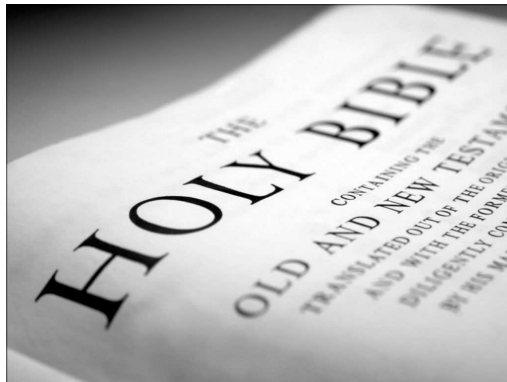


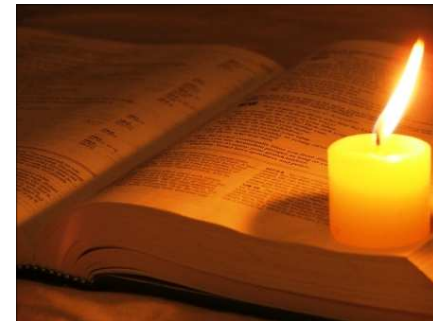
in it? What conversation takes place? What is the mood—tense? joyful? confused? angry?

Feel free to paint this picture in any way your imagination takes you. If we worry about historical accuracy, it can be a distraction that takes us away from prayer. This isn't Scripture—this is letting God take our imaginations and reveal to us something of the intimate life of Jesus or others. If, in our prayer, Mary pulls the toddler Jesus onto her lap to tie his shoes or zip his coat, we can let it happen that way. We don't want to fret about the historically accurate kinds of food served at a dinner or what kind of carpenter tools Joseph might have really had in his workshop. Here is an experience of prayer that lets our imaginations free themselves from anything that limits them. This is God revealing himself to us.

It helps if we imagine Jesus and his disciples as the real people they were who walked on the earth. St Ignatius imagined that the first person Jesus appeared to after the Resurrection as his mother and he encourages us to picture Jesus appearing at home to Mary, watching the joy and emotion in the scene.



Four Ways of Praying the Scriptures



- a guide to *Lectio Divina*

Introduction—what is ‘Lectio Divina’?

Lectio Divina [or Holy/Sacred Reading] is about developing a deeper relationship with God in daily life through the slow, contemplative praying of Scripture.

It is an ancient practice, first written about by Cyprian in 256 AD:

‘You are to be diligent in prayer and in lectio [reading]; that is how you speak to God and God in turn speaks to you.’

In the 12th Century, a Carthusian monk, Guido II named the four movements, in a ladder image, reaching from earth to heaven as being:

1. **Lectio**—a thoughtful, slow, attentive reading; listening deeply with the ‘ear of our hearts’. Firstly, though, we need to quieten ourselves and to centre ourselves to attend to the Word of God as though for the first time. Secondly, we ask the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds that we might be receptive to the one who speaks to us. We may be drawn to a phrase or word in the text which will lead us into the second movement of:

2. **Meditatio**—reflecting, ruminating [chewing over], repeating, savouring it with all our senses; personalising it—hearing it being said to me in the depths of my heart. In responding, we are lead to the third movement of:

3. **Oratio**—responding in prayer—prayer of the heart which may be praise, thanksgiving...We may find ourselves using a few simple words from the Psalms, ‘Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is longing for you my God...’

Conclusion—How do we pray with our imagination?’

[written by a Jesuit]

We meet new friends and we want to get to know them better. How do we do it? We share our stories. We tell them about our childhood, how we met our spouse or how our great-grandparents moved here.

We live in a rational, left brain world with global technology at our fingertips. Yet as human beings, our soul is still fired by colour and imagination. Our minds are storehouses of images and memories and through them God works in our hearts. Praying with our imaginations can create a deeper and more personal intimacy with Jesus, Mary, the disciples and others written about in Scripture. We can take the familiar stories we know and let them flow through our own imagination and see where the Lord guides us.

Using the imagination in prayer has been a treasured tradition in prayer for centuries. It prompted St Francis of Assisi to encourage people to create nativity scenes at Christmas, to imagine the Holy Family as people like we are. Four hundred years later, St Ignatius of Loyola used imaginative prayer as a key part of his life-transforming *Spiritual Exercises*.

How do we start? First, we get settled in a comfortable chair and in a quiet place where we won’t be distracted. Our first gesture might be to open our hands on our lap, and ask God to open our hearts and imaginations.

Then, pick a story out of Scripture. Read through it once, slowly, and put it down. Now we begin to imagine the scene as if we are standing right there. What is around me? Who else is there? What do I hear in the scene? If I am in a house, what noises are in the house or in the street outside? What are the smells I can pick up?

