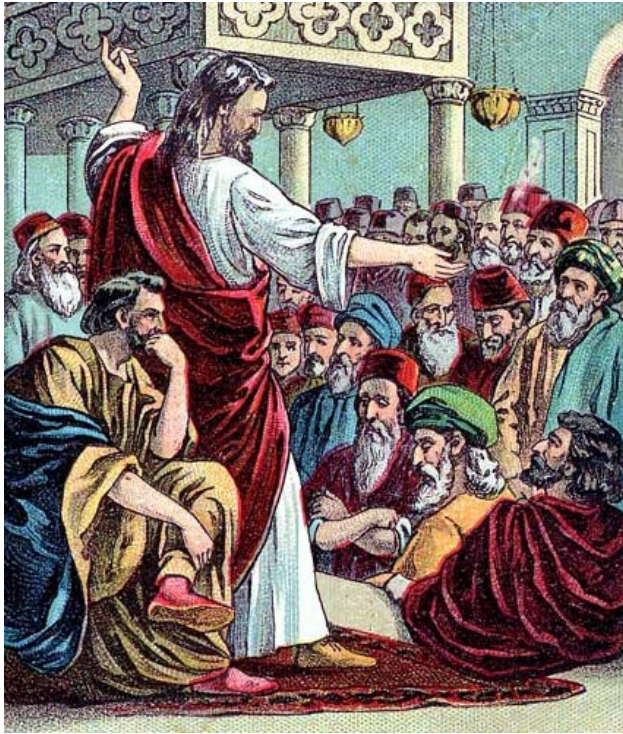


Imaginative Contemplation – Laws and Traditions



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 may open our hearts to the ways of God and allow his Spirit to transform us by the way we act.

Reading **Mark 7:1-8.14-15.21-23**

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round him, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and the Jews in general, follow the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow; and on returning from the market place they never eat without first sprinkling themselves. There are also many other observances which have been handed down to them concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes.

So these Pharisees and scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?' He answered, 'It was of you hypocrites that Isaiah so rightly prophesied in this passage of scripture:

This people honours me only with lip-service,
while their hearts are far from me.

The worship they offer me is worthless,
the doctrines they teach are only human regulations.

You put aside the commandment of God to cling to human traditions.'

He called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into a man from outside can make him unclean; it is the things that come out of a man that make him unclean. For it is from within, from men's hearts, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a man unclean.'

Contemplation

For today's Gospel, the 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time, we return to the Gospel of St Mark after having heard the Bread of Life Discourse from Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. In Today's Gospel Reading, St Mark gives us an insight to Jewish laws and traditions regarding eating. Let us enter the scene at the point where the Pharisees are confronting Jesus' disciples lack of observance of the Law handed down to them by Moses.

- Who are you in the scene? Are you one of the disciples? One of the crowd? One of the Pharisees? One of the Scribes? One of those confronting Jesus? 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 Pharisee, of the disciples, of Jesus? What do you see and hear? What strikes you about the general atmosphere?
- Are you one of those who noticed that Jesus disciples were eating with unclean hands? How do you feel about this? Are you enraged because you, yourself observe the law and adhere to it? Because you get annoyed with those who do not keep to rules and regulations? Because you feel that these laws are a sign of your commitment to God and that by not keeping them it is being disrespectful? Because the laws make you better than your pagan neighbours? Are you glad that some Pharisees questioned Jesus about his disciples' disregard for the law?
- Or do you feel that the laws are no more than petty regulations which the Pharisees enjoy policing? Do you feel that the law has become too complicated and impractical for every day living? Do you feel that the Pharisees have burdened you with their interpretation of the law so that it makes you feel overwhelmed? Are you curious to know how Jesus will answer the criticism of the Pharisees?
- As you listen to Jesus addressing the people, how do you feel? Insulted at being called a hypocrite? Ashamed because you suddenly see that you have been following the law so rigidly that you are not able to see beyond it? Do you realise that the way you observe the law has become a policing exercise on people's external behaviour and not about building a relationship with God and one's neighbour? Do you see that what Jesus is criticising is the disproportionate emphasis on the laws which blind us to what is important, i.e. the love of God and the love of neighbour?
- Do you find Jesus' words challenging? Do you find that by trying to be holy you pay too much attention to the trivial externals and follow

the rules unquestioningly? Do you see that Jesus is trying to tell us that to become holy, we must pay more attention to what goes on in our hearts and allow ourselves to be transformed by God's Spirit? Do you ever find that your practices and routines interfere with helping others and showing compassion?

Spend some time speaking to Jesus about what is going on in your mind regarding how you view your religious practices. Talk to him about the times you can be judgmental and ask him for the eyes to see the goodness that lies beneath.

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