

Mother of God Community
Palm Sunday Prayer Meeting
March 29, 2015
Using a Contemplative Method of Prayer during Holy Week
Terri Celmer

Psychological identification with Christ's passion is a form of prayer attested to by the Early Church Fathers. Saint Gregory Nazianzen, bishop of Cappadocia in the fourth century, instructed his readers to choose one of the roles indicated in the Gospel "scripts".

If you are Simon of Cyrene, take up the cross and follow Christ. If you are the thief and will be hung on a cross (if you will be punished, that is), do as the good thief did and honestly acknowledge God who preceded you to punishment.... If you are Joseph of Arimathea, ask those who crucified him for his body; assume that body and thus make your own his expiation for the world. If you are Nicodemus, the nocturnal adorer of God, bury his body and anoint it with the unguents prescribed by rite: surround it, that is, with your adoring worship" (Gregory Nazianzen, Discourse 45.23-24).

Father Timothy Gallagher, OMV explaining the method taught by Saint Ignatius of Loyola tells us:

- **Read** the text slowly and carefully; recall what it is about; then let it come alive for you!
- **Place yourself inside** the story, using your imagination; become one of the characters in the scene.
- **Participate** in the dynamics of the scene, dialoguing & interacting with Jesus and other characters.
- **Observe** what is going on around you in the scene: What do you see, hear, feel, smell, taste, touch?
- **Dialogue** with the other characters: What do they say or ask you? What do you say or ask them in reply?
- **Notice** what is going on *inside you* as you pray: joy, sorrow, peace, confusion, love, anger, etc.
- If you get *distracted* or your mind wanders, gently *return to the biblical text* and re-enter the scene.

A few words on using this method of prayer during Holy Week

The goal is to remain very present to the experience of Jesus, his disciples, and others who encounter Jesus during Holy Week. When praying with one scene, do not access what you know about what's coming next. That would interfere with your ability to remain present to this moment in Jesus' life.

Walk with Jesus as he faces his life one day at a time, one event at a time, one conversation at a time. None of the apostles and disciples had the foreknowledge of what was to come, so don't be tempted to think about what happens next. Next week you can spend the entire week rejoicing in the Resurrection and you can look back on events of Holy Week, but you cannot look into the future now.

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Another instruction: Do not do treat this material as a bible study. You are meant to pray with these Scriptures. The Scripture readings are meant to set the scene so you can locate yourself within the event. Number yourself among the witnesses of this event in Jesus' life. Experience this scene in the presence of Jesus. Go where he goes. Stop when he stops. Speak or be silent as your heart leads you.

Prayer Suggestions for Holy Week

The following is offered for your prayer on Monday and Tuesday of Holy Week

Knowing that his Hour was approaching, how does Jesus spend his time leading up to the Passover?

Luke 21:37-38 Jesus spent his days teaching in the Temple and his nights in Bethany.

Meanwhile, the chief priests and elders gather at the home of the chief priest Caiaphas and they plot to have Jesus arrested and put to death. Pray with Matthew 26:1-5 or Mark 14:1-2.

What might have consoled the heart of Jesus?

It is in Bethany that Jesus is anointed by the woman who broke the alabaster jar and poured it on his head while he was reclining at table. Pray with Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, or John 12:1-8.

The following is offered for your prayer on Wednesday and early part of Thursday of Holy Week

Judas makes a deal with the chief priests to hand Jesus over to them. They agree on a price for His head. Pray with Matthew 26:14-16, Mark 14:10-11, or Luke 22:1-6

Put yourself in Judas' shoes. Identify the motives you have for offering to turn Jesus over to the religious authorities of the time. How soon will you comply with the chief priests' request? What sign have you chosen to indicate which man is Jesus? Are you feeling uneasy when you rejoin Jesus and the others? Are you asked to explain where you've been?

Preparation for the Passover: Luke 22:7-13 Parallel passages are Matthew 26:17-19 and Mark 14:12-16.

Do you think the master of the house considered it a privilege to have Jesus in his house for the Passover meal? Was he a follower of Jesus? Does it matter to you if he is or he isn't?

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Don't over-spiritualize what takes place this week. Jesus remains firmly grounded. He's even thought about where they are to eat the Passover meal? Take the time to be practical. Think like a human being with both feet on the ground in Jerusalem. And use only what you know up to that moment in time being a Jewish disciple who has been walking with Jesus for the past three years. If you find that you keep accessing your knowledge of the rest of the story, and thinking like a 21st century Christian who has the benefit of the written Word and the teachings of the Church, stop and ask the Holy Spirit to make known to you which disciple's perspective He wants you to carry with you into the *Triduum*. Walk beside or in the sandals of that particular disciple. I think you will find this a very powerful experience.

The following passages are for use in your prayer after Holy Thursday's Mass and on Good Friday

The agony in the garden	Matt 26:30-46; Mark 14:26-42; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1
Jesus is arrested	Matt 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12
Jesus before the Sanhedrin	Matt 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54, 63-71; John 18:13-14, 19-24
Peter denies Jesus	Matt 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54b-62; John 18:25-27
Jesus before Pilate	Matt 27:1-2, 11-26; Mark 15:1-20; Luke 23:1-25 especially vv 14-16,22
Jesus is sentenced to death	Matt 27:23-31; Mark 15:15; Luke 22:23-25; John 18:28 – 19:16
The way of the cross	Matt 27:32-34; Mark 15:21-32; Luke 23:26-31; John 19:17
The crucifixion	Matt 27:35-54; Mark 15:33-41; Luke 23:32-49; John 19:18-30

Examples of using the contemplative method with the Seven Last Words of Jesus

"Woman, behold, your son...behold, your mother!" (John 19:26-27)

MARY: This is the most difficult day of my life. After a ministry of teaching and working miracles to help people, my Son is being crucified by the Jewish leaders and the Roman procurator as though he were a criminal. I do have the support of the beloved disciple and women followers of Jesus. My conviction is that by willingly, humbly and obediently accepting the plan of the Father, I will help to reverse the results of the sin of Adam and Eve, a sin of pride and disobedience. I cannot stop crying, but my mind is at rest.

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"It is finished." (John 19:30)

OPPONENTS: This false prophet was not able to prove to us or our leaders that he is the Messiah. As we see him dying on the cross, we know that he is certainly not the Son of God. He is in our eyes a blasphemer, a crucified criminal.

Source: Words of Jesus from the Cross: Meditations by Father Ralph Kuehner, pages 14 and 23

Some copies of this book are on sale after the prayer meeting for \$6 each.

The following is offered for your prayer at night on Good Friday and anytime on Holy Saturday

The burial	Matt 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:31-42
The longest Sabbath	Matt 27:62-66; Mark 15:47 – 16:1; Luke 23:56b