

## Imaginative Contemplation – Feeding of the Five Thousand

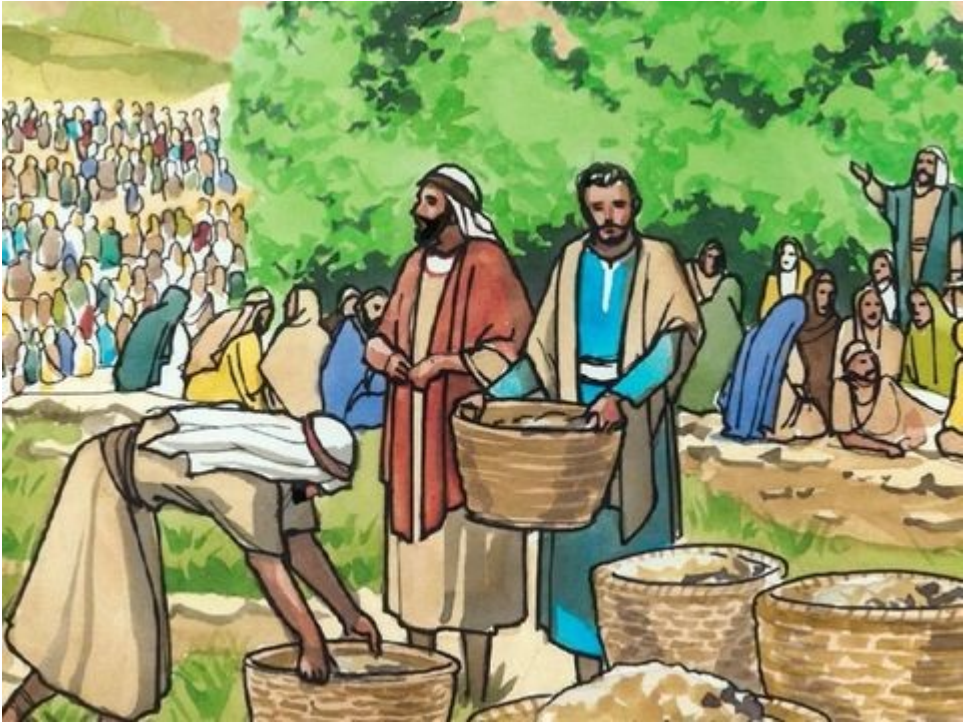


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### Introduction

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 relax in the company of Jesus and share a meal. Let the Spirit enrich our hearts and minds so that we can contemplate this great miracle of the feeding of the five thousand.

## **Reading      Matthew 14:13-21**

When Jesus received the news of John the Baptist's death he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the people heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick.

When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, "This is a lonely place, and the time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food." Jesus replied, "There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves." But they answered, "All we have with us is five loaves and two fish." "Bring them here to me," he said. He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing.

And breaking the loaves he handed them to his disciples who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps remaining, twelve baskets full. Those who ate numbered about five thousand men, to say nothing of women and children.

## **Contemplation**

In the previous verses of this chapter, we hear of the arrest and beheading of Jesus cousin, John the Baptist. Jesus needs time to grieve and seeks some time to be alone. As we enter this scene, a scene of crowdedness, let the Spirit enter our hearts so that we too can be like Jesus and have a generous heart, putting others first before ourselves.

- Who are you in the scene? One of the disciples? One of the crowd who had followed Jesus' boat along the shore? Someone who had just happened to be there? An inanimate object? Or you could be one of the loaves or the fishes.
- What time of day is it? Morning? Afternoon? Evening?
- What kind of day is it? Hot? Cold? Clammy?
- If you are one of the disciples, are you with Jesus when he receives the news of the death of John the Baptist? What does he say if anything when he hears the news? Does he look sad thus the reason he wants to go to a lonely place so that he could grieve with you, one of his friends?
- If you are one of the crowd, why do you think Jesus is leaving in a boat? Do you realise that John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin has just been beheaded? If you had known this would you have followed him in the boat?
- When you follow the boat, do you run to keep up with it? Do you not want to let Jesus out of your sight? Why did you follow the boat? Were you one of the crowd when he told his parables about the Kingdom of Heaven? Do you want to hear more? Do you want to be healed? Do you just want to be with Jesus?
- What was Jesus mood like when he started teaching you and healing the sick? Do you notice his compassion, putting others' needs before his own needs? Do you feel sorry for him attending to such a huge crowd, all wanting some sort of healing?
- If you are one of the disciples, how do you feel when you realise the huge crowd is following you? Do you feel irritated because you know Jesus is grieving? Do you feel it is only natural because the crowd were hungry for Jesus teaching and healing?
- How long has Jesus been attending to the crowd? Are you tired and fed up with the crowd and that is why you remind Jesus of the time? Who are you thinking of when you suggest to Jesus that the crowd should be sent away? Jesus? Yourself? The crowd?
- When Jesus asks you to feed the crowd, what do you think or feel? Do you panic realising that you do not have the enough resources to go round – only five loaves and two fishes? Do you feel Jesus is being unreasonable considering the size of the crowd and the small amount of food? Do you feel sorry for the people but do not know how to help? Do you feel Jesus is testing you? Telling you to have faith, to trust?
- You watch Jesus taking the five loaves and two fishes, raising his eyes to heaven and blessing them. Do you realise something

miraculous is going to happen? Do you feel the love God has for his people at that moment in time? What do you then think when after Jesus telling you to feed the people, he now asks you again to feed the people with the food he has just blessed?

- If you are one of the crowd, how do you react to this miracle? What impact does this miracle you are witnessing, being a part of, make on your life? Has this miracle you have witnessed and meal you have just partaken in changed your life? How has it changed your life? Has your hunger been satisfied or has this miracle left you hungry for more? Do you see this as a gift from God?
- Why do you think that Jesus asks his disciples to collect what has not been eaten? Do you think it is because you can eat it later or do you think there is something more e.g. the gift from God should not be wasted?
- When you go home, do you share this miracle with others? You have just experienced God's love for his people and He has given you a gift. Do you want to share this gift?

Speak to Jesus about what is going on in your mind and heart. Ask him to help you understand the miracle you have just witnessed and the gift you have just received.

## **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.

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