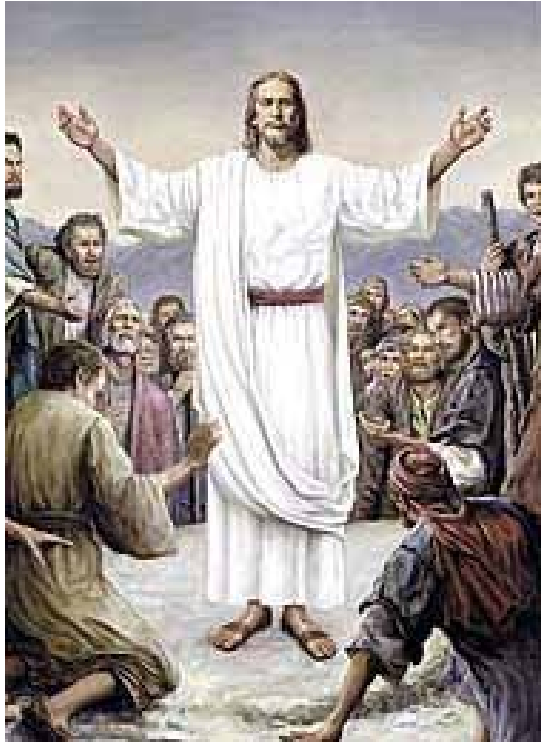


Imaginative Contemplation – Who shall we go to?



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 can see that Jesus is leading us away from the dependence of earthly bread and understand that he has the message of eternal life.

Reading John 6:60-69

After hearing it, many of his followers said, 'This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?'

Jesus was aware that his followers were complaining about it and said, 'Does this upset you? What if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?'

'It is the spirit that gives life,
the flesh has nothing to offer.

The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

'But there are some of you who do not believe.'

For Jesus knew from the outset those who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him.

He went on, 'This is why I told you that no one could come to me unless the Father allows him'. After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him.

Then Jesus said to the Twelve, 'What about you, do you want to go away too?' Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God.'

Contemplation

Today's Gospel, the 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time, is the conclusion of the "Bread of Life" discourse in which we see Jesus, having fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish and having explained that he is the Bread of Life, is now responding to the complaints of the crowd regarding his teaching. He acknowledges their scepticism and in today's reading he tries to re-enforce his message that his words are spirit and they are life.

The crowd of what started off as more than five thousand has now dwindled away to twelve, his chosen disciples. Let us enter the scene and listen to Jesus' life-giving words.

- Who are you in the scene? Are you one of the disciples? One of the crowd? Someone 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?
- Do you find Jesus' language intolerable? Do you find the thought of eating his flesh and drinking his blood as a way of life an impossible undertaking?
- As you listen to Jesus' teaching, what is going through your mind? Can you see that Jesus is aware of how difficult it is to accept his teaching? Are there aspects in what he is saying that you find revolutionary and difficult to understand? What are they? Jesus asks what is upsetting you? How do you respond? Do you want to turn away? How do others in the crowd respond?
- Jesus tells you that it is the Spirit that gives life and that the flesh has nothing to offer. What is going through your mind as you hear these words? Do you see that you have to listen to Jesus with the eyes of the Spirit and not through the eyes of the flesh? Do you feel you have to listen through the eyes of faith?
- Jesus tells you that his words are spirit and they are life. What does that mean to you? Can you see that it is Jesus' desire to give everyone life? Can you see that Jesus wants to raise you into a life with the spirit? Do you desire this transforming way of life which Jesus is offering you?
- Jesus asks you if you too want to go away? How does his voice sound as he asks the question? Does he sound hurt? Abandoned? Rejected? Do you hear in Jesus' voice that he is giving you the freedom to choose?
- What do you reply to him? Do you, like Peter, wonder where you would go to if you left? Do you, like Peter, believe that Jesus has the message of eternal life? Do you, like Peter believe that Jesus is the Holy one of God? Do you feel that to stay with Jesus is to walk forward with him in faith?
- Do you believe that amidst whatever life brings you, only Jesus has the words of eternal life? Are you, like Peter beginning to see things as Jesus sees them? Are you beginning to see things in a new way? Does this make you want to draw nearer to him? Is your

life like that of Peter's, becoming hopeful and full of meaning because of Jesus? How does that make you feel?

Spend some time speaking honestly to Jesus about what is troubling you about his teachings and be open to his response. Ask Jesus what it takes to be like him, to be fully open to God.

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