

Prayer Corner 3

Contemplative Prayer (Peter/Jesus Gethsemane)

By Angie Rebert

"Oh My Father, if it is possible
Let this cup pass from me;
Nevertheless, not as I will but as You Will."
Matthew 26: 39 NKJV

In this season of Lent, I would like to share with you a form of Contemplative Prayer. It involves choosing a scripture passage and reading it aloud several times. Become aware of the thoughts and feelings you are having while reading and pausing to ponder. It is a way of immersing oneself into "living the Word".

My understanding of this prayer practice comes from the book, *The Ignatian Adventure* by Kevin O'Brian. St. Ignatius (1491-1556), was the founder of the Jesuit order. The adventure of the Ignatius prayer practices is about traveling (praying) between the head and the heart.

Meditation is using our intellect to pray over words, images, and concepts and it allows our hearts to be moved into contemplation. **Contemplation** is more about feelings; it stirs up emotions and inspires deep God-given desires. Contemplation relies on Holy Spirit revelation through our God-given gift of imagination. In the Ignatian exercises they say, "we pray the Scriptures, we do not study it."



I would like to invite you to come with me on a contemplative adventure with Jesus and his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. In this exercise, I am using scripture from

Matthew 26: 36-46, Mark 14:32-42, and Luke: 22:39-46. In this contemplation, I imagine that I am Peter. Who will you choose to be?

A Contemplation Prayer Monologue

Peter is with Jesus and other disciples and is telling this story. We left the Upper Rooms after the Passover Meal, and went with Jesus to our favorite gathering place in the Garden of Gethsemane, on Mt. Olives. All through this night, Jesus has seemed very sad and distant.

"Sit here while I pray," Jesus said quietly to me, and to James and John. He motioned for us to go with him a little further away. We settled down on the ground and Jesus moved still a little distance beyond us, but we could still hear him as He began to pray.

"Abba Father,
All things are possible for You.
Take this cup away from me;
Nevertheless, not what I will,
But what You Will"

Mark 14:35,36

At first, we listened to his beseeching praying, but we were exhausted from the day's events and that very strange Passover evening we had just shared with Jesus. We all fell asleep quickly. A little later on, Jesus came back to us and found us sleeping. I think he just wanted a little companionship and comfort, but alas, we could not stay awake for him.

Jesus spoke to me directly, "Peter, could you not watch with me ONE hour?"

His words pierced deep into my heart! I was cut to the core! "I'm so sorry, so sorry!" I murmured. I love this man so! And I let him down!

But Jesus went on speaking. And when the other two were awake and listening, Jesus said,

"Watch and pray,
Lest you enter into temptation.
The spirit is indeed willing
But the flesh is weak."

"Oh Jesus, I'm so sorry!" I said.

But Jesus had already left us, returning to his lonely place of prayer. And we again heard the same words, the same request, the same surrender: "*Not my will but yours be done.*" And he prayed on and paused.... prayed and paused.

Jesus came to us again. And again, he found us all three of us sleeping. This time he did not speak, he just walked away. I sensed his coming and going, and this time I struggled up to a sitting position and propped myself against the rough bark of a tree nearby. I could hear Jesus groaning, praying louder and again asking God "to take away the cup." Why does he keep asking about *this cup*? His words sounded like a painful groaning and sorrowful moaning. I watched him intently. It seemed to me like there were drops of sweat, that actually looked like blood, appearing on His agonized face. "Oh my dear Lord! Why are you in such turmoil?" I murmured to myself.

And then, I noticed there was a soft, glowing, misty Presence all around Him. It seemed to me that two angels had suddenly appeared, glimmering and pulsating and moving all around him. It felt to me, like they were ministering to Him, comforting and strengthening Him, bestowing peace upon Him. His countenance changed. His face was a normal sun-tanned color again. And Jesus seemed at peace, assured, confident even, and no longer troubled.

