

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

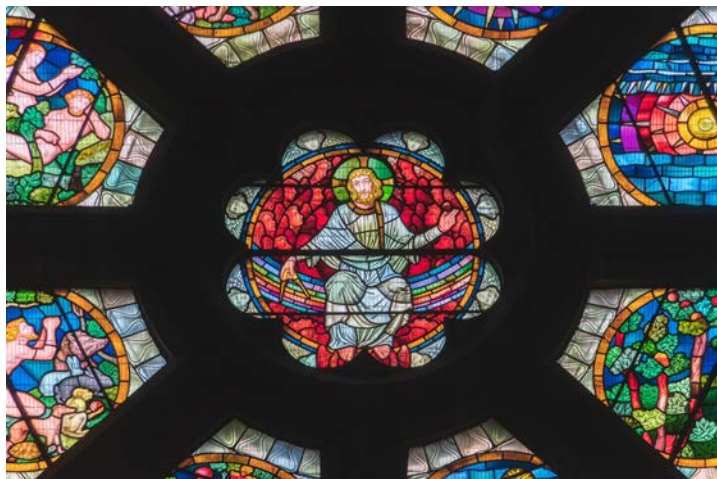
Consciously take deep and slow breaths.

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