

## **Listening to God: Session 2**

Ignatian spirituality centres around Jesus' promise that we might have fulness of life. It is concerned to help us notice what is not fulness of life.

It begins with ourselves and our own experience. God speaks to us through the language of our experience. So, what matters is that we become attentive to our own experience.

Attention needs to be given to our interior movements, categorised by Ignatius as 'consolation' and 'desolation'.

**Consolation** is an affective state drawing us closer to God. It causes us to open out from ourselves and entails feelings of joy, peace, hope, faith and love.

**Desolation** turns us in on ourselves and away from God, producing a sense of disquiet and inner turmoil.

The question to be answered is 'In what direction am I moved: towards God or away from him?'

### **EXAMEN OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

It is a prayerful reflection of your experience with Jesus over a specific time period. **The goal is simple: increased awareness and attentiveness to the presence of God in your daily life.**

Recall you are in the presence of God, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide you as you review the events of your day.

Walk through the events in your day (or yesterday's events if it is morning). Imagine yourself watching your day on a fast-forwarded DVD with Jesus. Let Jesus stop the DVD at any part of the day so you might reflect on it.

**Notice those times when you were aware of God's presence, when you felt you were moving toward God.** How did you feel when you were open and responsive to God's guidance? Give God thanks for those times.

Notice the times you were not aware of God's presence, when you felt you were moving away from God. What was blocking that awareness? Pray for forgiveness or healing, as appropriate, for those times.

**1. Pray for light.** Since we are not simply daydreaming or reminiscing but rather looking for some sense of how the Spirit of God is leading us, it only makes sense to pray for some illumination.

**2. Review the day in thanksgiving.** Note how different this is from looking immediately for your sins.

**Gratitude is the foundation of our whole relationship with God.** Walk through the past 24 hours, from hour to hour, from place to place, task to task, person to person, thanking the Lord for every gift you encounter.

**3. Review the feelings that surface in the replay of the day.** Our feelings, positive and negative, the painful and the pleasing, are clear signals of where the action was during the day. Simply pay attention to any and all of those feelings as they surface.

**Ask Jesus to bring to mind the thing you are most grateful for from today.** Ask yourself what happened in that moment. Breathe in the gratitude you felt and the life of that moment.

**Ask Jesus to bring to mind the thing that you are least grateful for from today.** Ask yourself what happened during that moment and why it may have been difficult.

- What was the most life giving part of the day?
- What was the most life draining part of the day?
- When was I happiest today?
- When was I saddest today?

**4. Choose one of those feelings (positive or negative) and pray from it.** Now simply express spontaneously the prayer that surfaces as you attend to the source of the feeling—praise, petition, contrition, cry for help or healing, whatever.

**5. Look toward tomorrow.** What feelings surface as you look at the tasks, meetings, and appointments that face you? Whatever it is, turn it into prayer—for help, for healing, whatever comes spontaneously. To round off the examen, say the Lord's Prayer.

## **IMAGINATIVE CONTEMPLATION**

**Ignatius was convinced that God can speak to us as surely through our imagination as through our thoughts and memories.**

Ignatian contemplation is suited especially for the Gospels. **It's like we accompany Jesus through his life by imagining scenes from the Gospel stories.** Letting the events of Jesus' life be present to us right now.

**Visualize the event as if you were making a movie.** Pay attention to the details: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings of the event. Lose yourself in the story; don't worry if your imagination is running too wild. At some point, place yourself in the scene.

Imaginative contemplation involves imaginatively putting oneself into a narrative from scripture, particularly the Gospel stories with Jesus, **where we become a part of the story as the events unfold.**

We use all our senses to touch, see, hear, taste, smell and feel our way into the scene. **It is not about analysing the texts, but imagining them in a way that they become alive for us,** perhaps for the first time. We place ourselves directly into the scene, interacting with the characters and allowing the story to unfold with us actively involved.

Read through the original story a few times, until you feel you know it well.

- Imagine the scene, find a place within it. Let the story unfold in your imagination.
- Who are you within the story? Are you a central figure or an unnoticed bystander?
- What can you see, hear and feel around you?
- Listen to what is said and look around you.
- Look at the expressions on people's faces and listen to the tone of people's voices.
- What else can you hear, see or feel?
- Perhaps you will notice things not mentioned in the text.
- Is there anyone you want to engage in conversation?

Once you find yourself in the scene, let the events unfold more or less as described in the passage you just read, **but this time interact with God or Jesus yourself – not in a character but just be you.**

## **LECTIO DIVINA**

Lectio divina ('holy, or divine reading'). First practiced by the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Common in monastic communities.

In Benedictine monasteries, time is set aside each day for this 'holy reading'.

4:55-56 – *'listen readily to holy reading and devote yourself often to prayer.'*

**Literally meaning 'sacred reading', lectio divina is an active meditative kind of reading where we let God start the conversation.**

Lectio calls for a different way of reading. **We're not reading for information, but for transformation.**

We're not reading quickly. **Lectio uses a slower pace that encourages us to savour each word.** We're not doing bible study.

In lectio divina we seek to attend with 'the ear of our heart' rather than analyse through our rational faculties.

Read the passage you've chosen twice. Read the Scripture slowly. Allow its words to wash over and sink into your consciousness as you become familiar with the passage. Don't try to interpret it or understand it. Picture and even enter the scene, watch and interact with the characters.

**As we slowly read, a word or phrase may catch our attention.** Read as if hearing it for the first time, with fresh eyes and an expectant heart.

**Let the text speak to you personally.** Whenever a word or phrase stands out for you, even in the smallest way, stop. If it strikes you stop.

### **Meditation (meditation).**

We reflect on the word or phrase that struck us.

### **Monastics often talk of ruminating (like an animal quietly chewing its cud.)**

We take in the word and chew on it. Memorise it and gently repeat it to yourself. We're exploring what the word or phrase is saying to us and how it connects with our life.

**We can carry the memorized text with us through the day to remind us of God's touch during prayer.**

### **Oratio (prayer)**

Next we respond by talking to God about how we see the word or phrase of scripture connecting with our lives. We ask God to show us the connection even more clearly. **Carry on the conversation as if with a friend. You can be totally honest.**

### **Contemplation (contemplation).**

We stop doing and simply be. Rest without words in God's embrace. Still your heart and mind and be silent. Allow God to speak deep within you.

You might like to write your word or phrase down as a reminder.

If doing it on your own, don't feel that you have to finish the passage.

*"Lectio Divina has no other goal than spending time with God through the medium of his word."*

**Remember, God is in charge. Relax and simply accept the way God chooses to reveal himself.**