Now we begin to imagine the scene we read about. Who is

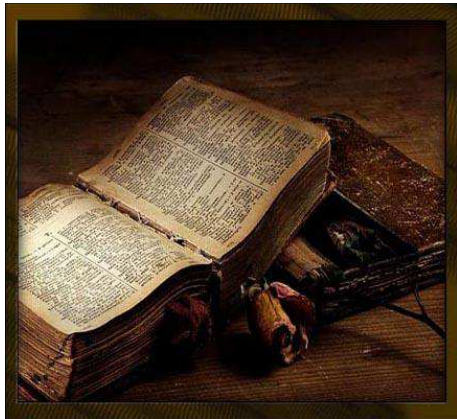
see that the Lord is good.' [Ps 34.8]

It may be that, in a familiar passage, you notice a word or a phrase that you have not noticed before. Take that and taste it.

The reason behind this is that the Holy Spirit has highlighted that word or phrase at this particular moment of your prayer. Once again, it is not necessary—in fact, it may well be counter-productive—to draw conclusions or make resolutions based on these texts. Just taste and enjoy, and leave the 'harvest' to the Lord.

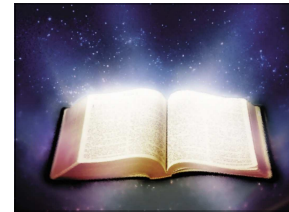
If, at a later stage you feel yourself drawn back to these words and phrases, then go back and continue to enjoy them; to wonder at what you read; to ponder in your heart—as Mary did.

Again, at the end of your prayer, reflect on the experience, and note down the feelings that were present.



4. **Contemplatio**—God's gift—enabling us to experience him directly beyond words, concepts and images. Resting in silence, doing nothing, being in his love, experiencing his loving gaze...

Four Ways of Praying the Scriptures



We know that if we plant a seed in the earth, water it and care for it, then in due course it will bring forth its fruit. Christ, in the parable of the sower [Lk 8.11-15], speaks of a seed being sown in the soil—in different kinds of soil. He tells us that some of these seeds failed to produce any fruit because of the type of soil into which they fell, but that the seed into good soil yielded much fruit.

Christ was telling us here that the seed sown was the Word of God and that it had a life within itself. When we pray the Scriptures that seed, which is the Word of God, is planted within us. If we nurture that seed, that life, if we allow the Word of God within us to grow in good soil [that is, if we nurture it and care for it] then, in due course it will bring forth fruit.

It takes time for a seed, once it has been planted, to grow. It takes time for the Word of God, planted within us, to grow. So we need to give time to the Word of God within us. For this reason it is valuable to have some guidelines to help us when we are praying the Scriptures.

Perhaps the first guideline should be that of always having a listening ear. This presumes that there are a number of traps we must avoid when praying the Scriptures—

- don't 'theologise', that is, ask questions beginning with 'Why?' or 'How?'
- don't apply to self or others, such as, 'Just like me... her...him...them'
- don't moralise, for example, 'I should...must...do this, that or the other'.

All of these traps pick up the seed before it has had time to settle [*the birds*], or force it to come to fruition too soon, and die [*shallow soil*], or cause it to be choked by cares [*thorns*]. The purpose of praying the Scriptures is to *look at God or Jesus, not to look at self*.

Don't force yourself into the Scriptures or force the Scriptures into your own way of thinking. Just let them unfold before you. The following four different ways of praying the Scriptures may help with this.

1. OBSERVING



Take a Gospel scene and just read it over and over again:

- between each reading pause for a few moments
- during this pause try to re-run the scene in your mind
- at each subsequent reading note what you missed previously: words, gestures, places, feelings, time,

[*your name*], I went up to the mountain to pray.'

['And yes, in answer to your question, I was tired and I was glad to be alone for a while and have time to be alone in prayer with my Father.']

Again, note how you feel as you pray in this way. Did you feel close/closer to Jesus, friendly, excited, dull etc? Remember, there is no right way to feel in prayer. The right thing to do is to register honestly how you actually do feel.

4. TASTE AND SEE



Not all passages of Scripture lend themselves to the ways of praying the Scriptures, of contemplation, that have been described. Large sections of our Lord's discourses, most of them in St John's Gospel, the letters of St Paul, so not fall into the 'memory' type of record. Nor do most of the writings of the Old Testament, especially the Psalms.

What are we to do with these passages? Is there another way which can help us to pray them?

