Ignatian Imaginative Reading / Prayer

1. Pick an action scene from the gospels as a foundation for your prayer. In other words, choose a story in which Jesus is doing something rather than teaching something. Some possible stories include:

Jesus Heals Two Blind Men (Matt 9:27–31)
Jesus Walks on Water (Matt 14:22–43)
Jesus Heals Jairus’ Daughter and the Bleeding Woman (Mark 5:21–43)
A Woman Anoints Jesus (Mark 14:3–9)
Jesus’ Heals in Simon’s House (Luke 4:37–41)
Jesus Goes to the Cross (Luke 23:26–30)
Jesus Raises Lazarus (John 11:28–44)
Thomas Believes Jesus Is Alive (John 20:24–29)

2. Read the passage several times. Perhaps once you’ll read slowly as if for the first time. Another time through, maybe reading it aloud will help you get the feeling of the whole scene.

3. Invite the Lord to be present with you, to guide and protect as you seek to be with him.

4. Now quiet yourself before God. Some people use techniques like body awareness and breathing to still themselves.

5. Let your imagination work on the gospel scene. Imagine the location. In other words, are you by a lake or on a mountain? What time of day is it? See the people involved. Who is there with Jesus? City folk, farmers, shepherds, the disciples, women, Pharisees, crowds? How do your feet feel? What do you bump into, touch with your hands? What do you smell? What do you taste? What is being said by Jesus and others? What emotions might be in the hearts of various people? What actions are taken by Jesus and others?

6. Put yourself at the scene. Take the place of one of the characters and see the scene through the eyes of that person. What is he or she feeling? Thinking?Doing?

7. Release your imagination from your inner critic. Your imagined scene need not reproduce first-century Jerusalem with forensic accuracy. Let go of your prayer list. You and God can talk about details of your day later. (Suggestions for dealing with distractions can be found under Lectio Divina/Practice/4.) The point is neither to see “right,” nor to cover everything, but to be with Jesus. Remember that you come to God as a child to his mother. Her presence is sufficient to comfort her child (Ps 131:2). The child does not require her to produce scientific evidence that there is no monster under the bed. In the same way, do not refuse to enjoy Jesus’ presence until this form of prayer measures up to whatever criteria your mind may generate (Job 40:2–4; Rom 11:34). Remember that God has redeemed all of your faculties, including your imagination (Luke 5:23–24). More importantly, it is he whom we trust to communicate clearly using whatever method he chooses.

8. On the other hand, do not be consumed and overwhelmed by your emotions. With intention, choose to be “taken in” by your encounter with Jesus without becoming sucked under by the scene. Emotionalism is not the goal in itself. Being together with Jesus, experiencing his presence, is the goal (Luke 10:39).

9. Now “freeze frame.” Stay with a particular picture involving yourself and Jesus. Talk to him and listen to what he says to you. Spend time in his presence. Allow your imagination to serve your faith. Jesus is not here the way you imagine him, but he most assuredly is with you, seeing you, listening to you, speaking to you.

10. Do you come away from the scene with Jesus frustrated, empty, worried, content, eager? Are these actually reflections of how you feel about your daily,non-imagined walk with Jesus or about a particular circumstance with which you want him to be involved? When you consider what happens after your scene, as recorded in Scripture, does that change how you think about your encounter? Ignatian prayer is meant to be experiential. Perhaps you simply spent uninterrupted time with him. The purpose is not necessarily to gain new spiritual insights—though these may come—but to deepen your relationship with
Jesus.

11. Write down what you have heard, what happened, what you said, and/or what the theme seemed to be, or share this with your small group, prayer partner, or spiritual friend.

<http://tenwaystopray.com/home/imagination-ignatius/practice/>

<http://pray-as-you-go.org/index.php?id=133>