

Prayer of Imagination:

1. Prepare to read Mark 10:46-51a.
2. “Recollect yourself”
3. Slowly read the passage twice, ending with the phrase, “What do you want me to do for you?”
4. Set the passage aside and begin to review in your memory what you have read: the people, the place, the actions, the conversations. As you review these elements of the passage, let your imagination begin to construct the scene they form (Do not worry about getting the scene, “right.” In this way of praying, scripture inspires richness of images that exceeds the written details.) What do you see? Hear? Smell? Feel? Whom do you see? What colors are visible? What buildings and vegetation? What do you notice about Jesus? As the scene unfolds, imagine that he ultimately turns to you with the question, “What do you want me to do for you?” Hear that question again and again. Notice how Jesus asks it – the way he looks and sounds.
5. Begin to answer Jesus’ question. You may wish to carry on a conversation with him, either imagining it within you or writing it out as a dialogue.
6. Conclude with a prayer that expresses to God what has arisen for you in this time.¹

A further note of help or theological reflection on the process, “Who we are (the different pieces of who we are) is projected onto the reflective surface that is God’s presence. What we ‘see’ is the place where who we are meets who God is. Who we are looks different when it hits the God-shaped surface offered by God’s presence. We experience the meeting point of our two presences as God accommodates the Divine presence to who we are. Sometimes this meeting point reveals the ugliness, the sin, in my life – because when the nastiness in me hits the surface of the goodness that is God, the contrast is incredibly stark. Or sometimes the goodness in me is highlighted, thrown into relief, when it hits the surface of the goodness of God’s presence. So I find myself.... In God.”²

¹ Andy Dreicter. *Prayer Traditions*, Claremont School of Theology course in Spring 2006, class handouts. Most of this material is adapted from his work.

² Dreicter, reflecting.

Centering Prayer

(Note: This is not a prayer form which can be done “right” or “wrong” and it is further not one that you end up feeling like you “get.” However, for many people it is a very useful experience. It may be helpful to think of it as sitting quietly with God.)

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within. (Often finding this word is a time consuming part of this prayer.)
2. Sitting comfortably and with your eyes closed, settle briefly, and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God’s presence and action within.
3. When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word. (Thus, the word is not a mantra. It does not get repeated, only used to draw you back to the center when needed.)
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with the eyes closed for a couple of minutes.³

³ Adapted from class handout, which came from Thomas Keating, “The Method of Centering Prayer” in Gustave Eininger, ed. *Centering Prayer in Daily Life and Ministry* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 130-131)

The Jesus Prayer

“(Lord) Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” This phrase is repeated, continuously. Optimally out-loud, but can be silent. It is said that when this phrase is repeated without ceasing it moves from lips to mind to heart. The phrase is centered on scriptures: Luke 18:13 and Luke 18:38 and arises from the Desert tradition.

A Prayer using Recollection, Repetition, and Colloquy

1. Recollection

Option 1: Turn your attention to something in nature, something that attracts you. If possible, spend some time outside, sitting or walking. If you cannot be outside, look out a window to the natural world.

Allow yourself to focus intently on this gift of nature. Bring all your senses to it. Be aware of your connection to this bit of the life that flows from God, and caress it with your attention. Notice each detail. Follow its lines, its textures, its movements. Allow your seeking to deepen and expand so as to gaze upon it and into the mystery of God. Be with this piece of nature as a two-way window.

Option 2: What helps you to focus on the presence of God in your life? Is it some way you have of naming God? Is it a song? Is it a memorized prayer? A Psalm? Spend some minutes entering into this process of focusing, of being present to God, attending to God's presence, without concern to bring something to God or receive a particular thing from God.

2. Repetition

After Recollection, begin to recall what occurred in a prayer you have already prayed. Gently let your attention move through what you experienced during that time of prayer. Notice the point in your prayer that draws your attention most fully, the place where you now experience the strongest attraction or the most disturbance. (It is good to note any physical sensations you had, from tightened or loosened muscles to sighs, to an upset stomach) Begin to explore with God that point, movement, dynamic, that is drawing your attention. Allow your exploration to deepen and to expand as it will.

3. Colloquy (Intended to last at least 10 minutes)

After the Repetition, turn your attention to conversing with God about what you experienced during the Recollection and Repetition. You may want to imagine one or more of the figures of the Trinity in conversation with you, and/or you may wish to write out your conversation (both sides of it perhaps!), or engage it in some other way.⁴

⁴ Adapted from class handout that was adapted from Elizabeth Liebert's June 1996 adaptation of an exercise written by Nancy Wiens St. John.

Prayer with Creation (One way to do it)

1. Go to a place where God's creation meets you: ask for God's presence with you.
2. Attend to the works of creation around you. Does one thing seem to invite you, strike you, impress you, or somehow attract you?
3. Come to a sense of quiet rest in the presence of God and in this piece of God's handiwork.
4. Simply gaze upon this part of creation for an extended time – a time of wonder, amazement, openness, receiving.
5. Eventually, engage God in conversation about this thing you have noticed. You may want to ask God questions such as: Where has it been? Who has touched, held, seen it? What does God value it? How is it related to what is around it? How is it related to me? – to the rest of creation? What does it tell me of myself?

And finally... How is God present to me through this piece of creation? What does it tell me of God? What is God saying to me, offering me?

6. Remain for a time in the experience of whatever follows these questions.
7. Offer God thanks for this time and for the wonders of creation.⁵

⁵ Andrew Dreitcer, March 1996, All Rights Reserved, used with permission.

Examen

One of the most frequently used forms of prayer in the Christian Tradition is the process of examen. The questions can be named in a variety of ways, and a few of the options are here. Generally examen is a repeated process, done every day, or every week, or at some regular interval. After intentionally opening yourself to God, you and God consider the two questions:

- What has been the best part of today? Or, what has been the most life-giving piece of today? Or, how have I best been able to shine forth God's love today? Or, when did I feel most connected to the Divine today?
- What has been the worst part of today? Or, what has been the least life-giving piece of today? Or, how have struggled most to show God's love today? Or, when did I feel most distanced from the Divine today?

After reviewing the time since the last examen and answering the questions, prayer is offered to thank God for the good and the bad.

Rosary

Prayer beads can be found in many faith traditions and are used as a way to keep count of the number of repetitions, as is the case with the Muslim chaplet of 99 beads, or as a reminder of a specific prayer, as it is with the Catholic Rosary.

Today Rosaries are commonplace and many places sell “pocket crosses” or “pocket angels”, and WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) bracelets, all in the hope carried or worn with the hope of pulling us into a prayerful (or reflective) mindset.

In secular society groups and alternative therapies are using prayer beads and stones to help individuals deal with their problem as both the construction of the beads and the use of them in prayer or meditation have proven helpful. Tactile stimulation according to Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O., and author of Praying By Hand, “...helps our concentration.” and “While they occupy and integrate our external senses into our prayer, our mind is left freer to attend to its own level of reality.”⁶

It is believed that in Christianity, the Rosary evolved from a simple stone. The first Christian documentation found of using stones to keep track of prayers was a hermit by the name of Abba Paul (A.D. 341). Paul would collect the stones for his prayers in the morning (all 300 of them), and as he recited the prayers he would drop them into his pile. Later, stones, berries, and bits of bones were also used as reminders of prayers and Psalms.^{7 8}

As a brainstorm, we offer a few novel ways to pray a Rosary that may be helpful.

- Pray for one person in your life with each bead.
- Repent of one sin in your past with each bead.
- Repeat a mantra that connects you to God, moving through the beads as you see fit.
- Follow the traditional method of praying the Rosary, but when you get to the beads used for the mysteries:
 - Pray a psalm for each one.
 - Move your way through salvation history:
 1. Creation
 2. Emancipation
 3. Exile
 4. Jesus’ ministry
 5. Life after the resurrection
- Be creative – let the Rosary beads move you toward prayer, however that works best for you!

⁶ Pennington, M. Basil, Praying By Hand: Rediscovering the Rosary as a way of Prayer. Harper: San Francisco, 1991. 3

⁷ The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume II, “The Rosary”

⁸ This Rosary information comes from Sarah Fredrickson, worksheet for Prayer Traditions, Spring 2006.