

WEEK SIX

The Public Ministry of Jesus

This week we follow Jesus in his public ministry. Each day we'll pray and reflect on a Scripture passage describing Jesus interacting with people. The idea is simply to get to know Jesus better. Use your **imagination** to become part of these Gospel scenes. Watch what Jesus does. Listen to how he speaks. Note how people react to him. Ponder his words. If you wish, talk to Jesus in a **colloquy**.

There's no need now to make any big decisions and commitments about how specifically you will follow Christ's call in your life. If you need to make such a decision, it is best to make it only after getting to know better the One who calls you. Our hope is simply that we become more like the One who is the focus of our attention. We want to see, hear, speak, and feel as Jesus does.

Day One: Join Jesus on Busy Day

The grace of the Second Week is fundamental: to grow in a heartfelt knowledge of Jesus Christ so that we can love him more deeply and follow him more closely. But to grow in this intimate love, we need to get close. We need to walk with God, who became one with us.

In this part of the adventure, the Gospels come alive for us. We are there with Jesus, immersed in the Gospels with the help of our senses and imagination. We do not simply obtain more insight or information. With our attentiveness fine-tuned and our imaginations sparked, we see the living God in daily life as we pray through the Exercises.

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following graces: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read Mark 1:21-39

Join Jesus on a busy day.

For Reflection

Jesus did not leave us a list of truths to affirm, but a task to carry out. We must try to discern in our time and place how God wants us to live our lives in this world in tune with God's Spirit, the one divine action at work in this universe. This is what the discernment of spirits is all about. Followers of Jesus have been given a task to carry out and the means to do it. Impelled by God's Spirit, they must try to live in this world with the conviction that with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, all the needful has been done, that God has won the victory he intends. Our task, therefore, is to follow the prompting of the Spirit, who has been poured out in our hearts, to follow the way of Jesus, the way of peace, of love, of the cross.

— William A. Barry, SJ, *Spirit, Style, Story*

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Two: The Beatitudes

The kingdom of God is not simply what awaits us in heaven at some time in the future. By becoming one of us in Christ, God revealed how the kingdom of God breaks into history, here and now. The kingdom of God is not a place but a way of living and being.

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following graces: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read Matthew 5:1-12

The beatitudes express the standard of Christ. Imagine that you are present in the crowd or with the disciples, watching and listening to Jesus. Allow his manner and words to affect you.

For Reflection

The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* beautifully describes the kingdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ:

It is a Kingdom of love, justice, and mercy, where sins are forgiven, the sick are made whole, enemies are reconciled, captives are freed, and the needs of the poor are met.

It is all these things and more, for ultimately the Kingdom is Jesus Christ and all he means for us. The Kingdom is already here because of the redemption of Jesus Christ. But in another sense, it is “not yet” here, since Christ’s final transformation of individuals, society, and culture has yet to happen in its fullness. This is why we need to pray this petition [“Thy Kingdom come”] every day and work for its coming.

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Three: The Wedding Feast at Cana

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following graces: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read John 2:1-11

The wedding feast at Cana.

For Reflection

Marriage and wedding feasts are metaphors used in Scripture to describe God's salvation and the Kingdom of God. Here at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, John's Gospel seeks to establish that Jesus is going to re-interpret and fulfill God's promise to Israel. Jesus establishes the New Covenant. A hint about what this New Covenant will be like is made evident in the deed that Jesus performs. Asked to do something to address the awkward situation that the absence of wine at a wedding feast would create, Jesus' miracle produces vast quantities of wine – six jars holding thirty gallons each are filled to overflowing with choice wine.

This lavish response to a simple human need is a vision for us of the abundance of God's kingdom. It challenges us to respond generously when confronted with human need today. We respond as best we can, fully confident that God can transform our efforts, bringing the Kingdom of God to fulfillment among us.

–*Loyola Press Sunday Connection*

Journal

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Day Four: Healing the Blind Man at Bethsaida

Jesus empowers us to embrace our humanity in all of its beautiful complexity. The more we express our humanity in loving, healing, forgiving, serving, and rejoicing, the more our divinity or holiness is revealed.

No definition or doctrine fully captures who Jesus Christ is. We are left with an alluring Mystery. Our deepening desire to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ draws us into this mystery of God becoming human for us.

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following graces: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read Mark 8:22-26

For Reflection

God's Grace and Our Efforts



I have watched myself and other people swing back and forth between two extremes of expectation when it comes to spiritual growth.

