

# Gospel Contemplation

## OVERVIEW

The early Christians did not waste a lot of energy looking back and wishing they had been born a hundred years earlier so they could have walked with Jesus. Instead they focused on **coming to know Christ in three powerful ways**: practicing the *Sacraments*; reading *Scripture*; and the *Spirit's* presence in gathering together as God's people.

St. Ignatius **invited people to pray to come to know Christ** so that one may love him in a more real way and, following from this knowledge and love, become a more faithful disciple.

In order to grow in this 'faith knowledge', Ignatius taught a prayer method called *contemplation*. This is not some strange, mystical prayer but a form of prayer in which **one uses his or her senses in an imaginative way to reflect on a Gospel passage**. One uses seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling to make the Gospel scene real and alive.

This is a prayer that emphasizes listening to God's Word, learning Christ, so as to become more like Him.

## KEY FEATURES

1. **Gospels emphasis**—choose a Gospel story.
2. Recognition that **God is present in Scripture**.
3. The passage should be read **thoughtfully**—not too fast or too slow, but to be understood and experienced.
4. Use of **imagination and creativity**

## CONTEMPLATION

Although best done in a group setting, solo contemplation can be done.

1. Find a quiet, relaxing place
2. Choose a passage (story) from the Gospels.

3. Recall that you are engaging with God's Word and **God is present in His Word**.
4. Read (or listen to) the passage—**soak in the details** of the scene: Where does it take place? Who is present? What happens?
5. Read (or listen to) the passage again—**soak in the words and emotions** of the scene: What is said? What emotions run beneath, between characters?
6. (If needed, read it again to familiarize yourself further with the scene)
7. Close your eyes and reconstruct the scene in your imagination: See what is going on and watch the men and women in the scene. As one enters into the scene, sometimes there is the desire to be there. **Place yourself in the scene, perhaps as an observer, as one lining up for healing, or as one helping others to Jesus.**
  - o What does Jesus look like? How do the others react to him?
  - o What are the people saying to one another? What emotions fill their words?
  - o Is Jesus touching someone?
8. Some people's imaginations are very active so they construct a movie-like scenario with a Gospel passage. Others will enter the scene with verbal imagination, reflecting on the scene and mulling over the actions. **Vividness is not a criteria for the effectiveness of this kind of prayer.** Engagement is and the result is a more interior knowledge of Jesus.
9. Respond: **one should take a moment to speak person to person with Christ saying what comes from the heart.**
  - o What is your response to Jesus?
  - o Is Jesus drawing you to change in some way?
  - o What do you need the Spirit's help with?

