

Praying with Art

Art can speak to our deepest feelings, calling forth our own creative response to the creativity of the artist. Just as we can be moved by a beautiful sunset, or seeing the smile of a child, or hearing a wonderful musical symphony, often without knowing why, so a painting or sculpture can move us beyond words to some deep feeling, some movement of the heart towards God – a feeling of ‘I know not what’ as CS Lewis put it or, in another of his phrases, ‘being surprised by joy.’ Or, as Ignatius would say, allowing us to experience ‘inner feeling and relish’.

We do not need to like or admire the art... as we notice our ‘inner feelings’ even responses of unease or discomfort are telling us something... and we can bring this movement to God in prayer.

Step-by-Step Praying with an Image

- Settle yourself into quiet. Take a moment to enjoy God’s long loving look. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you in your prayer and ask for what you desire in this time.
- Now look at the image before you. Look long, linger, sit with it in a quiet space. Allow your eyes to roam around the picture ... to notice the colours ... the shapes ... the moods... the texture ...
- Refrain from immediate interpretation of the image. Hold back from judgement. Allow thoughts and feelings to emerge gently –perhaps like water seeping into dry ground. Wait, let be. Be still. Let the image speak.
- You might then wish to use one or more of the following questions to help your ongoing reflection :-
 - Where do you find your attention most resting?
 - Which thought/s do you find yourself thinking?
 - Which feeling/s or desire/s in you does the image evoke?
 - Which memories are stirred?
 - Is there something in the picture you wish to change? Do you know why?
 - Does the image invite anything of you?
- Take some time with God to talk about the picture or what it has stirred within you and allow God to respond.
- Finish your prayer with an ‘Our Father’ or ‘Glory be ...’ etc.

Afterwards, review your prayer and, if you find it helpful, make some notes.