Harry Potter and the Sacred Text 3.11- The Firebolt: Duty

Vanessa: Chapter Eleven: The Firebolt.

“Harry didn’t have a very clear idea of how he had managed to get back into the Honeydukes cellar, (intro music begins) through the tunnel, and into the castle once more. All he knew was that the return trip seemed to take no time at all, and that he hardly noticed what he was doing...”

Vanessa: I’m Vanessa Zoltan

Casper: And I’m Casper ter Kuile

Vanessa: And this is Harry Potter and the Sacred Text.

(Intro music fades)

Casper: We are two days away from our very first live show on the West coast. We’re going to be in Seattle on Thursday, Portland on Sunday, L.A. on Tuesday, and then San Francisco next Thursday. So if you haven’t got your tickets yet, please head over to http://harrypottersacredtext.com and join us, we’d love to see you.

Vanessa: When I was doing my first round of clinical pastoral education, I was still very much in a space where my atheism was incredibly important to me. And I was at a large hospital with people of all faiths, in the hospital, and so I was sent to nondenominational patients, to Christian patients, Jewish patients, atheist patients—I was really sent to all sorts. The only patients who I really never saw were Catholic patients because we had a couple of priests on staff who would visit them. But I was sent to visit a woman and I looked at her chart, and she was dying; and she requested a Chaplain, she was Christian. So I went to visit her and she was in a lot of pain and she couldn’t talk very loudly, and she was turned on one side. And so in order to speak to her I got on my knees, because she was so low, if I was sitting on a chair I was above her awkwardly. And we chatted about how she was feeling, and we held hands the whole time that we talked, and then I said, “Is there anything else I can do with you?” And she said, “Yes can you pray with me?” And that was the first time that a patient had asked me to pray with them. I had sat with patients while they had prayed; I had sort of always wiggled my way out of it. But nobody had ever directly asked me, “Will you pray with me?” And I asked her to lead me in the prayer. I was like, “I’m not very good at praying but can you tell me what you would like to pray for?” And once I heard the way she was praying, I added my own prayers that I hoped that she would be pain-free an that she would feel love in her life and then she said, “Praise Jesus.” And I said, “Amen.” On my knees, I prayed to Jesus. And it was so simple, and if you would have told me later today you’re going to have to pray with a devoutly Christian woman who is going to say, “Praise Jesus,” I would have been like, “Oh that sounds awkward and awful.” And it was just so easy, it became very clear to me in that moment that my responsibility was to do whatever it took for this woman to feel good, and she wanted me to pray, and so I did. The circumstance called for something very specific and I knew that my
duty was to fulfill that request. And I think that is when duty is at its best, when you have
discerned what it is that you care for and that then you get asked to do something that lives to
those values and even though it’s hard, because you’ve made the promise, you rise to it,
because it is your responsibility, because you have made a vow and therefore it is your duty to
fulfill that vow. And I think in most other circumstance, as we see in this chapter with
Hermione and her responsibility for the boys’ safety and all sorts of other things, that often
duty is much more complicated than that. But there are moments that duty is just a good pair
of boots that you can step into in order to do a job well.

Casper: I love that illustration of duty, and I think it illustrates exactly what you say, that feeling
of: this is not something I’d choose to do, it’s not something I’d do every day; but it is so clear
what is expected of me here. And it’s not going to cost me a lot. It’s uncomfortable, yes, but
I’m not having to compromise who I am to do this.

Vanessa: Just what a blessing are the moments when your duty is clear and it aligns with your
values.

Casper: Yes. Can we have more of those?

Vanessa: Yes please. So before we talk too much more about our duties, let’s do our 30 Second
Recaps.

Casper: Perfect.

Vanessa: Okay, so you lead the way?

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: On your mark, get set, go.

(Ticking noise)

Casper: So all the students have gone home for the holidays and only Rom and Hermione are
left with Harry in the Gryffindor Common Room. And he’s had this sleepless night because he’s
FREAKING out about Sirius, and oh my god. And then he wakes up at lunch time and he goes
downstairs and there’s Christmas presents and there’s a jumper from Mrs. Weasley and oh my
God what’s this big package, who’s it from? And gasp it’s a Firebolt, woohoo! And they’re
freaking out about it, so exciting, but Hermione’s like, “Wait who sent it to you? Why isn’t there
a note?” And then they go to Hagrid’s cottage to take Harry’s mind off things and Hagrid’s
freaking out because Buckbeak is in danger, and there’s a commissioner who’s going to take
him out. And Hermione tells McGonagall about the...

(Buzzing noise—140 words in 30 seconds)
Casper: ...broomstick.
Vanessa: I didn’t know you were capable of speaking that fast.

Casper: I feel like I aged actually significantly.

Vanessa: Oh look your hair just fell out.

Casper: Like I have shortness of breath, my blood pressure is up, this is not good for me. All right, you ready? 3, 2, 1, go.

