

Imaginative Contemplation – Take up your Cross

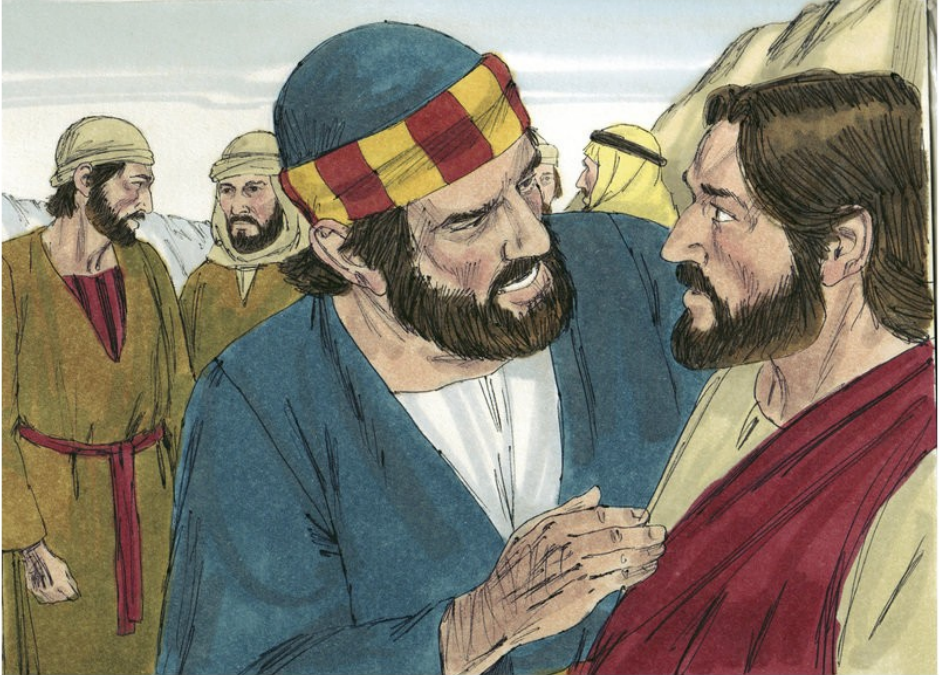


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Introduction

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 so that we can reflect on who Jesus is for me and what I must do to be one of his disciples.

Reading Mark 8:27- 35

Jesus and his disciples left for the villages round Caesarea Philippi. On the way he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say I am?' And they told him. 'John the Baptist,' they said 'others Elijah; others again, one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he asked 'who do you say I am?' Peter spoke up and said to him, 'You are the Christ'. And he gave them strict orders not to tell anyone about him.

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man was destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again; and he said all this quite openly. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. But, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said to him, 'Get behind me, Satan! Because the way you think is not God's way but man's.'

He called the people and his disciples to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.'

Contemplation

As we continue reading the Gospel of St Mark, the disciples are beginning to see more clearly who Jesus is through his ministry and miracles. In today's Gospel, the 24th Sunday of Ordinary time, Jesus himself puts the question of his identity to his disciples. Let us enter the scene and hear the disciples response and then listen to Jesus telling them about the outcome

of his mission; that he will be rejected, that he will suffer and die, and that will rise after three days.

- Who are you in the scene? Are you one of the disciples? Someone not mentioned in the passage?
- Notice what is going on around you. What is the mood like – of the disciples, of Jesus? What do you see and hear? What strikes you about the general atmosphere? What are the surroundings like?
- Are you wondering why Jesus took you to this place? A place of beauty but a place of known pagan worship.
- When Jesus asked you “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Are you the one who replied “Elijah”, “John the Baptist” “one of the prophets”? or do you sit quietly listening to everyone else?
- When Jesus asks “But you, who do you say I am?” what is going through your mind? Are you about to say something? If so what would you have said? Does Peter get his say in before you?
- Do you believe and affirm with love Peter’s declaration of faith in Jesus, not just as Messiah, but as the Son of God? Or is Jesus someone different for you? Are you still thinking he has come for political purposes?
- What is Jesus’ reaction to Peter’s declaration of faith? Does he look pleased? Relieved because Peter is now thinking on a spiritual plane and not in an earthly way? That Peter’s eyes have now been opened to who Jesus is?
- If you are Peter what was it about Jesus that made you answer as you did? i.e. “You are the Christ, the son of the living God”. Was it an answer that came from your heart or your head? Have you seen enough evidence in his words and deeds to know without doubt that Jesus is the Son of God?
- What are your expectations of the Messiah? Political? Military leader? Something else?
- Are you brought down to earth when Jesus, the Son of God, tells you he is destined to be put to death by the chief priests and scribes? What do you understand by him saying he will be raised up on the third day? Or are you still shocked by his disclosure that he is going to die? How do you feel?
- If you are Peter, what makes you take Jesus aside to challenge him? Do you feel you can talk to Jesus on equal terms? Do you say what you do because you love Jesus? Because you do not want anything to happen to your friend? Because you have not really understood what it means to be the Messiah?

- How do you feel when he says to you “Get behind me Satan”? Upset? Confused? Do you realise that the way you think is not God’s way of thinking? That one minute you had been given a revelation by God and now you are thinking in human terms? What is going on in your mind?
- When Jesus turns and says to you, “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me.....”. What is he asking you to do? What do you think he means? What is this cross he is asking you to bear? Do you think he is asking you to lead a miserable life? Or do you think he is asking you to look at life in a different way? That a life as one of his disciples is not all about honour and privileges? Could he be asking you to give up something so that you can live life more fully? Is Jesus’ words revealing to you that he is the Messiah but in a different way to what you envisaged? Are you open to seeing the Messiah in a new way? Are you disappointed by this revelation? Afraid? Dispirited? Excited? Do you want Jesus to explain more fully what he means?
- Are you willing to walk the way of Jesus and bear a cross? Are you willing to exchange your life so that you can find a life in God?

Speak to Jesus about what is going on in your mind and heart as you contemplate what being his disciple means and the cross you may have to bear to be a disciple of Jesus.

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