

## Imaginative Contemplation – Parable of the Dishonest Tenants



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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 our responsibility of being good tenants in God's vineyard and producing fruit that will last.

## **Reading      Matthew 21:33-43**

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people, "Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a wine press in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance.' So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They answered, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him when the season arrives."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures:  
"It was the stone rejected by, the builders that became the keystone.  
This was the Lord's doing  
and it is wonderful to see  
"I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."

## **Contemplation**

This reading is a continuation of last Sunday's Gospel about the parable of the two sons sent by their father to work in his vineyard. One son refused to go but later relented. The other son said he would go but didn't. However, today's reading is not a parable as such but an allegory, a story

containing hidden meanings. In Jesus' discourse, the landowner is God, the vineyard is the nation of Israel, the tenants are the people of Israel or its religious leaders. the servants are the prophets and the son is Jesus. However, in this Season of Creation, perhaps we may want to look at the parable in a different light. The landowner being God, the vineyard, his beautiful creation; the tenants, us; the servants prophets like Pope Francis, David Attenborough, Greta Thunberg; and the son, Jesus. With this in mind, let us enter the scene and listen to Jesus continuing to talk to the disbelieving religious leaders.

- Who are you in the scene? One of the disciples? One of the religious leaders? Someone who had come to pray in the temple? Someone coming to hear Jesus? Someone who is not mentioned in the passage?
- Why have you come to the temple? To be with Jesus? To pray? To listen to Jesus? Had you heard about Jesus and were curious?
- Is the temple crowded? Look around you. Who is there? What is the atmosphere like? Is it noisy? Hostile? Prayerful? What is Jesus' mood? Is he angry? Calm? Prayerful? Frustrated?
- What is going through your mind as you listen to this parable? Do you make the connection between the landowner and God; the vineyard and his beautiful creation; the religious leaders, you and his tenants; the servants and the prophets; the son and Jesus himself?
- How do you feel when you hear that the tenants have abused the servants sent by the landowner to collect his produce? Outraged? Not surprised since the landowner is not there to monitor what is going on? Do you feel that the landowner was too trusting of the tenants whom he had chosen to care for his vineyard? Do you think they needed supervision? Or do you think that the landowner wanted to allow the tenants tend to the vineyard as they saw fit?
- Who do you think the tenants are? The religious leaders or all of us? Do you think that you that you are one of those tenants put in the vineyard to produce a harvest? Do you realise that God has given you the tools (your talents and gifts) necessary to produce the fruit and the freedom to run the vineyard to the best of your ability? How do you see the fruits of your labours? A challenge? A joy?
- What do you do with the fruits of your labours? As a tenant, do you protect the vineyard and treasure its fruits and share them with those in need? Or do you store the fruits for yourself thinking that you worked for them so you think they are yours and not God's? How do you care for the vineyard, God's beautiful creation?

- How do you treat those servants who come to remind you of your responsibility to your tenancy? Do you think they are prophets of doom and gloom? Do you listen, take note but do nothing? Or are you afraid of the consequences if you don't listen and act on their advice? Can you think of anyone in particular who are prophets? Is there anyone in particular who inspires you to be a better tenant?
- How do you think the Landowner/God feels when he sees his land being abused by the tenants? Do you see that he has not given up on us?
- As you listen to Jesus, do you realise that he is that Son, the one who will be put to death? This is something he has been predicting all along, but do you make the connection? Or are you listening to the parable in a literal sense and feel sorry for the landowner who thinks they will respect his son or even angry with the landowner for being too trusting and giving the tenants free reins?
- Again, do you realise that Jesus is the cornerstone, the one who has been rejected and who has now become the keystone? Do you realise that through Jesus' word and deeds, we can all become better tenants? That by recognising this we can put the fruits of our labours to better help the community in which we live?

Is there anything you want to say to Jesus, ask Jesus, discuss with Jesus about what is going on in your heart and mind about your tenancy.

## **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