

Imaginative Contemplation – I am the Bread of Life



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.

Sit and relax by focussing on your breathing for a few minutes so that you can contemplate the Gospel using our imagination.

Prayer

Acknowledge you are in the presence of God by saying the following prayer:

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 minds so that we too can become a close companion of Jesus, one who shares bread with him (companion, coming from Latin; cum meaning with and panis meaning bread). Let us pray that through our companionship with Jesus, we will never hunger or thirst again.

Reading John 6:24-35

When the people saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into boats and crossed to Capernaum to look for Jesus. When they found him on the other side, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

Jesus answered: "I tell you most solemnly, you are not looking for me because you have seen the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat. Do not work for food that cannot last, but work for food that endures to eternal life, the kind of food the Son of Man is offering you, for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal."

Then they said to him, "What must we do if we are to do the works that God wants?"

Jesus gave them this answer, "This is working for God: you must believe in the one he has sent."

So they said, "What sign will you give to show us that we should believe in you? What work will you do? Our fathers had manna to eat in the desert; as scripture says: He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

Jesus answered: "I tell you most solemnly, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread; for the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Sir," they said "give us that bread always."

Jesus answered: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst."

Contemplation

On this, the 18th Sunday of the year, we continue to read from the sixth chapter of St John's Gospel however, it is not a continuation of the Gospel from last week where we saw the miracle of the loaves and the fish. The section that is missed out is the calming of the storm where Jesus and his disciples leave the crowd after feeding them. In today's Gospel, we see that the crowd has noticed the departure of Jesus and begins the journey to the other side of the lake to seek him out. Let us now enter the scene and listen to the dialogue between Jesus and the crowd.

- Who are you in the scene? Are you one of the disciples? One of the crowd? Perhaps someone or something not mentioned in the story?
- Notice what is going on around you. What is the mood like – of the crowd, of the disciples, of Jesus? What do you see? What strikes you about the general atmosphere?
- If you are one of the crowd, why have you gone to look for Jesus? Is it out of love? Because you want to hear more from him? Because you want to know who this Jesus is whom you are seeking? Because you want to enter into a deeper life with him? Did you realise that this great miracle you have just been a part of has a deeper meaning to the material food you have just eaten? Do you have a particular hunger of your own you are trying to satisfy?
- Or have you just come to see what more you can get can get? Is Jesus correct when he tells you that you are looking for him not because you have witnessed a great miracle but because you have had a lot of bread to eat? Is he right in implying you have missed the significance of the miracle?
- Do you now understand that the food was not to fill a physical hunger but a spiritual one? Do you now see that the food Jesus is offering is one that endures forever?
- Do you grasp there is more to satisfying your physical hunger and is that why you ask what you must do to get this bread of life? Do you find Jesus' answer straightforward when he tells you "You must believe in the one God has sent" which means that you have to commit yourself unconditionally to God's way? Do you feel you can put your faith and trust in God alone and let go of the material things of this world?

- Are you one of the crowd who wants to see a sign before you can commit? Is the miracle of the loaves and fishes you have just witnessed not enough of a sign for you? Do you see this dialogue in a material sense or have you found a richness in the words of Jesus and wish to commit to his way? Has Jesus and the miracle of the loaves and fish opened your eyes to the abundant gifts God has to offer? Have you come to realise that Jesus himself is the sign you have been looking for?
- When the crowd asks for some of this life-giving bread from God, Jesus answered: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst", do you wonder how we are supposed to get this Bread of Life? Do you now see that Jesus is not talking about material bread but Spiritual bread? Do you now understand that your spiritual hunger will be satisfied by becoming Jesus' companion? By listening to his word? By involvement in the community and experiencing its love and friendship? Do you see that these are the things that nourish your soul?

Talk to Jesus about how your life can be nourished, how your hunger and thirst can be satisfied, how your life can be enriched. Talk to him about the things that give your life more meaning.

Let us now spend ten minutes in quiet contemplation

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.