(Ticking noise)

Vanessa: Christmas day, all sorts of presents including the Firebolt, then Christmas dinner. They go down, Trelawney is like, “Someone is going to die,” and McGonagall is like, “Shut up.” And then they go down to Hagrid’s hut because, or maybe, I don’t know, they go down to Hagrid’s hut and Buckbeak is going to be killed and that’s so sad. And then Hermione is really upset that they don’t know who gave the Firebolt, Harry the Firebolt. She tells McGonagall, McGonagall’s like, “we’re going to have to test this.” And Ron is like, “Hermione you ruin everything.”

(Buzzing noise—97 words in 30 seconds!)

Casper: I’m glad you mentioned Trelawney because the moment between Trelawney and McGonagall in this chapter is priceless.

Vanessa: I know.

Casper: They are like going at it and it’s...I just hadn’t appreciated it until I read it again. Vanessa let’s start with this theme of duty, where does it strike you in the pages of this chapter?

Vanessa: So this chapter breaks my heart for the moment in which Hermione has a very clear duty, which is to love her friends, and takes it very seriously. And so tells Professor McGonagall that Harry has gotten a Firebolt from an anonymous source.

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: And the boys are furious that she has done this because McGonagall comes and says, “Hermione Granger’s told me that you’ve gotten an anonymous Firebolt. She’s concerned it’s from Sirius Black, I think she’s right and we’re going to confiscate it and we’re going to do some tests on it.

Casper: And it’s not just like an afternoon of tests, like this is going to take weeks of anti-charms. They’re going to take the whole thing apart, which to Harry’s mind is just obscene.
Vanessa: Yeah, and Ron immediately turns on Hermione and says, “What did you go running to McGonagall for?” I mean, Hermione cannot possibly be surprised by this negative reaction, and it was just so clear to her. She says, “because I thought, Professor McGonagall agrees with me, that the broom was probably sent to Harry by Sirius Black.”

Casper: And you can find a parallel, you know, if it’s trying to intervene in maybe a friend or family member’s addictive behavior, or a relationship that you think is dangerous, or in a worst case scenario, literally calling the authorities to intervene in a loved one’s life.

Vanessa: Which is what Hermione does, she calls in her authority.

Casper: Right, right. And it could really destroy the relationship she has. I mean, the books could have ended in a way where this is the moment which is unforgiveable to, especially Ron, in a way even more than Harry in some way; at least in the way that he reacts at the end of this chapter. But she has these competing duties, and ultimately I think she sees them in alignment, she’s like, “my friendship and my duty to keep you safe mean that I have to do this thing that you’re not going to like.”

Vanessa: Right and I feel like there’s a way to argue that this is Hermione just being Hermione and a goody-goody, but it’s interesting that in this chapter that Ron says, “Hermione check if Snape is teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts again because if he is I’m ditching.” And Hermione checks.

Casper: That’s right and we’ve seen her already helping Neville, right? In the same Defense Against the Dark Arts Class, so this isn’t just, “you’re breaking the rules so I’m going to tell on you,” this is coming from a much more deep place.

Vanessa: Yes. It’s not obedience, it’s duty.

Casper: Exactly! That’s really interesting. Okay help me understand the difference between those two.

Vanessa: I feel like obedience is following the rules whether or not you agree with the rules and whether or not you think the rules are moral. And duty at it’s best; I think you’ve at least agreed that you think that the rules are moral as you try to fulfill that.

Casper: Well as you say, obedience is just about following instructions; but duty has some sort of connection to the purpose or motive to the whole infrastructure in the first place; the organization or the cause. And I feel like that means that duty sometimes will come into conflict with obedience.

Vanessa: Yeah sometimes they really overlap, but other times I think that there are moments in which you’ll really come up against each other.
Casper: Right, I mean one place where you can see a difference between indifference and duty is in the line of battle. I mean there’s so many stories of a group of soldiers, maybe in a skirmish or in the heat of battle, and the orders from their superior is to retreat or is to leave a wounded person because they’re risking themselves and other service men and women. And some of the most heroic stories out there are of people who go into danger to rescue a comrade who is under attack. Which makes no sense, it’s disobeying orders from which they’ve been trained and yet when it works they have like fulfilled this duty to their brothers and sisters in arms; which I mean you can’t not be moved by that.

Vanessa: Yeah, and I really do think that previous Hermione cared so much about obedience that she didn’t think about what she wanted her duties to be, but now she’s acting in accordance with the duty that she has decided for herself. There’s no order that says, “If your friend gets a Firebolt randomly, you have to tell the authorities.” There is no Christmas gift rule that she is following here, this isn’t rules, rules. This is something else.

Casper: Exactly, because you can only follow the letter of the law so far, duty is about the spirit of the law. It’s about the gray space between and it has to engage your heart and your brain, that there isn’t instructions for everything.

