

Imaginative Contemplation – Love your enemies



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 guide our hearts and enlighten our minds as we reflect on the challenges of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus – to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek, to give to those who ask without expecting repayment, to treat others as we would like to be treated and not to judge lest we be judged.

Reading Luke 6:27-38

Jesus said to his disciples: 'But I say this to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly. To the man who slaps you on one cheek, present the other cheek too; to the man who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask for your property back from the man who robs you. Treat others as you would like them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what thanks can you expect? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what thanks can you expect? For even sinners do that much. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what thanks can you expect? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount. Instead, love your enemies and do good, and lend without any hope of return. You will have a great reward, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

'Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged yourselves; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be

poured into your lap; because the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back.'

Contemplation

On this, the Seventh Sunday in Ordinary time, the Gospel passage is a continuation of last week's Gospel passage, the Beatitudes in which Jesus gives us a roadmap on how we should live our lives and challenge us to be people of virtue. In today's reading, Jesus goes even further and calls us to a new way of living, behaving and responding to our daily human encounters. Let us enter into the Gospel setting and listen to the challenges Jesus sets before us.

- Who are you within the story? Are you one of his disciples? Someone who is listening in on the conversation? Perhaps a person who is not specifically mentioned in the printed story?
- Where is Jesus talking to you? Are you still on the plain? Are there still people around or have they all left? Are you the only people left with Jesus? What time of day is it? What is the weather like?
- What is the atmosphere like? Do you feel peaceful? Attentive? Confused because what Jesus said before has challenged you? Are you tired?
- As you listen to Jesus telling you to love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly and then telling you to the person who slaps you on one cheek, present the other cheek too; to the person who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic, to give to the person who asks and not to ask for your property back from the person who robs you. How does that make you feel? Has Jesus turned your world upside down?
- Do you feel Jesus is asking too much of you? Does it seem an impossible task to be asked to love your enemies? Do you start to think of all those you consider your enemy? Those you have closed your heart to or sought vengeance for their offence against you? Do you wonder how you can bring people such as those into your heart and do as Jesus asks – to love them?
- Did you realise that being a follower of Jesus would be so difficult? Are you prepared to welcome Jesus' way of loving

even those you find difficult to love? Are you prepared to look for the best in people and make allowances for their faults and failings with the hope that people look for the best in you and overlook your faults and failings? Can you think of a time when someone was merciful to you?

- Do you think you are ready to respond to the world as Jesus did by loving and forgiving everyone, by blessing all he met and by praying to his Father for us? Do you think you are ready to go that extra mile for someone you don't particularly like?
- Do you realise that you cannot achieve Jesus' way of loving by yourself? That you will need the grace of God our Father to be able to have the space for everyone in your heart? That only God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within you can help you go beyond a way of loving that you never imagined could be possible? That only then can you love, be compassionate and merciful?

Feel what is going on inside you as you listen to Jesus' words. Is there anything you want to ask him? Approach Jesus and talk to him about what is going on inside you. Give thanks for the love, friendship, generosity and compassion he has shown you and pray that you too can aspire to be like him..

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.