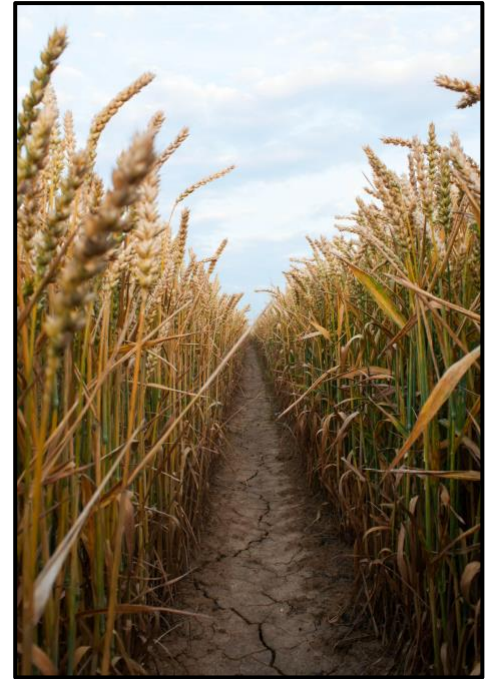


Imaginative Contemplation – Your Kingdom Come

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 enter our hearts and enlighten our minds as we listen to and reflect on Jesus explaining the Kingdom of heaven to the crowd. Let the Spirit enrich our hearts and minds so that we can identify with the Kingdom of heaven in one of these parables.

Reading **Matthew 13:24-43**

Jesus put a parable before the crowds, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off. When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, the darnel appeared as well. The owner's servant went to him and said, 'Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?' 'Some enemy has done this,' he answered. And the servant said, 'Do you want us to go and weed it out?' But he said, 'No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest; and at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn.'

He put another parable before them, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and shelter in its branches."

He told them another parable, "The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through."

In all this Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; indeed, he would never speak to them except in parables.

This was to fulfil the prophecy:

I will speak to you in parables

and expound things hidden

since the foundation of the world.

Contemplation

In this scene, as in the previous section of this chapter, Jesus is talking in parables, using imagery to capture the minds of his listeners. He compares the kingdom of heaven with images that his listeners would have identified with: weeds mixed in with a crop of good wheat, a mustard seed and a baker woman baking a loaf of bread. So close your eyes and envisage these images. Find a place within them and with the help of the Spirit, identify which image(s) the Kingdom of heaven is for you.

- Who are you in the scene? One of the disciples? One of the crowd? A passer-by? Someone who is not mentioned in the passage?
- What kind of day is it? Hot? Cold? Clammy?
- What is the terrain like? Is it rocky? Is there soil? Do you think this is why Jesus chose this spot to tell his parables? So that we could associate with them better?
- Where are you in the crowd? On the margins? In the middle of the crowd? Near the front? Separated from the crowd?
- What is the mood of the people present? Are they listening intently? Are some chatting amongst themselves, criticising?
- When Jesus started his parables with “The Kingdom of Heaven is like ...” did you first think he was talking about the afterlife? Some other out of this world existence? Were you surprised when he compared the Kingdom of Heaven to the “here and now”? To every day living: a farmer planting his seeds; a mustard seed; a baker woman? What was going through your mind?
- Which of the three Kingdom of Heaven parables resonates with you? The farmer planting his seeds and discovering it is mixed with dandelion; the mustard seed which grows to a tree and shelters the birds of the air; or the baker woman using yeast to make her loaf of bread?
- If the Parable of the sower with the wheat and the dandelion captures your imagination, why? Does it surprise you that a farmer wants the wheat and the weeds to grow side by side? Do you think the parable means that we are expected to live side by side with a whole spectrum of people who perhaps do not share your vision of God? Or do you think it means that each one of us is a mixture of good seeds and weeds and that we must learn to be patient and tolerant with our weaknesses so that the good wheat, our strengths can flourish? Are you grateful to Jesus for allowing you to see clearly the patience of God who trusts that the wheat will flourish despite the dandelion?
- If the parable of the mustard seed resonates with you, why? Does it surprise you that such a small seed can become such a large tree? Is it something you took for granted? Do you now realise that like the mustard seed, the Kingdom of Heaven has tiny beginnings? Does this revelation give you hope that you could be that tiny mustard seed which could help establish the Kingdom of God here on earth?
- If you identify with the parable of the yeast and the baker woman, why? Is it because you, yourself, bake bread and it always surprises you that a small piece of yeast, undetected in the flour because it has been blended, has energy of its own? How it works in the background and rises to produce a loaf of bread? Does it give you hope that you too can be that yeast and exert a growth in the community and help to establish the Kingdom of God here and now?
- Perhaps you identify with all three parables because they each have a different message i.e. having the patience and the tolerance to live with good and bad (the wheat seed and the dandelion); accepting that beginnings are always small (the mustard seed) and being able to influence your surrounding undetected (the yeast).

Speak to Jesus about what is going on in your mind and heart as you imagine the kingdom of heaven here and now. Ask Jesus to help you with this mission of establishing this Kingdom 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.