We read them slowly and carefully—as indeed we do with all Scripture. If some word or phrase strikes you then stop at that word or phrase. Repeat it to yourself over and again, putting the emphasis now on one word, now on another. What you are doing is tasting that word or phrase as one might taste food or drink. As the Psalmist says, 'Taste and

- our memories
- our life-story
- listen to the other persons' memories and life-story

The Gospel is Jesus' life-story, which he shares with us and we with him. The first step is the same as the 'observing' way of praying the Scriptures. The evangelist tells us his memory of Jesus; how he 'shared' that memory.

The next step is to ask Jesus to let you *remind him* of the incident in the Gospel that you are praying. This means that you speak to Jesus personally—changing the pronoun from 'he' to 'you'. And you might like to add his name: Jesus, or 'Lord' when you feel like it. An example of this from Mk 6.45 would then read:

'Immediately Jesus, you made your disciples get into the boat and go before you to the other side, to Bethsaida, while you dismissed the crowd. After you had taken leave of them, you went up to the mountain to pray...'

Again, you can ask him questions or make comments—for you are recalling memories:

- Were you tired after speaking to the crowds?
- You must have been glad to be alone at last and be able to climb the mountain and be alone with your Father in prayer.

A further stage is to ask Jesus to tell you his memory—as he remembers it. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead and is now glorified in heaven does not mean he has no memory. He now has a 'glorified memory'. Using the same method as above, let Jesus speak to you. This means changing the pronouns to 'I'. And using the same text as above would now be:

'Immediately, [*your own name*], I made my disciples get into the boat and go before me to the other side to Bethsaida, while I dismissed the crowd. And after I had dismissed them,

attitudes—till the account becomes almost one of your own memories

While you are doing this try to keep Jesus in focus all the time.

During the readings, and especially during the pauses, note your feelings.

- Were you at ease with the scene?
- Did you feel threatened by the scene, or by part of it?
- Did the scene bring you comfort?
- Were you puzzled by the scene, or over-awed by it?
- Did it make you feel sad or happy?

There may be other thoughts that come to your mind at this time. Allow them to surface.

It is a good, and very helpful, practice at the end of the prayer period to note down in a prayer journal the reference to the biblical text and what your experience of the prayer was.

The times when you have to struggle are often accompanied by feelings of boredom, frustration and tiredness. We feel nothing seems to be happening, or we just 'can't get through to God'. Remember, these too are feelings and can be helpful to note down.

2. BECOMING INVOLVED



This time, as we pray the Word of God, we enter into the

scene and become involved in it. We become one of the participants in the scene. We can become:

- an onlooker
- a Pharisee
- a sinner
- one of the characters mentioned, perhaps Peter, Mary Magdalene, Martha, the woman at the well—according to the text of Scripture being read

Become that person. Get into the person's character:

- How did the person feel?
- What did he/she say?
- How did Jesus seem to that person? How did it make you feel?
- How did that person seem to Jesus? How would it have made Jesus feel?

Speak to Jesus about your feelings and how you felt about what has taken place in the incident in the Scriptures that you have just prayed and asked him to reveal to you some of his feelings about it. Remember, he too had feelings. Christ was not living in a vacuum. He was a human being just like us, with human feelings, like us.

Again, it can be helpful to write in your journal what your feelings were and how your prayer developed.

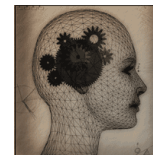
A good passage to begin with in this way of praying the Scriptures is that of blind Bartimaeus—Mk 10.46-52.

- Become Bartimaeus: you are sitting by the roadside and hearing the crowds shouting, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'
- What is it like for you, unable to see, to hear crowds shouting out? How do you feel about being unable to see him? What do feel there is in your life that you are blind to, that is keeping you from seeing him; that is holding you back?

- You begin to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'
- Bartimaeus knows that he needs help if he is to see again; if he is to find his way again. Am I aware of the help I need when I fall away from the person I wish to be?
- 'But many rebuked him and told him to be quiet' - who or what are the people in my life 'rebuking' me or holding me back, telling me to be quiet about Christ, telling me that I don't have to draw closer to Christ—that I'm alright as I am?
- Jesus stopped and said, 'call him'. What is it like for you when you hear the call of Jesus? Are you excited? Can't believe it's happening, not to *you*?
- So they called to the blind man, 'Cheer up! On your feet, he's calling you.' Throwing his cloak aside, he sprang to his feet and came to Jesus!
- What are the things in my life that I must throw aside so that I can jump up and fall at the feet of Jesus?
- When I fall at the feet of Jesus he asks me, 'What do you want me to do?' And, how do I answer.....? Bartimaeus wanted his sight. What do you want of Jesus?

The above is just one example of how you can use the 'becoming involved' way of praying the Scriptures, It may be of help to you and encourage you to find other ways of using it.

3. RECALLING MEMORIES



To get to know someone we share with that person: