**Easter Contemplations with the Gospel of John**

The Easter season in liturgical churches includes the 50 days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost. The intensity of Holy Week is over and sometimes even the best of pray-ers want a break. Pause as needed, but realize that the Easter season is an ideal time to renew and strengthen our relationship with Christ and to discern what effect Christ’s passion, death and resurrection will have on our lives going forward.

You’ll find below a review of contemplative prayer, then some passages from the Gospel of John and reflection questions that might be helpful in your prayer. Some like to pray with each passage for a number of days. Others prefer to use a new passage each day, or simply let the Spirit guide them. Do what feels best to you. If you prefer to use another gospel, please do, and you can always move on to Matthew, Mark and Luke if/when you feel “done” with John.

**Contemplative Prayer**

Using your imagination in praying with the Gospels is a practice that is part of Ignatian spirituality. Ignatius called it “contemplation.” It is especially suited to scripture that tells a story and/or uses images that we can easily engage with. It is based on the belief that God can speak to us through the gospel in a way that touches our lives today.

During the Season of Easter, we can use Ignatian contemplation to help us draw close to the resurrected Christ. Each day, if possible, set aside 10-15 minutes for prayer. Let the events of the Gospel passages be very present to you.

Here are a few steps to guide your prayer:

1. Settle into a chair/place where you are comfortable and free of expected distractions.
2. Pray for the grace to be open to God’s love for you and to integrate God more fully into your life.
3. Read the scripture passage at least once (two or three times, if possible). It can be helpful for some to read it out loud and/or in a different language.
4. Imagine yourself in the scene. Ask yourself questions like this: Where are you? What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? What sensations of touch do you have? What do you feel emotionally? Let your imagination go and trust the Spirit to guide you.
5. Consider whether something strikes you in particular. Do you sense God speaking to you personally through the scripture passage? Is there something you are being called to in your relationship with God? In your relationships with others? In caring for yourself? Do you have questions or comments for those you meet in the scripture passage? If you feel called to do so, enter into conversation with them.
6. Rest a few minutes in your experience to savor it and let it grow and deepen.
7. Pray with thanksgiving for insights and graces given.
8. Ask for what you need to live as God calls you for the rest of the day and/or tomorrow.
9. Jot down a few words or phrases about your experience. Consider what you would like to take with you from this prayer time.

Ignatian contemplation is not for everyone. If it helps you to feel even a bit closer to God or to Christ, I’d consider doing it again in your prayer. If you don’t like it, don’t force yourself. Be sensitive to the way God is calling you, and let God’s grace guide you to prayer that helps you.

**Resurrection scripture passages/possibilities for reflection:**

**John 20:1-9 The Empty Tomb**

We have the advantage of knowing “the rest of the story.” Mary, Peter, and John did not. What must they have felt in encountering the empty tomb? What is it like to look in or go in with them or after they have left? Pause and behold the scene, including the tomb’s emptiness and the burial clothes. What do you feel in this process?

**John 20:10-18 Jesus and Mary Magdalene**

Mary remains in deep grief. How do you feel as you see her weep? What is it that helps her know that the gardener is Jesus? How is she called to respond? Do you identify with Mary in any way? How is Jesus calling you to respond to the reality of his resurrection?

**John 20:19-23 Jesus and his Disciples**

The disciples are afraid for their lives when Jesus appears. What must it have been like for them when he burst through the locked doors? What would it have been like for them to hear his words of peace, not once, but twice? And what about commission Jesus’ gives them? Why is forgiveness an essential part of their mission? Have you ever experienced Jesus bursting through the locked doors of your frightened, confused heart? Are there areas you want to pray for his peace? Have you experienced Jesus commissioning you? What about now? Do you feel the Spirit with you? How might you draw closer?

**John 20:24-29 Jesus and Thomas**

Thomas was in the same boat as we are. He hadn’t seen the Risen Lord the first time he came to the disciples. Then his turn came. Draw as close as you can to Thomas as he puts his hands into the wounds of Jesus. You may even want to be Thomas and follow through with this action. What is the experience like? What do you see? What do you feel? How does it move you? Have you had doubts about the resurrection? What are the experiences and who are the people who have brought you to belief? Is there any way you feel called to reach out to those who struggle?

**John 21:1-14 Breakfast with Jesus**

Peter and others went fishing, something they knew in the midst of an uncertain future. They were at first unsuccessful, but when they responded to Jesus’ instruction, they caught a “large number of fish.” After John and Peter recognized Jesus, they joined him for breakfast. Jesus had fed people during his life, but this is the first recorded time that he fed people after his resurrection. Imagine being there with them. Perhaps, you are John or Peter, or one of the non-named disciples. What is your experience like? What kind of day is it? What sounds or smells from the sea do you witness? What is the fire like? How does the bread taste? And the fish? What is it like to be with Jesus? There are a lot of metaphors in this passage. Pay attention to words or images that speak to you. Is there meaning in them for your own life?

**John 21:15-22 Jesus and Peter**

Peter had denied Jesus three times, yet with John’s prompting Peter recognized Jesus and impulsively jumped out the boat to be with him. After breakfast, Jesus questioned Peter about his love for him and gave him a commission. Imagine being with Jesus and Peter or perhaps, even being Peter. What do you hear from Jesus? What do you see in his eyes? What emotions do you feel? Imagine Jesus asking you the same question he asks Peter. How would you respond? What commission does Jesus give you?

**John 21:24-25 This is true, but there is more.**

# The gospel of John ends with a reminder that the words are truth, and also that there is much more to the story of Jesus life on earth. We will never know what accounts of Jesus’ life John omitted from his gospel, but perhaps these omissions are an invitation to each of us to write our own gospel. In a prayer ascribed to St. Teresa of Avila, we are told: “Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

# In what ways is the gospel true for you? How has it influenced your life? How are you or how can you be the hands, the feet, the eyes, the body of Christ? How can you bless the world in the name of Christ with the gifts, the opportunities, the liabilities and limitations that you have? Are you feeling called to recommit yourself to Jesus in any way? Are you feeling called to do more, to give something up, or to do something different so that you can respond more fully to Jesus? It’s important to take time to reflect on any of the inclinations you have. Discernment involved continued prayer and often, spiritual dialogue.

# The Holy Spirit is the gift of Pentecost…Pentecost will come in our liturgical year, but we have the Holy Spirit now, in our midst and in our souls. May we be blessed with openness to receive this Spirit each and every day!