

Imaginative Contemplation – Give back to Caesar



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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 to awareness of our responsibility to both the spiritual and the temporal dominion.

Reading Matthew 22:15-21

Then the Pharisees went away to work out between them how to trap Jesus in what he said. And they sent their disciples to him, together with the Herodians, to say, 'Master, we know that you are an honest man and teach the way of God in an honest way, and that you are not afraid of anyone, because a man's rank means nothing to you.

Tell us your opinion, then. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' But Jesus was aware of their malice and replied, 'You hypocrites! Why do you set this trap for me?

Let me see the money you pay the tax with.' They handed him a denarius, and he said, 'Whose head is this? Whose name?' 'Caesar's' they replied. He then said to them, 'Very well, give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God'.'

Contemplation

In the past few Sunday Gospel Readings, Jesus has been addressing the religious leaders berating them for their leadership and for not recognising in him the love of God and the Word of God. They had got it into their heads that Jesus was trying to break the Law of God not fulfil it. In today's reading Jesus is being challenged by the Pharisees and the Herodians, their plan being to attempt to get Jesus to discredit himself and thus catch him out. With this in mind, let us enter the scene and listen to Jesus' reply to a seemingly innocent question..

- Who are you in the scene? One of the disciples? One of the disciples of the Pharisees? One of the Herodians? Someone following Jesus? Someone who is not mentioned in the passage?
- Where does this discussion take place? In the Temple? In the market place? Just walking along the street?

- Why are you there? Are you with Jesus? Are you just passing by? Is the area busy? Quiet? What are people doing? What is Jesus doing?
- What was going through your mind when you saw the Pharisees and Herodians approaching Jesus? Did you immediately think there was going to be trouble? Were you suspicious when you saw a delegation of Pharisees and Herodians approaching Jesus together knowing that despised each other? Did you wonder what would transpire?
- When they started to speak saying 'Master, we know that you are an honest man' were you quietly surprised since this was a non-confrontational opening but a true statement? Did you think that perhaps Jesus' opponents were starting to come round to his way of thinking? Or were you still suspicious and found this opening statement smarmy and full of hypocrisy?
- What about the question "Tell us your opinion, then. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not??" Did this spark your interest since the Romans colonised Palestine and were regarded as hated oppressors? Did you think it was a fair question? Or did you see where the question was heading? Did you think that Jesus would be backed into a corner from which he couldn't escape? Were you curious as to the answer he would give? If he said "No" then he would be reported to the Roman authorities. If he said "Yes" he would be regarded as a Roman collaborator. Did you wonder what Jesus would answer? Do you feel sorry for him since he recognised that they have laid a trap for him?
- Did you wait with baited breath for his answer? Were you surprised when he asked to see a coin with which people paid their taxes? Were you surprised when he answered "Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God"?
- What was the reaction of the Pharisees and the Herodians when Jesus gave them his answer? What was the look on their faces? Anger that they had failed to catch Jesus out? Anger that they were the ones who had been caught out?
- What about your reaction? Had you ever thought that you were a citizen of both the country in which you live and God's Kingdom? Did Jesus' answer make you realise that you have a responsibility by being a citizen of both kingdoms? That you have a responsibility for the community in which you live? That being a good citizen by paying taxes helps build the community in which you live and is not in contradiction to serving God since a community is built on love fairness and justice? Did it ever cross your mind that God

works through human systems and that if we don't pay taxes then the community would be deprived of its basic building blocks? Can you see that a properly run state is preferable to disorder? Has this made you realise that you have a responsibility to every one in the community especially those in margins of your society?

Is there anything you want to say to Jesus regarding his answer? Talk to him and tell him about the conflicts that may be going on in your mind regarding your dual citizenship. Ask Jesus for his help to build good relationships wherever you are.

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