

Reading Scripture with the Senses

Ignatius of Loyola strongly desired to see integration between the heart and mind. He wanted us to read Scripture as if we were present with Jesus and not as detached observers analyzing the text. He understood the power of stories to shape the imagination and, therefore, our entire way of perceiving and being in the world. To facilitate entering the biblical narratives, he counseled the use of all our senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. The following steps will help you begin to engage Scripture in this way.

1. **Select a passage in Scripture that is *narrative*.** The Bible has different genres. Narratives that depict scenes with detail are especially suited for using our senses and imagination. For the purposes of this retreat the narratives have already been selected for you.
2. ***Experience the passage by reading it two or three times.*** Avoid analyzing the text. You are just drinking it in. Take in the sights and sounds. If it helps, listen to an audio version instead of reading. Ask God to bring illumination.
3. ***Close your eyes and play the scene in your mind like movie.*** Close the text, turn off the audio. Don't worry about checking to see if you "got it right." Just let the scene play out in your mind's eye. What do you see? What sounds or conversations do you hear? What are you touching? Is there anything to taste? What do you smell? As you engage your senses, consider the location, the type of people present, and interactions that are happening.
4. ***Reflect on where you are in the story.*** What are you saying and doing? What emotions are you experiencing?
5. ***Talk with God about the experience.*** What stands out to you the most? You can even talk with Jesus in the scene you are playing out. What is God saying to you? Are you being invited to take real-life action on anything?