

Imaginative Contemplation – I am the living Bread



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 by believing Jesus is the bread of life, we will better understand the great gift Jesus has given us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist which we celebrate each time we gather for the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Reading John 6:41-51.

The Jews were complaining to each other about him, because he had said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven'. 'Surely this is Jesus son of Joseph' they said. 'We know his father and mother. How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?'

Jesus said in reply, 'Stop complaining to each other. 'No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise him up at the last day.

It is written in the prophets:

They will all be taught by God, and to hear the teaching of the Father, and learn from it, is to come to me.

Not that anybody has seen the Father, except the one who comes from God: he has seen the Father.

I tell you most solemnly, everybody who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.

Your fathers ate the manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that a man may eat it and not die.

I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

Contemplation

On this, the 19th Sunday of Ordinary time, we continue to read from the sixth chapter of St John's Gospel, the Bread of Life discourse, in which Jesus continues to tell the crowd that he is the bread of life. In this Scripture reading he goes further by also telling them that he is the living bread that brings eternal life. Let us now enter the scene as we listen to some people from the crowd complaining to one another about the claims Jesus is making about himself.

- Who are you in the scene? Are you one of the disciples? One of the crowd? One of the Jews who is complaining? 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 and hear? What strikes you about the general atmosphere?
- What strikes you about those in the crowd complaining? Do you wonder what makes them think they know Jesus, just because they know his mother and father? Do you think they feel his claims that he came down from heaven are arrogant because they think they know him? Do you think they have not grasped the identity of Jesus because of their prejudices? Do you sometimes close your mind and heart to someone because you think you know them?
- When Jesus says 'No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me' what is going through your mind? Have you ever felt the Father drawing you into the life of the Blessed Trinity through the events of your daily life; through the people you meet, through your ups and downs, successes and failures? Do you accept Jesus' invitation to be drawn to the Father through him? Do you feel that the words of Jesus are drawing you to something life-giving and loving?
- When Jesus says 'I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread that comes down from heaven', what are you thinking? Do you hunger for this life-giving bread or do you feel self-sufficient? Do you realise that it is not physical bread like the manna in the desert Jesus is talking about but a way of life? Do you realise that this bread of life is Jesus' teachings, his attitude and relationship towards people and his Father? Do

you understand that this is the bread of life and having eaten it, you will live forever?

- What is going through your mind when Jesus says, 'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'? Are you shocked by this statement? Do you wonder what it means? Do you wonder how you will know when you have eaten of this bread? Do you think you will know it by the type of person you have become and by the values you uphold? Do you think that by eating of this bread, you are absorbing the Spirit of Jesus which will make you become more kind and compassionate, more generous and forgiving? Is it this Bread of Life you are hungering for?

Talk to Jesus about what is going on in your mind as you listen to his words of life. Ask him for his help to be drawn into a life with the Trinity and for a greater understanding of the great gift he is giving us in the Eucharist.

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.