

Imaginative Contemplation - Parable of the Sower



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.

Let us sit and relax so that together we can contemplate the Gospel using our imagination.

Prayer

We acknowledge we are in the presence of God so let us say together:

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

Let the Spirit take us over and enlighten our minds as we listen to and reflect on the parable of the sower. Let the Spirit enrich our hearts and minds so that the seed of God's word can be sown within us and take root.

Reading 13:1-9

Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, but such crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat there. The people all stood on the beach, and he told them many things in parables.

He said, "Imagine a sower going out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up straight away, because there was no depth of earth; but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Listen, anyone who has ears!"

Contemplation

In this scene, as in the previous chapters in St Matthews Gospel, Jesus is talking about how the Word of God is received. Jesus knows that there are many different levels of receiving the Word of God so in this passage, so he uses imagery to capture the minds of his listeners. He compares his Spiritual Message to seeds being scattered by a sower (i.e. God). This analogy would appeal to many of the listeners because they know the terrain of Palestine. So close your eyes and imagine the scene, find a place within it. With the help of the Spirit, let the Word of God be implanted in your imagination.

- Who are you in the scene? The sower? An observer? The seeds? The soil? The pouch carrying the precious seeds? Something that is not mentioned in the passage?
- Notice the terrain. What does it look like? What is the ground like? Has the soil been well prepared for the precious seeds or are there rocky patches and patches with weeds?

- If you are the sower, how do you feel about sowing the seeds? What does the soil feel like between your fingers? Do you think the ground is ready for your seeds? Do you think the ground is too uninhabitable for the seeds to grow so you do not want to let go of them? Do you try to make the ground more hospitable for these precious seeds? Or do you throw them anyway knowing full well that some seeds will find a well nourished patch thus allowing them to grow and bear abundant fruit whereas others will be strangled by weeds and rocks and only bear a small amount of fruit?
- If you are the pouch, how do you feel about the sower relieving you of your contents? Are you ready to let go of your precious contents? Do you think the right time has come to let the sower spread the seeds you have been protecting? Are you afraid that the soil may not been well prepared or deserving of the fruit your seeds have to offer? Do you feel that the sower will be too generous and liberal as to where he is planting the your seed or do you trust him to sow in the right place at the right time? Are you afraid that your seeds may fall on inhospitable terrain or are you confident they will bear fruit no matter where they fall? Do you want to take the chance and let go of your seeds to see what they will become and the harvest they will bear?
- If you are the seed, how do you feel about being sown? Are you excited at the thought being planted so that you can bear fruit? Are you excited at being taken out of the dark pouch so that you can feel the warmth of the sun and see the light? Or are you afraid that you are not sown on the right terrain and thus will not bear fruit? Are you afraid of being choked by brambles, being eaten by birds, thrown on stones, not take root so you would rather stay in the pouch? Or do you trust the sower that he will plant you on the right soil at the right time?
- If you are the soil, How do you feel about receiving these precious seeds? Are you open to receiving them? Do you feel ready to bear them? How have you been prepared to receive the seeds? Are you afraid that the seeds wont grow? Do you need nourishment to help these seeds to grow? Do you hope someone will come to uproot the weeds and remove the stones so that your seeds can flourish? Are you optimistic that the sower knows what he is doing so that he will obtain the maximum harvest?
- Is there anything you would like to say to Jesus about this parable? Speak with Him now about what is going through your mind.

Sit and imagine the scene and how we receive the Word of God.

Sharing

Let us now share what we thought, felt etc. only if you are comfortable to do so.

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.

I would like to share this reflection I found in the St Patrick's Missionary Society Magazine. There was no reference as to its origin but I felt it was appropriate to the Parable of the Sower.

A Gardener's Reflection

First look at the weeds,
weed out gossip,
weed out laziness,
weed out indifference and
weed out pride.
Plant five rows of peas:
patience, peace, promptness, politeness and prayer.
Then plant five rows of lettuce:
let us be faithful,
let us be loving,
let us be useful,
let us be trustful
and let us be grateful.
Then we can turn to the reliable turnips:
turn up on time,
turn up with a smile,
turn up with a new idea and
turn up with a new determination.

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