Vanessa: But don’t you feel that there are times in which all sorts of sins are covered under the auspice of “duty.”

Casper: Totally, actually I was thinking of that as we were reading this chapter because we start to see here some sort of generational revenge story. It just reminded me of the Greek tragedies. Harry is learning about his parents, he’s learning about Sirius, and he feels like he wants to avenge his parents by killing Sirius, which is interesting because Harry, at this point, is still quite young and someone says, “Well you’re not going to go out and kill Sirius are you?” And Harry didn’t know what he wanted to do. So there’s this sense of, “I want to do something bad,” like he has to pay for what he did, but he hasn’t consciously made that step to say, “I want to kill this person.” Which is a big step to take, and so I feel like he is being compelled by his sense of duty to mortally wound someone else. And I feel like here, duty is pushing Harry in a dangerous direction, right?

Vanessa: Right, it doesn’t even feel like a responsibility, or obedience, or anything else. It’s only a sense of duty to protect the reputation or something ephemeral like that about someone you love.

Casper: Right, it feels like you’re love is at stake, like if you don’t do this thing it says that you didn’t love the person. Which that can’t be right, I mean I understand it but like...

Vanessa: No, and I often feel like it’s often a similar situation which we see ourselves in now, which is Harry might feel the need to avenge his parents’ deaths, but I don’t feel as though his parents would be like, “Yes! Go!” I feel like it’s often not what the victims would actually want done in their names.
Casper: Right.

Vanessa: But there’s still this desire to avenge.

Casper: Right and I think it’s wrapped up in how it looks like to other people. We touched on this in the last episode; it’s kind of like that idea of fragile masculinity beginning to emerge for Harry, you know what is Malfoy going to say? Is he going to look weak if he doesn’t? Because that’s what Malfoy taunts him in the beginning of the book, he says, “I’d want revenge if I was you.” He’s already being pushed in that direction.

Vanessa: Bated, yeah...

Casper: He’s being bated, yeah.

Vanessa: There’s a moment that I’m having a hard time with and it might just be that we don’t have enough information, but in this chapter we find out that Hagrid got a letter from the school governors saying that he is not going to be in trouble for what happened with Buckbeak and Draco but that Buckbeak is going to be put on trial for his crimes. And obviously Hagrid being Hagrid is distraught over this, and Ron, Harry, and Hermione are like, “Don’t worry, we’ll mount a good defense for Buckbeak.” And Hagrid says, “You don’t understand it won’t matter. The Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Animals is all in Malfoy’s pocket.” And I just, I mean I’m guessing there’s money involved here, but this is clearly like a subcommittee in the government and I understand that level of corruption but I just like don’t understand where their sense of duty is... mostly I’m incredulous.

Casper: Well yeah, it’s absurd! They are totally failing in their duty, they’ve been so easily swayed by Lucius, who as this point, yes is rich, yes is powerful; but he’s not as powerful as the Minister of Magic at this point, right? Dumbledore certainly has more power over him.

Vanessa: Why isn’t Malfoy disgraced? He was a follower of You-Know-Who.

Casper: Right, well this is the thing; I feel like people are hiding behind an institutional mask, right? There’s zero courage, like even for Malfoy, why is he picking this fight? Like is this a way to swipe at Dumbledore? I don’t understand.

Vanessa: I feel like for Malfoy it’s racism right? He’s so pure-bloody that he hates Hagrid for being half-giant. I feel like it’s just, “I’m in your home.” And technically this animal hurt his son.

Casper: Yeah I mean it’s just another case in these books of an institution failing to maintain its duty. And it’s just selfishness and some combination of fear and money reward that is being given to sway these votes on this committee. But, my gosh, we need better committee members in the wizarding world.

Vanessa: And I just don’t understand how they’re not ashamed. I mean, even Hagrid, knows this committee is corrupt.
Casper: Can’t we take this to some sort of internal review? Or like even the press?

Vanessa: Right.

Casper: So there’s another place where I want to go in the text, which is that the Firebolt, of course we know that it’s from Sirius....

Vanessa: What?!

Casper: I know, hold your horses people. And at this point it’s because he’s a godfather, and we learn later it’s paying for a lot of previous presents, which never arrived because he was in prison. But there is something interesting here, you know Sirius can’t really yet love Harry, at least not in a relational way, maybe as an idea, but they haven’t really spent time together and so there’s no real relationship there. And so this present is being given out of duty, and I would say there’s nothing wrong with that at this moment, but it made me think about what relationships do I have which are about duty more than they are about love? And I’m looking at you Vanessa.

Vanessa: Oh I absolutely think that, and I think that it’s a sense of duty to James, also, James was this great Quidditch player and so he wants Harry to remain one. And it shows Sirius’ sense of duty that he knows what’s going on with Harry. I mean we know that he was at the Quidditch game so he saw for himself, but yeah there’s a real sense of responsibility for all of these different things and certainly he loved James, which I feel like when one of your friends has a child, you love the child because they’re part of your friend.

Casper: Right so there is a relational connection, but it’s not direct, it’s like indirect.

Vanessa: Right, but I agree with you that it’s a sense of duty and a sense of like, “I want to be able to do this now that I can.”

Casper: It’s also kind of a duty to yourself in a way, because it’s like, “I want to be the kind of person that does this kind of thing.” It’s an idealized version of the type of person that you want to be.

Vanessa: Casper, just one more point before we move on that I have to make. So McGonagall, in this chapter, publicly makes fun of Sybill Trelawney. I’m going to make the argument that she would not be making fun of Trelawney if there weren’t students in the room. In front of whom, McGonagall feels as though she has to debunk these theories of death and destruction. So Trelawney walks in and is like, “Oh I can’t possibly sit down, I’ll be the 13th person at the table and therefore the first person who stands up is going to die.” And McGonagall is like, “don’t worry about it, I think we can risk it.” And then when Ron and Harry stand up, Trelawney is like, “wait, which was the first of you to stand up?” And McGonagall says, “I doubt it will make much difference unless a mad axe man is waiting outside the doors to slaughter the first into the entrance hall.” And even Ron laughed, right? So I feel like, Harry is constantly
being threatened with life and death and she feels a duty to be like, “no this woman is torturing you with these fears, I will cut her down to size, for the sake of your education.”

Casper: So I had the exact opposite, because nearly all of the students are gone, I feel like McGonagall is finally releasing her pent up anger. She’s like, “listen, there’s like five students. They’ll see this, I don’t care, I cannot bear this woman one second longer. I’m going to cut her to shreds,” because they don’t interact much right? You know this school doesn’t have a staff meeting; the only time they interact is at the dinner table.

Vanessa: Oh yeah they don’t have like Annual Professional Development Day.

Casper: No, there’s no assessment, it’s like just some house elves in a room somewhere being like, “I guess I’ll give them an 8.” So I feel like McGonagall is letting it rip.

Vanessa: Yeah I totally disagree because I feel like with Harry, Ron, and Hermione there, there are three Gryffindors who she’s pretty close too. Especially with Harry there, she even gets teary-eyed thinking about the fact that Lily and James have died earlier in this chapter. I feel like that is what she’s holding and is just like, “no Trelawney, you torture him 364 days a year, not on Christmas.”

Casper: I mean she has so many zingy one-liners. Like I just looked at the text right now and saw another one. McGonagall, at one point, puts a large spoon in the nearest tureen and then says to Sybill, “Tripe, Sybill?” Which of course also means like, bologna? Like she is just taking her for a ride.

Vanessa: Well I think that it’s out of a sense of duty to Harry and you think that it’s because she’s finally duty-free.

Casper: Exactly, it’s like a holiday, and she’s like, “I can finally undo my top collar and just like shake my hair down.

Vanessa: Oh my god do you think her hair is down?

Casper: Oh yeah, she’s in sweatpants.

(Sacred Reading theme music plays)

Casper: Next up, we have a conversation with Father Jim Martin, who is a Catholic Priest. And we wanted to invite Jim on the show because he could tell us a little bit more about the Ignatian Spirituality Practice that we’ve been engaging in over the last couple of seasons. And of course, as a Catholic Priest Jim uses language, especially the language of God that might be comfortable for some of you and not so comfortable for others. So as you listen, listen with an open heart and see what resonates for you, and hopefully we’ll all learn something new about this practice that we’ve grown to love.
Casper: So this week we’re really thrilled to have Father Jim Martin join us, he is in the studio in Carnegie Hall where Jim Dale first recorded the audio books of Harry Potter so Jim you’ve got some hallowed ground that your standing on, or sitting on I guess.

Jim: I do, but don’t expect all those voices.

Casper: Yeah exactly, we’ll leave that for another day. Jim, you are the Editor at Large at America Magazine, you’re someone who comments a lot in the media and is really an advocate, I would say, for Ignatian Spiritual Practice in public life as well as being a Priest yourself. So we’re glad to have you on the show and give us a little history about some of the practices that we’ve been doing here. So the first question I have for you is just tell us a story about how you became a Catholic Priest and a Jesuit.

Jim: Yeah it’s kind of a round about story; I’ll try to make it a little less long than the Harry Potter books. Basically I grew up in a fairly nonreligious family; we were Catholic but not super Catholic. I went to the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Business where I studied finance, and got a good job with GE, General Electric, in New York City and it was very exciting. It was the early 80s and I did everything that a young man with a lot of money in the early 80s would do.

Casper: Oh boy…

Jim: Yeah fill in all those blanks. And I enjoyed it, but I ended up taking a job with GE Capital, their financial services arm, in Connecticut and just found that that wasn’t really my vocation. And while business is a great vocation for a lot of people, I just felt like a square peg in a round hole. I didn’t know what to do, I didn’t know how to escape until one night I came home and turned on the TV and saw a documentary about Thomas Merton, the trappist monk, I’m sure you guys know. And something about the documentary and the look on his face and the idea of monastic life really called to me, and I started reading his book, *The Seven Story Mountain*, his autobiography, and that led me to lots of his other books and I really started to think, “wow this sounds like a really appealing, romantic, beautiful way to live.” Although I didn’t know anything about…

Casper: Looks good on the outside, right?

Jim: Yeah, yeah I never set foot in a monastery for that matter. And I ended up going to my parish priest and saying, “I think I want to be a priest.” And he said, “Well contact the local diocese,” and I said, “Sure.” And he said almost as an afterthought, “you might want to contact the Jesuits, who are up the street at Fairfield University, not too far from where you guys are.” And I met the Jesuits and just loved it, it just kind of clicked. And to make a long story very short, I applied for it and got in and left GE and it’s the best decision I’ve ever made.

Vanessa: Is that a common reason that people leave GE to go become a Jesuit Priest?

Jim: Yes, I think 50% of the people who leave GE end up in religious orders.
Vanessa: Wow, that’s higher than I thought, I was going to guess 35.

Jim: That’s right, yes one is generally surprised by that figure. No, I mean people at GE thought I was crazy, and I mean crazy, crazy; not you know, you’re a little nuts. They actually thought I was insane.

Casper: Wow.

Jim: And I remember one of the great quotes was one of my best friends, this guy named Chris and we’re still good friends, he’s a year or two older than I was and I told him what I was doing and he said, “I think you need to see a therapist.” And I said, “I am seeing a therapist.” And he said, “I think you need to see another therapist.” So no, people thought I was nuts, my family thought I was nuts, and you know I didn’t really share anything about this process of this journey or discernment with them and so why wouldn’t they think I was nuts? And it took a couple of years before people really got what I was doing.

Casper: Right. And Jim, you became a priest, you entered the Jesuit life, you’ve become a wonderful writer: *Jesus: A Pilgrimage, Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* which I started last week and am very much enjoying, *Seven Last Words*, all sorts of wonderful books and articles and popular press as well. Can you tell us what do you love about being a Jesuit? What about it really works for you?

Jim: Oh that’s a great question. I love the spirituality, which can be encapsulated in the phrase, “finding God in all things,” that’s so liberating. I love the prayer, I love my relationship with God, but at a more, I would say, daily level, I would say, I love my Jesuit brothers. That’s one thing they don’t tell you when you enter it, I mean I have many close friends who are Jesuit and it is like having brothers. There are 17,000 Jesuits and that’s beautiful, but I love the work. I love my job; I work at *America*, which is a Catholic magazine. As you say, I write books, I do speaking gigs, I work with the media, I love it.

Casper: You get to be on podcasts about Harry Potter. I mean, that is the life.

Jim: Yeah, which is why I left GE. But no, I mean exactly, doing this kind of stuff is fun and that I love. But I would say: spirituality, the work, and really my Jesuit brothers who I really love a lot.

Casper: Tell us more about that idea of finding God in everything, because I think that’s something in the practice of trying to read this book is trying to find the deeper meaning, the deeper connection, within this story and I’m curious how that has played out for you in your own spirituality. Where have you ended up finding that kind of piece of God in the everyday?

Jim: Yeah well finding god in all things, and I can use the Harry Potter books as an example, finding god in all things means you can experience god, or one can experience god, not simply within the walls of the church or reading the bible or sitting down and praying; Saint Ignatius is famous for, and he’s not the only one but he popularized it, is that god is inviting us to
encounter god self, himself, herself, at every moment of the day through relationships and work, through nature, music, reading. And so the whole world becomes this kind of sacrament, through which you can experience god. And there are different ways of talking about that; Ignatius talks about being a contemplative action and a contemplative stance in a very busy life. But you know, let’s take Harry Potter, I mean I’m a big fan of the books and let’s say that you’re someone who reads the books and is a big fan, and who sees in that story this great battle between light and dark? And who takes inspiration in the character of Harry Potter and his friends? And who takes inspiration from the fact that he puts up with struggles and really has to discern and kind of go on his own journey. You know, if you were to come to me as a spiritual director and say, “You know I really felt moved by that.” I would say, “hey, maybe God is speaking to you through that story, you know as god speaks to us through lots of stories, and film, and art, and music, and all sorts of literature.” So absolutely, can you find god in the Harry Potter novels? Absolutely. And that’s where if you’re someone who is of that bent, who is perhaps introspective and likes books, that’s where god is going to meet you. You might be someone who is an extrovert and god meets you more through relationships and going out with friends and things like that. The two aren’t exclusive, of course, but we can say in all of those things god can be found. And that is Ignatius’ great insight and that is what breaks open the spiritual life for so many people.

Casper: I mean, we’ve talked a little bit about Ignatius on the podcast. This kind of miraculous moment, post-war that Ignatius had, and that practice of imagining himself in the gospel stories, especially. Can you tell us what has really been formational for you personally?

Jim: Sure, I knew zero about Saint Ignatius before I contacted the Jesuits. I mean literally zero. Saint Ignatius Loyola, oh I guess he’s a Saint and there’s some colleges named after him. But he was a bask and we’re talking about the sixteenth century and I won’t tell his whole life story; but as you said he was a soldier and was injured in a battle in 1521 and ends up convalescing and instead of tales of daring do and knightly heroism, the only thing that’s available in the house, his family castle by the way---I think we should all have a family castle that we can recuperate in—are the lives of saints and the life of Christ and he starts to think, “wow rather than the life of exploit and honor and glory that I was going to pursue, following the saints and looking at their example and emulating them seems to fills me with greater happiness.” And that’s how he started to discern, as we say. And the practices besides finding god in all things, there is a practice of Ignatian Contemplation or as he calls it Composition of Place where you imagine yourself in a scripture scene. And you know really Ignatian Contemplation is a kind of Lectio Divina on steroids. You imagine yourself in the passage, so for example, what do I see? What do I feel? What do I hear? What do I smell? What do I taste? It’s literally using your senses to imagine yourself. So for example, let’s take one of my favorite passages, the storm at sea, so the disciples are on a boat in the Sea of Galilee and a storm comes up and Jesus is asleep on the boat and they say, “don’t you care about us?” And he stands up and rebukes the wind and the waves and it stops. And they’re terrified and they say that, “even the winds and the waves obey him.” So what would you do there? You would literally read the passage, close your eyes, ask god to be with you, and you trust that god is going to be at work in this exercise. And you would compose the place, as Ignatius says, what does the boat look like? How many disciples are on the boat? What’s it look like outside? Is it dark? Is it stormy? Is it the daytime?
What am I wearing? What does it feel like? Well I’m going to be cold; it’s going to be cold and clammy. And is the boat rocking? What does it sound like? Well there’s fishing tackle going from place to place, are the disciples complaining? Lightning, thunder, what do I do now? Well if you’re in a fishing boat, you’re going to smell fish. So all of that stuff is to engage the imagination. And all sorts of stuff can come up: insights, emotions, memories, desires, feelings…

Casper: Well and one of the questions that we’ve had, is that sometimes when you imagine yourself into a scene, you get all sorts of stuff that isn’t necessarily in the text, but that does come up in your imagination. How would Ignatius answer that kind of question? Is that faithful?

Jim: That’s a great question. And the question is, it really doesn’t matter, in a sense. So if you’re in, I’m going to make something up, if you’re in the feeding of the 5000, where Jesus is feeding the multitudes, and suddenly a friend of yours appears you’re not going to say, “Get out of my meditation.”

Casper: I’m supposed to be encountering god here.

Jim: That’s right, “You weren’t in Galilee then.” No, it actually might be beautiful because you might say, “oh my gosh, my friend feeds me in a certain way.” And all sorts of things can happen like that, if you’re open to them. And that doesn’t mean that every single time you do them, they’re going to be that rich but a lot of times it is, and it’s really unmistakable when it happens.

Vanessa: I mean, I loved so much of what you said. I love the idea of inviting the scene to come in, I find that very powerful. And something that we come up against in doing this with Harry Potter is I’m always very weary of people slipping into fan fiction imagining. Where it’s like, “Oh well as I was in this scene, it occurred to me that maybe Harry and Draco had a conversation in the bathroom...” and I’m like, “maybe but this feels sort of beside the point.” And I don’t want to say that there’s good prayer and bad prayer or like good imagining and bad imagining, but there does seem to be one that’s rigorous and self-conscious and asking itself, “is this still prayerful or spiritual or am I simply making it up?”

Jim: Well, funny enough, I’m actually, believe it or not, I’m writing a book on prayer and I’m right at that chapter where I’m calling it, “How do I know it’s God?” And I would say two things; (1) I would say there are certain simple ways, and the first way is to say where does this leave me? Paul says, “By the fruits you will know me so.” Does it lead to an increase in charity? Love? Faith? Hope? So that’s the first thing, where does this lead? Is it really inspiring me? So if I’m reading a passage and I’m imagining myself in the scene that you were talking about and I get the sense of being inspired and hopeful and moved and sort of a deeper understanding of myself I would say, “yeah that sounds like god moving you.” But if you say, “oh you know I love that passage where Harry went out and killed Voldemort finally so I’m going to go kill my enemies.” You’d say, “Yeah I’m not sure that is coming from god.” But the other thing is this: I think that god’s voice in our lives is often very surprising, very simple, very to the point, and it
really does feel like it comes from outside of us. So for example, let’s say you’re reading something about Harry Potter and Hermione in that beautiful relationship that they have, and you say “you know, I never really fully appreciated this particular relationship I had in my life, the person in my life that’s most like Hermione in my life is this young woman I know who does x, y, and z and I realize that she’s kind of like my Hermione.” That could be a really, and you’re like, wow where did that come from? If it’s surprising, if it’s simple, if it’s relatable, if it makes sense, I would say that’s a good way to discern. Does that make sense?

