

Preparing to Pray

Today, as I do a couple times a year, I'm going to lead you through an Ignatian meditation on today's Gospel passage.

A reminder: when we do this, this is really how we are supposed to pray when we pray the Rosary. The Rosary is vocal prayer, but it is also meditative prayer, in which we are supposed to put ourselves in the place of these mysteries that accomplished our redemption.

And as a reminder, what we're doing today is not fantasy. Jesus is alive. So, when we attempt to encounter Him within our imagination, the Lord will encounter us in some way.

You'll do best if you sit up straight but comfortable, feet on the floor, hands not clenched but relaxed at your sides. Begin to take a couple deep breaths in and out: in through your nose and out through your mouth.

You'll do best either to close your eyes or to pick one spot in front of you to stare at, to focus your imagination. And to further focus our imagination, repeat after me, praying that the Holy Spirit will enlighten our minds:

Come, Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit, come.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Jesus, come.

The Upper Room and the Mount of Olives

I invite you to imagine the room in which the Last Supper occurred: that large upper room.

The man who owns the house observed the earthquake and the eclipse of Good Friday, and decided to allow the apostles to continue to use the upper room for some weeks, or as long as they need it.

It is here that Jesus appeared to them on Easter night, and also again a week later when Thomas was present. The apostles have been gathering here in this room, and most have actually been sleeping there. It is also the same upper room where Pentecost will take place.

Again, imagine this upper room on the very early morning of the Ascension. Imagine now that you are asleep in the upper room on a mat on the floor. View yourself sleeping on top of the mat with your clothes on, but with your shoes taken off and placed beside the mat.

Imagine that Jesus now comes to you where you're sleeping, kneels down, places His hand on your shoulder, and gently shakes you awake. As you awake, He indicates for you to get up. He gestures at your shoes, signaling to put them on, and He says, "It is time to go." You realize that He has already roused the other apostles, and they are making their way sleepily to the door. You follow and turn to the door.

Upon exiting the door, you find yourselves outside on a cool morning, sun not quite up, birds chirping, and on the Mount of Olives.

As you gather around Jesus, imagine His appearance in the morning light. This is the risen Jesus: alive, radiant, and strong, yet still with the wounds visible in His hands and His feet.

How does it feel to be in His presence?

Watch as He now looks in turn at each apostle. And as He looks directly at you, what do you see in His eyes?

He says to all of you, "Do not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, about which you have heard Me speak." He continues, "For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

As you look at the apostles, you can see that they don't fully understand. One of them asks, "Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" They seek clarity, resolution, and victory. Perhaps you do, too.

Where in your life do you say to the Lord, "Fix this"? Or, "When will this make sense?" Or, "When will the plan become clear?" Where are you impatient in faith? This is something to offer to the Lord.

Jesus answered, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by His own authority." Jesus does not give a timetable or a solution. He gives you a mission.

Waiting for the Spirit, Sent as Witnesses

The Lord continues, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses." He says to you: you are not a spectator, but an active participant, a witness to Him.

Ask yourself: how is the Lord inviting you to witness to Him more fully? In your parish? In your family? In your friendships? At work? In your hidden sacrifices?

Look at Jesus and ask how He wants you to witness to Him. And if you don't get an indication now, it may come later.

Jesus then concludes, looking directly at you: “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” How does this statement strike you?

“And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

Then the moment shifts slowly. He begins to ascend. Imagine it. You and the others stare upward. Some fall to their knees. Some shield their eyes from the brightness. Then the cloud covers Him, and you can see Him no more.

Then you hear a voice. As he begins to speak, you see two men just outside the circle of you and the apostles. They are wearing dazzling, bright garments. One of them says, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus will return to you in the same way you have seen Him going to heaven.” Jesus is no longer present in the same way. But as you look around, you see that you have a band of other followers with you.

Finally, in this time of waiting for the Holy Spirit, quietly pray, asking the Holy Spirit to prepare you to receive Him in a fuller way.

Over this week, quietly pray, asking the Holy Spirit to prepare you to receive Him in a fuller way in this week preparing for Pentecost. And feel free to ask for a specific strengthening you feel you need to bear greater witness to Jesus.

As you’re ready, begin to come back to me here in the sanctuary.

Dear friends in Christ, let us ask the Lord for the grace to bear witness to Him with our lives, that His love may be evident in us.

Praise be Jesus Christ.