then notice that the next thing she does is to "run" (why is she doing that?). And to whom does she run? "Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved" (why does she go to them?); and she has a message for them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him". As you pray, you may notice that "we": were there other women with Mary?

Then the evangelist's camera, which is very restricted, with hardly ever room for more than two parties, focuses on "Simon and the other disciple"; and now you might watch them as they go; and at the same time, if you look very carefully, you can see that Mary is also running with them, though perhaps at a distance.

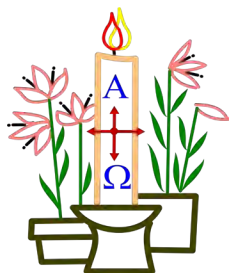
At all events "the two of them ran" (there is a lot of running in this story, you notice), but the beloved disciple got there first, which is why we all think of him as a younger man; courteously he does not go in, but "stooped and saw the grave-cloths lying". Next, watch Simon Peter reaching the place (is he out of breath?); and he actually goes in. And what does he see? "the grave-cloths lying", which we had already seen through the Beloved Disciple's lens; but there is an addition: "the sweat-cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the other grave-cloths, but rolled up, apart, in one place". Only then does the other disciple go in – "and he saw, and he came to faith". Now the evangelist adds an explanation: "for they did not yet know the Scripture, that it was necessary for Jesus to rise from the dead"

How are you going to respond today?

Why did the Beloved Disciple come to faith at that moment? What do you believe about the Resurrection? What difference might it make to your life, do you think?

Examen (review of prayer)

As you pray your examen today reflect on the meaning of the resurrection to you in your life of prayer and your deeds.



CONTINUE YOUR JOURNEY



Reviewing your retreat

Take about 20 minutes for this prayer, longer if you wish, to look back over the days and weeks of the retreat at what God has been doing in and around you.

Take time to come to a still point using whatever has been helpful during Lent.

Ask God to show you whatever it would be most helpful to see. Ask for God's light as you review the days and weeks of the retreat. What does God want you to notice as you look back, and to take forward into daily life?

Read through the following passage. How has what St Paul speaks of been true for you in the retreat?

Ephesians 1:17–19

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring you to full knowledge of him. May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, what rich glories he has promised the saints will inherit and how infinitely great is the power that he has exercised for us believers.

Gently let the days and weeks of the retreat re-play before your mind's eye.

What do you notice?

Where did you feel closest to God? Where did you feel most challenged? Where did you feel yourself to be most fully alive, most completely the person that God has created you to be?

Are there any biblical passages, words or phrases, or images, which capture something important for you to remember from these weeks, things that you can come back to in your prayer in the coming days and weeks?

End by speaking to God, as one friend speaks to another, about all that you have seen and felt in this prayerful review. Let this part of the prayer go where it will, leading you into thanksgiving, or asking for further gifts that you need from God, or perhaps simply into a companionable silence.

*They decided to go
to Jerusalem*
by
Vasilii Polenov



General suggestions to follow up your retreat

- Be realistic
- Aim at praying 5–10 minutes every day. You may be able to do more. If so, fine – but if not, don't worry.
- Find a suitable time and place. Maybe a little corner in the house, somewhere very simple – a prayer corner with perhaps a statue, icon, bible, candle.
- Go to that place to pray.
- **Rosary:** Just one mystery: read it from the Gospel – pondering/searching. (This will cover 15 days.)
- **Stations of the Cross:** Can be prayed in the same way as Rosary. Walk around ... gazing ... just look ... no need for words. Be there with Jesus and Mary. (A way to pray for Lent and Fridays.)
- **Daily Mass/other service you can attend:** sometimes it just helps to spend time with God any way you can.
- **The Prayer of the Church:** available via an app like Universalis or with a breviary.

Prayer resources

- www.pathwaystogod.org offers daily prayers, as well as resources to take your prayer deeper. This includes Daily Offerings and Examen which you can use every day.
- www.pathwaystogod.org/my-prayer-life/Sunday Each week we publish a sheet of reflections on the Sunday readings suitable for praying in groups or at home.
- www.pray-as-you-go.org offers audio reflections to help you pray based on scripture for every day – online, via the app or via the podcast. They also have audio retreats.
- <https://www.sacredspace.ie/> offers daily meditations on scripture.

Retreats and other experiences of Ignatian Spirituality

- <https://www.pathwaystogod.org/courses-events-retreats> (includes residential retreat centre at St Beuno's as well as the Ignatian Spirituality Centre, Glasgow and the Mount Street Jesuit Centre, London.)
- <http://www.retreats.org.uk> (other retreats around the U.K.)
- Ongoing spiritual direction: in the London area please contact the Mount Street Jesuit Centre, and in Scotland please contact the Ignatian Spirituality Centre. Elsewhere in the country, please contact Sarah Young, Teams and People Coordinator: syoung@jesuit.org.uk

Organisations in your area

The British Province works closely with the following organisations which provide links to spiritual directors and prayer guides but also may run faith sharing groups.

Christian Life Community of England and Wales www.clcew.org.uk

Prego/St Beuno's Outreach in the Diocese of Wrexham <https://stbeunosoutreach.wordpress.com/>

Manresa Link (in the West Midlands) <https://www.manresalink.org.uk/>

The Epiphany Group (Scotland) <http://www.epiphanygroup.org.uk/>

Hearts on Fire (Sacred Heart, Boscombe)

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