

Imaginative Contemplation – The Holy Family



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 to the fact that we, like Jesus belong to a family and like Jesus are called to serve not only our immediate family but also a wider family.

Reading Luke 2:41 – 52

Every year his parents used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up for the feast as usual. When they were on their way home after the feast, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it. They assumed he was with the caravan, and it was only after a day's journey that they went to look for him among their relations and acquaintances. When they failed to find him they went back to Jerusalem looking for him everywhere. Three days later, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the doctors, listening to them, and asking them questions; and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. They were overcome when they saw him, and his mother said to him, 'My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.' 'Why were you looking for me?' he replied 'Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father's affairs?' But they did not understand what he meant.

He then went down with them and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. His mother stored up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and men.

Contemplation

On this, the Feast of the Holy Family, we are called to reflect the meaning of family life and how it is central to our lives. Not only that, we as Christians are called to follow Jesus and fit in with the wider family of our community and indeed the world. In today's Gospel we see Jesus' coming of age and I would like to share my thoughts with you as I put myself in the scene of Luke's Gospel passage.

What child is this sitting amongst us asking questions usually asked by scholars and students of the Scriptures? Whose child is this that he is here alone in the temple unaccompanied by an adult? This is now the third day he has appeared amongst us asking questions about the scriptures, about the prophecies and challenging our answers. He is only a child but one with a keen mind and insatiable appetite for answers. All of us doctors and teachers were astounded by his intelligence regarding the questions he was asking and the answers he was giving; even those of us who felt that a child's place was at home with their parents and certainly not amongst us learned people. There was something different about this child.. He was dressed simply but had an engaging manner so all of us were captivated by him. He spoke to us with ease and referred to God as his Father. None of us asked who he was or where his parents were or even where he was sleeping at night, we were all too interested to find out what he would say next.

Then a man and woman came rushing in. Worry written all over their faces. I could tell the woman was his mother as I could see similarities both in their appearances and in their mannerisms. They too were dressed simply. To be honest I thought that this boy's parents may have been scholars but their attire told a different story. They were overcome with relief when they saw him. Had they been searching for him for the three days he had been with us? They must have been at their wits end. His mother said to him in a gentle voice, "My child, why have, you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you." The boy replied in all innocence, 'Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father's affairs?' I could tell his parents were baffled by this reply which made me also question if this man is not his father, then who is?

Before the boy left with them, I approached his mother and told her that her son had been with us for three days and how amazed we all were with the depth of his knowledge. I told her how at home he seemed to be in the temple and that he had the makings of a scholar. She smiled and I could tell she was contemplating the whole incident. I felt she knew there was something special about her son. As I stood watching the family depart from the temple, my heart felt restless. I wanted to know more about this boy. I will make it my quest to find out.

I now invite you to put yourself in the scene.

- Who are you in the scene? Mary? Joseph? The boy Jesus? Perhaps you are someone who is not mentioned in the scripture passage helping Mary and Joseph search for their son.

- If you are Mary or Joseph, how did you feel when you discover Jesus is missing? What do you do? Do you ask for help?
- If you are a parent, have you ever lost your child, even momentarily?
- What is your initial feeling when you find Jesus in the temple with the doctors? Do you feel relieved that you have found your son? Are you angry with him for leaving without telling you? Do you notice how astounded these learned men are by his interaction with them or are your eyes only on Jesus?
- How do you react to the fact that Jesus feels he has done nothing wrong as he did not feel lost but close to his Father? Do you return to Nazareth in silence pondering the incident or do you discuss as a family how you felt at you son's disappearance? Do you start to understand why Jesus felt he had to be in his Father's house?
- If you are Jesus, what makes you leave the pilgrimage without telling your parents? What happened in Jerusalem that makes you want to stay in the temple with the doctors? Do you feel that you have become aware of your mission and you didn't even think of telling your parents you wanted to find out more?
- Can you remember a time when you were coming of age that you had a growing sense of identity and mission?

Speak to Jesus about what is going on in your mind and heart regarding your family and be consoled that this story is not one of a happy family but one of drama and difficult decisions.

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