

Contemplating Justice: A Prayerful Approach to Racial Injustice

An Ignatian Contemplation on Mark 10: 17-27

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Introduction

Ignatius proposes contemplation as a way of praying frequently in his Spiritual Exercises. You are invited to use your imagination to enter the scene, to take part, to let the scene unfold. As Ignatius suggests, notice the people, listen to them, watch what they do [SE, 106, 107, 108]. You might sense an invitation to be one of the individuals in the scene or engage in a conversation with one of them. In the guided prayer after we hear the scripture, I will suggest that you take the part of the rich young man.

If this way of praying is new – simply relax and try to become engaged in the scene. Try not to worry about what you are “supposed to” be doing. If you find yourself distracted during your prayer, very gently bring yourself back to the scripture text or your imaginative contemplation.

If at any point during the guided contemplation your imagination comes to life in such a way that God invites you to stay with a particular moment, follow the invitation that you sense, rather than move on to where the written contemplation is going. After the prayer, we’ll take a few minutes to do a written review, so just make sure you have paper and something to write with nearby.

We begin by quieting our bodies and minds:

- Choose a position where you can be relaxed but alert.
- Breathe deeply several times and let your body relax
- Breathe out any worries or stressful thoughts and put them in God’s hands
- Become aware of God’s presence here with you now, looking at you with love.

Ask for a Grace

Ask God for the grace of awareness of what you might have difficulty giving up in order to increase racial justice and inclusion.

Scripture

Mark 10: 17-27

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.’” He replied and said to him, “Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, “You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have,

and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through [the] eye of [a] needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.”

Contemplation

Have you begun to see the place in your imagination? Jesus is setting out on a journey – see the road where he is walking. Has he gotten very far out of town yet?

What are the surroundings like?

What’s along the road? Are there trees or shrubs or rocks?

Are there many people with Jesus?

What about passersby on the road?

What do you hear? What smells are in the air?

You are in this place, with Jesus as he heads out on his journey. Pause for a moment to really experience yourself there.

You approach Jesus with a burning question. You know you are a good person, and this is true, you are. You seek in all ways to follow the commandments and to love God and your neighbor. But you are wondering if there’s more that you can do to be closer to God and God’s desires for the world, and to eternal life. You wonder this especially as it relates to racism and inclusion of Black and people of color in your life and work.

And so you approach Jesus and ask what more can you do?.

He looks at you with love. Receive this gaze and know that it is genuine.

And then Jesus tells you what it is in your own life for you to still work on, especially as it relates to racial justice and inclusion. He might tell you what it is you are still reluctant to give up. For the young man, it was his material wealth. Very possibly for you it will be something different.

- Perhaps it is a reluctance to make changes (at home, in friendships, at work, in volunteer commitments) in order to include people of color who haven’t been previously present.
- Perhaps it is difficult to give up some leadership, power, or voice, so that people of color have more opportunities for leadership, power, and their voices to be heard.

Listen to what Jesus says to you, personally, about what it is you might be clinging to that’s getting in the way of your following him.

How do you respond?

Pay attention to your own feelings around this issue, and offer them, whatever they are, to Jesus.

Perhaps it feels difficult or even impossible to move forward. Listen to Jesus as he says, ““For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.”

Take a few moments to talk with Jesus about this statement and about this prayer experience. Ask him for what you need, and listen to his response to you.

And when you are ready, close with a favorite prayer.

Review of Prayer

St. Ignatius recommends this practice to help us see how God is moving in us. Some questions to assist with your review appear below. There is no need to answer all of them:

What happened in your prayer?

What feelings did you experience?

During prayer, when did you feel encouraged?

When did you feel discouraged?

Did you receive the grace you asked for?

What did you receive?