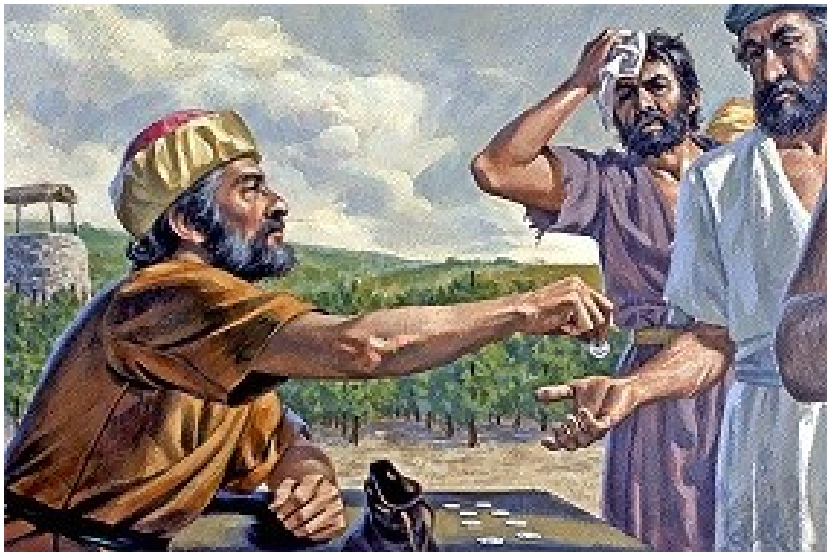


Imaginative Contemplation – “You too go to my vineyard”



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 respond to the generosity of God who calls us all to work in his vineyard.

Reading Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus said to his disciples: "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day, and sent them to his vineyard. Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place and said to them, 'You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage.' So they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the same. Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing round, and he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?' 'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. He said to them, 'You go into my vineyard too.' In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first.'

So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. They took it, but grumbled at the land-owner. 'The men who came last' they said, 'have done only one hour, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat.' He answered one of them and said, 'My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last comer as much as I pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why be envious because I am generous?' Thus the last will be first, and the first, last."

Contemplation

Let us start our contemplation by setting the scene. This parable follows on from the previous story of Jesus' encounter with the rich young man. Jesus is continuing his answer to Peter's anxious question "We have

abandoned everything and followed you. What will there be for us". Jesus explains to his disciples that God's ways are not our ways since we think using human standards. So let us enter the scene as we listen to Jesus telling us what the Kingdom of heaven is like.

- 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 you disciples and Jesus, perhaps eating a meal?
- What is going through your mind as you listen to this parable about the kingdom of heaven? Do you imagine that this is what the kingdom of heaven is like – a joyless world of work? Or a place where we actively participate with joy in God's work?
- Who do you relate to in this parable? The grumblers? The latecomers? The generous landowner?
- What is your feeling about the landowner? Do you think he should have paid all the workers the same wage? Should those who arrived late, those who have done less work have received less money than those who had been working all day? Do you think that those who had been working all day were right to complain? Would you have complained if you had been working all day through the midday sun? Do you feel you have been treated unfairly?
- Are you looking at this parable in terms of the drudgery of work? Or perhaps work as being a hardship? Do you see work as necessity to live? Or do you think Jesus is trying to tell you that the rules of the Kingdom of heaven are different? That they go beyond work as the means to an end but work as a place of love, respect and sharing. A place where everyone is treated with respect and dignity.
- Do you think Jesus is trying to explain to us that God's justice and fairness is different to our justice and fairness? That God gives his love to everyone without exception no matter when we open the door to it? Do you think the needs of the latecomers were any different from the needs of those who started work early? Jesus is trying to tell us that God's love, generosity and justice is distributed to us according to our needs and not according to any equation.
- How does this parable make you feel? That you are losing out to those latecomers? Or are you grateful to God that he will invite you into his vineyard at any time of your life? Are you annoyed that God

is treating saints and sinners alike? Or are you grateful that God has a short memory as far as your past is concerned? Speak to Jesus about what is going on in your mind and heart as you reflect on God's generosity to us and his unconditional love for us.

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