

Feast of Saints Peter and Paul



Introduction

The most frequent way of praying that Saint Ignatius uses is that of imagining ourselves in a Gospel scene. We imagine ourselves as a character in the story. We take part in the story, seeing Jesus and all the other people, being aware of what's going on and how we are feeling. The purpose of praying with the imagination is to allow Christ in the Scripture to speak to us. To bring the Gospel stories to life for us. We are not trying to recreate history. It doesn't matter if your imagination takes the story off in a different direction to the Scripture. It doesn't matter if the story takes place in 1st century Palestine or where we live now in the 21st century. What is important is what God wants to say to us through this passage.

Sit and relax by focussing on your breathing for a few minutes so that you can contemplate the Gospel using your imagination.

Prayer

Acknowledge you are in the presence of God by saying the following prayer:

Direct O Lord and guide and influence all that is happening in my mind and heart during this time of prayer: all my moods and feelings, my memories and imaginings; my hopes and desires; may all be directed and influenced to your greater glory, praise and service and to my growth in your Spirit.
Amen

As you listen to Jesus with his disciples, let the Spirit enter you so that when Jesus asks you the question “Who do you say I am?” you can answer with the same conviction as Peter “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”.

Reading Matthew 16:13-19

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ‘But you,’ he said ‘who do you say I am?’

Then Simon Peter spoke up, ‘You are the Christ,’ he said ‘the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.’

Contemplation

Let us start our contemplation by setting the scene. This passage comes from Matthew Chapter 16. Jesus has journeyed with his disciples to Caesarea Philippi which is located along the southern slopes of Mount Hermon and is the source of the River Jordan. It was originally called Panion because the people who lived there worshiped the Greek god Pan. King Herod built a temple at the top of the hill and dedicated to Caesar. When Herod died, his son Philip renamed the town Caesarea in the emperor’s honour. Hence, the town became known as Caesarea Philippi.

With this in mind, and with the help of the Spirit, find a place within this passage and amidst the beauty of the location, contemplate “Who is Jesus to you?”

- Who are you within the story? Are you one of the Twelve? Perhaps a passer-by? Or someone else who is not mentioned in the passage or even an inanimate object.
- Are you wondering why Jesus took you to this place? A place of beauty but a place of known pagan worship. Are you wondering why you are here or have you come to accept that Jesus is full of surprises?
- Where does Jesus settle down to talk to you? In the cave of Pan? In the temple dedicated to Caesar? At the source of the Jordan? Or are you sitting on one of the rocks?
- When he asked you “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Are you the one who replied “Elijah”, “John the Baptist” “one of the prophets”? or do you sit quietly listening to everyone else?
- When Jesus asks “But you, who do you say I am?” what is going through your mind? Are you about to say something? If so what would you have said? Does Simon Peter get his say in before you? Are you annoyed that Simon Peter jumped in before you had a chance to speak?
- Do you believe and affirm with love Simon Peter’s declaration of faith in Jesus, not just as Messiah, but as the Son of God? Or is Jesus someone different for you? Are you still thinking he has come for political purposes?
- What is Jesus’ reaction at Simon Peter’s declaration of faith? Does he look pleased? Relieved because Simon Peter is now thinking on a spiritual plane and not in an earthly way?
- If you are Simon Peter what was it about Jesus that made you answer as you did? i.e. “You are the Christ, the son of the living God”. Was it an answer that came from your heart or your head?
- When Jesus said that it was his Father in heaven who had revealed this outpouring of faith, how did it make you feel?
- How did it make you feel when Jesus renamed you Peter and said that he would build his Church on you? That he would give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven? That whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven?” What was going through your mind? A feeling of pride that Jesus chose you to lead a Church which the powers of hell could not overcome? A feeling

of dread because you don't feel worthy? Not qualified for such an enormous task? Were you thinking why choose me – a sinner?

- Similarly, if you are one of the others, why do you think Peter was chosen? Are you pleased that Peter was chosen as you feel he is a natural leader? Jealous that Jesus didn't choose you? Do you think you would do a better job? Or are you happy that Jesus chose you to be one of the foundation stones of the Church? What is going through your mind and heart?
- Is there anything you want to say to Peter? Is there anything you want to say to Jesus?

Sit and imagine the scene and perhaps write down how and what you feel, your emotions – anything that comes into your mind.

End Prayer Suscipe of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.

Scripture texts: from the Jerusalem Bible 1966 by Dartington Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday and Company Ltd