Vanessa: Yeah, it reminds me of something that one of our mentors, Matt Potts, said to us at the very beginning of this project which is when doing a sacred reading practice whether is be Lectio Divina or Ignatian Spirituality, or even, I would say, one of the Jewish practices that until you’re reading god is love you haven’t finished reading the passage.

Jim: That’s a great insight.

Casper: Jim thank you for your time, we really appreciate you being with us.

Vanessa: Yes, thank you.

Jim: My pleasure. My pleasure.

Casper: All right, goodbye.

Casper: So now, let’s put on our newfound expertise to practice and find a passage.

Vanessa: Sacred Imagination me.

Casper: So the passage I want to read for you today is when the trio go down to Hagrid’s hut. So if you’re comfortable, and not driving, feel free to close your eyes and try to imagine yourself into this scene.

“I’ve not bin meself lately,” said Hagrid, stroking Fang with one hand and mopping his face with the other. “Worried abou’ Buckbeak, an’ no one likin’ me classes---” “We do like them!” lied Hermione at once. “Yeah they’re great!” said Ron, crossing his fingers under the table. “Er—how are the flobberworms?” “Dead,” said Hagrid gloomily. “Too much lettuce.” “Oh no!” said Ron, his lip twitching. “An’ them Dementors make me feel ruddy terrible an’ all,” said Hagrid, with a sudden shudder. “Gotta walk past ‘em ev’ry time I want a drink in the Three Broomsticks. ‘S like bin’ back in Azkaban—“He feel silent, gulping his tea. Harry, Ron, and Hermione watched him breathlessly. They had never heard Hagrid talk about his brief spell in Azkaban before. After a pause, Hermione said timidly, “Is it awful in there, Hagrid?” “Yeh’ve no idea,” said Hagrid quietly. “Never bin anywhere like it.”

Casper: So Vanessa, what did you see in that scene?
Vanessa: I was imagining myself as like one of the three kids and first of all just feeling so little in front of this very large man; and then my life feeling so little in the face of everything that he has experienced. And just also feeling scared at the idea that there’s someone who I love with such big problems that I can’t fix. Watching an authority figure be scared is just, it’s terrifying.

Casper: Yeah, what you just said is something connecting in my brain to the fact that afterwards they become really intent on trying to find legal cases that will help Buckbeak because it feels like this is something they can’t deal with, but the Buckbeak case maybe they can. And so it’s that they’re desperately looking for a way to help him after the intensity of this scene. Yeah, I was kind of thinking of myself as Ron a little bit, he’s kind of playing earlier up the page, he’s saying like, “oh we do like your classes,” and he’s crossing his fingers which is a childish thing to do and his lip in twitching when he hears that the flobberworms are dead, he’s kind of smiling. And then when Hagrid starts talking about Azkaban, the world falls silent and all of that childishness disappears and I think it’s interesting that Hermione asks the question, who we already know is maturing much more than the boys, and she doesn’t offer a pronouncement she doesn’t offer a placation or anything, she invites a question, which I think is so beautiful, and she just asks him, “is it awful in there Hagrid?” They know it’s bad, and I think she wants to validate his experience and make him, give him some space to talk more about it. This is the first time bringing it up, and it happened a while again, and I think sometimes you have those moments in conversations where suddenly there’s this space to talk about this thing that’s so shaming or frightening or upsetting and she’s making it safe to do that.

Vanessa: Yeah and because she waited for him to bring it up, it doesn’t feel like prying curiosity but just like, “do you want to talk about it?” And she even has the elegance not to ask about, “what was it like for you in there?” She gives him space to either sort of be a reporter-type of like, “yeah people really struggle there” or to talk about his own experience. I think an incredibly artful question. The other thing I’m thinking of in this scene is just how awful I feel for Buckbeak. Like this is a really big animal, and in the book there were several hippogriffs around and so he like had friends and family or whatever around, and now Buckbeak is the only one left, he’s been tied up for along time outside and now is inside and I would just like he’s a prisoner, he’s locked up and I would imagine that for Harry, Ron, and Hermione can smell him, like a big animal like that is going to create a stench in the house and that Hagrid is just willing to put up with that in order to be empathetic and just that I feel like the innocence of an animal suffering is just so sad and pathetic and I just I feel like it’s probably so quiet and like stinky in there and probably overly hot cause it’s cold outside and it just must feel so claustrophobic and so awful and sad.