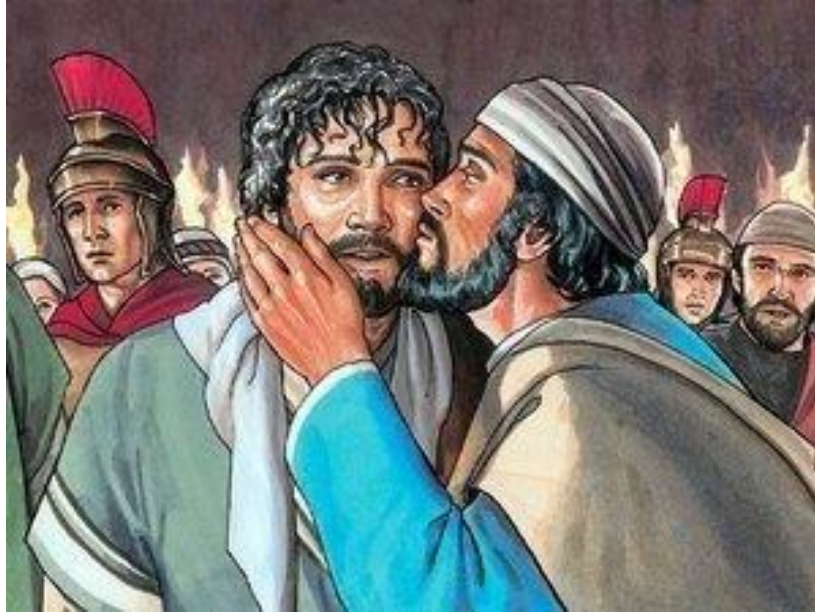
I think I saw this happen. But I can't be sure. Maybe I dreamed it all. In any case, when Jesus returned to us the third time, he AGAIN found all of us asleep, even me.! This time he scolded us gently but emphatically!

"Are you still sleeping and resting?
It is enough!
The hour has come!
Behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.
Rise, let us be going.
See, my betrayer is at hand."

We scrambled up quickly, the rest of the disciples rushing to join us. We heard heavy thuds of many footsteps coming up the path. Peering into the darkness, we saw flickering lights coming from many torches. Suddenly, there was a crowd of angry voices, as a group of temple guards and a band of Roman soldiers surrounded us.

I cannot bear to go on. What happened next is too painful to put into words. I cannot speak of it now, maybe later, much later. But I will say Judas betrayed our Lord and Master. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss... a Kiss!
But we ALL betrayed him as well. We all scattered in fear.
John and I followed a good distance behind Jesus, as the soldiers led him away. We dodged behind trees and tread softly, making sure not to be noticed.

"Oh my dear Lord Jesus. Forgive me for abandoning you!"



I hope this contemplative monologue was a prayerful experience for you. For me, the words I picked from the scriptures chosen were:

Watch and pray

Could you not watch with me one hour?

Rise, come let us be going....

The major feelings I empathize with Peter are: great grief, regret, and even shame that he could hardly bear to experience, because he failed to stay awake to watch and pray with his Beloved Jesus. I wonder how I would react/respond in that same situation back then—and today. I fear I, too, would fail my Beloved Jesus.

My ending prayer for this contemplation is:

Oh dear Lord Jesus,
I hope I will stay awake for you in today's trials.
But I know, I too, am weak and could easily fall asleep,
(Perhaps not really sleeping, but asleep by not being aware)
Help me Lord Jesus, to watch and pray, lest I fall into temptation
and not see the way the Holy Spirit is leading me.
Thank you for loving me no matter what.
Thank you for your Great Love Sacrifice on The Cross.
Thank you for always being here with me, saying:
"Arise, come let us be going...."
Thank you for loving me no matter what.

In Your Holy Name I pray...
Amen

If, this example of an Ignatius Contemplative exercise intrigues or inspires you to learn more, I would suggest you access the following links below:

Ignatius Contemplative Prayer

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/02/25/lent-imagine-podcast-240090>

Imaginative Prayer: A Guide for Beginners

<https://www.gracewatch.org/imaginative-prayer/>

Sources

Information

O'Brian, Kevin. *The Ignatian Adventure*. Chicago, Loyola Press, 2011.

Graphics

Jesus in the garden – jw.org

Judas kiss -