One expectation is that God will do everything if only I have faith and wait patiently. This view goes out of balance when, in my waiting and believing, I become

passive. I pray but do not act. I pray but do not engage with the realities in my daily life. When I become spiritually passive, my prayers are more about escaping or about seeing myself as a victim who must wait for God's rescue.

Yet God urges us to engage with life. God required that Abram pack up his family and possessions and start walking. Jesus required that the man with the withered hand reach out to him – Jesus didn't reach out first and grab the man's hand, because that would have been coercion. No, Jesus invited the man by saying, "Stretch out your hand." In the life of faith there is movement on both sides; God understands that through our own action we *participate* with **grace**.

The other extreme expectation is that, "God helps only those who help themselves" (which, by the way, is not from the Bible at all). This attitude believes God set the world in motion, but it's up to me to get things done. Sometimes the people most inclined to slip into this extreme are those trying to do the most good, such as activists on the front lines of social justice battles. It's not surprising that sometimes these well-meaning activists burn out – they have exhausted their personal resources and have not learned to partner with God's grace.

But ordinary folks in the pews can take this extreme view, too. How many of us are unwilling to share our struggles with others because we think that, as Christians, we should be able to overcome any struggle? Or how many of us have a family member who helps, helps, helps and rarely slows down until emotional and bodily stress and weariness lands her or him in the hospital or in bed with depression?

Jesus meant it when he said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He knew that the effort of giving ourselves to God's loving purposes would become a crushing burden if we attempted to do this without the help of divine grace and power. Jesus also told his disciples that he was the vine and they were the branches and that they must abide in him, drawing energy and ability from their Source.

So, it's good to ask ourselves these questions from time to time:

- Have I become too passive, waiting for God to magically do or fix everything, even though I'm not engaging with tasks or problems myself?

- Have I become too self-sufficient, working hard to do God's work in the world without participating with God's grace through **prayer**, pauses, counsel, and rest?

– Vinita Hampton Wright

Journal

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Day Five: The Grateful Leper

Continue to be aware of the areas in your life in which you experience greater freedom and in which some disordered loves linger. The practice of a daily Examen is very helpful in ongoing discernment and growth in freedom.

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following graces: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read Luke 17:11-19

For Reflection

Go through a day –or through a single hour– and discipline yourself to attend to each moment as it comes and to note what is praiseworthy in that moment. Try to build this habit of dwelling completely in the moment at hand rather than in the past or future.

– Vinita Hampton Wright, *Days of Deepening Friendship*

Journal

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Day Six: Martha and Mary

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following graces: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read Luke 10:38-42

For Reflection

A Prayer by St. Teresa of Avila

Let nothing disturb you,
Nothing frighten you;
All things are passing;
God never changes;
Patient endurance attains all things;
Whoever possesses God is wanting in nothing;
God alone suffices.

Journal

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Day Seven: Jesus and Children

In order to know Jesus, we must take his humanity seriously. We must not forget that while he is fully divine, he is also fully human. To gloss over Jesus' humanity is to miss one of the central meanings of the Incarnation: Jesus shows us that the way to our divinity (or holiness) is through our humanity, not around it. In other words, Jesus teaches us how to be fully human. The more we, who are created in the image of God, embrace our humanity, with all of its beauty and limitations, the more our divinity is revealed – that is, the more like God we become.

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following graces: to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely, and to follow him more closely.

Read Mark 10:13-16

For Reflection

Teach Me Your Ways

Teach me your way of looking at people:
as you glanced at Peter after his denial,
as you penetrated the heart of the rich young man
and the hearts of your disciples.

I would like to meet you as you really are,
since your image changes those with whom you
come into contact.

Remember John the Baptist's first meeting with you?
And the centurion's feeling of unworthiness?
And the amazement of all those who saw miracles
and other wonders?

How you impressed your disciples,
the rabble in the Garden of Olives,
Pilate and his wife
and the centurion at the foot of the cross. . . .

I would like to hear and be impressed
by your manner of speaking,
listening, for example, to your discourse in the
synagogue in Capharnaum

or the Sermon on the Mount where your audience
felt you “taught as one who has authority.”

— Pedro Arrupe, SJ

Excerpt from *Hearts on Fire: Praying with Jesuits*, edited by Michael Harter, SJ.

Journal

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