Casper: You know what it’s making me think that of course the title of the book is about Sirius, but actually we have a second Prisoner of Azkaban, which is Hagrid.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: Like he has not left and some part of him has not left that confinement.
Vanessa: I just hate those moments when you’re seeing someone suffer and you just feel like there’s nothing you can do and the trio, by being there, and just sort of existing in that space are like doing everything that they can and I love that Hagrid even thinks that they’ve somehow, magically, instantaneously found out. But I just, it’s just so heartbreaking to sit there and watch someone you love suffer and know that there’s little to nothing you can do to alleviate their suffering and that every protest that they put they’re right. It’s like; yep the system is just corrupt. Yep, he is just going to suffer. Yep.

Casper: Yeah the thing I’m taking away is just this deep sadness. He’s remembering a horrible experience, he feels rotten right now, he feels like he’s bad at everything. And now he’s dreading this event that’s coming, which is Buckbeak’s probable execution. He’s just stuck.

Vanessa: He is very lucky to have these three kids though, and I do think that’s something and a real solace to him.

Casper: Absolutely.

Vanessa: And fang.

Casper: This voicemail is from Sophia Charon.

(Beep)

Sophia: Hi this is Sophia, I’m currently living in Los Angeles, California and I love the show. I’m calling about the episode with the Marauder’s Map and how you discussed Fred and George gave the map to Harry but not what I feel like is really something crucial about this giving—the fact that they didn’t give it to Ron who is their family member. And Ron never really has a lot of things that he gets, especially from his family, and Harry on the other hand has the Invisibility Cloak, even Hermione has the Time Turner. And it’s not as if Fred and George give it to Ron and say, “oh loan this to Harry,” or give it to Harry and say, “oh then give it to Ron in a few days,” or something like that. And that just feels really sad that they don’t acknowledge their brother and seem to prefer Harry in some ways to him.

Vanessa: Sophia, thank you so much for your voicemail. I’m just really confused by... who’s Ron?

Casper: Oh so brutal!

Vanessa: Who’s this Ron character?

Casper: I’ve never though about this Sophia, I’m just totally stunned by my own inability to see what’s right in front of us. And you’re so right, poor Ron.

Vanessa: I know Ron is definitely like, even though he’s the youngest boy, he’s like a middle child in a big family and like, whelp?
Casper: All the more credit to Ron for his amazing commitment and courage throughout these books. Yeah.

Vanessa: He can be a real jerk sometimes, but I love him. Casper, we now get to bless someone from the pages of the book, who would you like to bless this week?

Casper: My blessing this week is for Dumbledore. At the meal where we see McGonagall and Trelawney going at each other, we see everyone sitting at their own house tables, you know these five/six students plus then the teachers at their table. And Dumbledore says that since there’s so few of us, it doesn’t make sense to sit at our house tables. I love that. And he’s not inviting people to move for an arbitrary reason, because he’s got Christmas crackers and the Christmas crackers are amazing. And in his Christmas cracker there’s this amazing witch’s hat with a vulture on it, just like Snape wears when he’s a boggart. And he puts it on and he’s just, I don’t know, this is one of those moments where I feel like the queer Dumbledore emerges and he’s like, “I’m going to dress up on Christmas day because I’m having a good time and I want everyone to come together despite our differences.” And anyone that wants to bring people together into community and helps people have fun with silliness, this blessing is for you. How about you Vanessa?

Vanessa: I would like to bless Hermione. She’s heroic in this chapter, she stays back with a complete clarity of purpose and ruins her own Christmas by tattling on the boys. And I just think that it must be so hard for her and she knows that she’s about to feel so lonely and she just has the courage of her conviction and she does what she knows to be right. I think that it’s brave and kind and I want to be her.

(Outro Music Begins)

Casper: You’ve been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text.

Vanessa: Our live show tour starts in two days so please join us in Seattle, Portland, San Francisco and Los Angeles. In all of them, not just one of them.

Casper: And then on the East Coast in New York City, Philadelphia, and D.C. You can follow us on Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Facebook or leave us a review on iTunes. Next week we’ll read Chapter 12: The Patronus through the theme of optimism.

Vanessa: This episode of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text was produced by Arianna Nedelman, Casper ter Kuile, and me, Vanessa Zolta. Our music is by Ivan Pizzo and Nick Bohl. And we are part of the Panoply Network. You can find ours and other great shows on panoply.fm. This week’s we would like to thank Sophia Charon for sending in a voicemail, Rebecca and Charlie Ledley, and Stephanie Paulsel. Thank you and we’ll talk to you next week.

Casper: Bye everyone.
(Outro Music Ends)

Casper: I try to say goodbye and I choke.

Vanessa: And I choke?

Casper: That’s what she sings.

Together:...and I stumble...

Casper: Though I try to hide it...

Together: It’s clear.

Casper: And I walk on frogs when you are not there.

Vanessa: No it’s and my world crumbles.

Casper: I know but it sounds like I walk on frogs.

Vanessa: No it doesn’t.

Final Music: Panoply