

Imaginative Contemplation – Unconditional Forgiveness



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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 so that we can feel the love of God who “forgives us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”.

Reading **Matthew 18:21-35**

Peter went up to Jesus and said, "Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?" Jesus answered, "Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times.

"And so the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; but he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet 'Give me time', he said, 'and I will pay the whole sum.' And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt.

Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him. 'Pay what you owe me he said. His fellow servant fell at his feet and implored him saying, 'Give me time and I will pay you.' But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt. His fellow servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to the master and reported the whole affair to him. Then the master sent for him. 'You wicked servant,' he said. 'I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound then, to have pity on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?' And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.

Contemplation

Let us start our contemplation by setting the scene. This passage is a continuation of last weeks Gospel in which Jesus tells us how we are to deal with someone in the community who has done something wrong and the lengths we must go to in order to bring him back into the fold. This scripture passage goes on to emphasises that God's forgiveness is without measure as should be our forgiveness of others. So let us enter the scene and listen to Jesus' explain to us the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation.

- Who are you in the scene? One of the disciples? If so, which one? A passer-by? Someone eavesdropping into the conversation between Jesus and his disciples? Someone who is not mentioned in the passage?
- Where is this conversation taking place? In the open air? If so are there many people around? Or are you sitting indoors around a table, just the disciples and Jesus, perhaps eating?
- Are you pleased when Peter asks for clarification as to the number of times that you must forgive your brother if he wrongs you? Are you shocked by Jesus' answer "Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times"? Does this seem over the top to you? How do you react to someone who wrongs you? What about someone who persistently wrongs you?
- If you are Peter, do you think you are being generous with the number of times i.e. seven times, that you should forgive your brother if he wrongs you? After all, does the number seven not indicate perfection? Are you shocked by Jesus reply? Are you confused, perhaps upset? Surely there is a limit to the number of times you are expected to forgive a wrongdoer?
- What is going through your mind as you listen to Jesus' parable about the merciful king? Are you astonished by the clemency and forgiveness of the king who is able to forget the enormity of the sum the servant owes him? Does Jesus illustrate to you that Our Father in Heaven also shows unconditional pardon with no limitations? How do you feel about that? Do you feel you can also show this unconditional, limitless pardon to someone who has hurt you? Or do you feel that this is a big ask and you are not able to achieve this? Do you feel you need God's help as you try to figure out what Jesus' message means to you in your life?
- What is going through your mind as Jesus continues to tell you of how the servant who has now been forgiven, goes on to treat a fellow servant who had a much smaller debt to pay? Are you

enraged? Do you feel that since the servant has had mercy shown to him, he should show mercy to others?

- Jesus is calling us to be merciful as we have received mercy. He is calling us to pardon and let go completely – not to harbour grievances. What is going through your mind when he tells us how God will treat those whose when his mercy is not reciprocated, and who cannot let go of grievances? What is going through your mind at this point?

Speak to Jesus about what is going on in your mind and heart as you reflect on mercy, forgiveness and compassion and ask him for the grace to be merciful in your life.

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