

Along the track

Voices from the Past

Sometimes TV shows can hook you in. I have become addicted to a rather dark, police drama series on TV, because of the acting and particularly because of the script. It is extraordinarily good, thoughtful and at times, almost poetic. Just about every episode offers some gem, something that makes you think, something that makes you reconsider the mundane things of life, the ordinary, the things we take for granted, to see them in a new and perhaps more appreciative light. I will let you guess what the series may be.

In one recent episode, the detective sat in silence for quite a while at the crime scene, now an 'empty' room, listening and observing, trying to re-compose the scene. He tries to place himself in the scene at the time of the crime. Who was there and why were they there? What brought them to this place? Where were they in the room? What might have been said, in what tone of voice? What was disturbed, what was out of the ordinary, out of place. What thoughts and feelings arise? How would I see the scene through the eyes of each of those who were there? What are those who were there at that time trying to tell me now? He was using all of his senses, as well as his imagination and memory.

It was no surprise to find that the scriptwriter was educated by the Jesuits. St Ignatius, in his Spiritual Exercises, recommended a very powerful way to pray, involving using all of our senses. When we reflect on a scriptural passage or event, first imagine the scene in concrete detail, and then place yourself in that scene. Who was there? Why? What was the place like, why was Jesus there, what was the atmosphere like, what might Jesus say to me if I was there? And then attend to the thoughts and feelings that arise within. Not unlike the method used by this detective.

When we take a scripture passage, Ignatius wrote that : *firstly, by the sight of my imagination I will see the persons, by meditating and contemplating in detail all the circumstances around them, and by drawing something from the sight. By my hearing I will listen to what they are saying or might be saying. Using the sense of touch, I will, so to speak, embrace and kiss the places where the persons walk or sit.*

This method of prayer, asks us to do more than just read about this particular gospel incident, it asks us to do more than study it, to dissect its language, to interpret the text. It asks us to place ourselves in the scene, not just think about it. We put ourselves right into the action, we try to see what is happening through the eyes of those who were there, to hear with the ears of those who were there, to imagine, to see, to smell, to hear, to touch, etc. We are being invited to experience Scripture on a whole new level, to pray as the Spirit moves us.

To pray as the Spirit moves us – sometimes we can become too intellectual about prayer, too attached to words and formulas. They have their place but prayer is also about letting God take the running, letting God communicate, letting God speak to us rather than the other way around. Words are not always necessary when we let the Spirit loose, when we place ourselves into the presence of God and create an inner silence. But that's not as easy as it sounds. Hence Ignatius' form of prayer which recognises our need for help to be at one with God in mind and heart, we need props, as it were to imagine and discover how God might be communicating to us and what God might be wanting to say to us. God doesn't only communicate with words, but through emotions, sounds, actions... all sorts of ways. Sometimes asking why we may feel this way or why we may be experiencing this emotion may reveal quite a lot. Ignatius tries to make us more alert to God's ways.

Such prayerful reflection can help us to ask what I see in Jesus' actions or words and what is He trying to say to you now? And what would I say to Jesus about my experience, how I felt, what struck me, how I was challenged, etc. Or, perhaps you do not need to say anything at all.

Regards
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