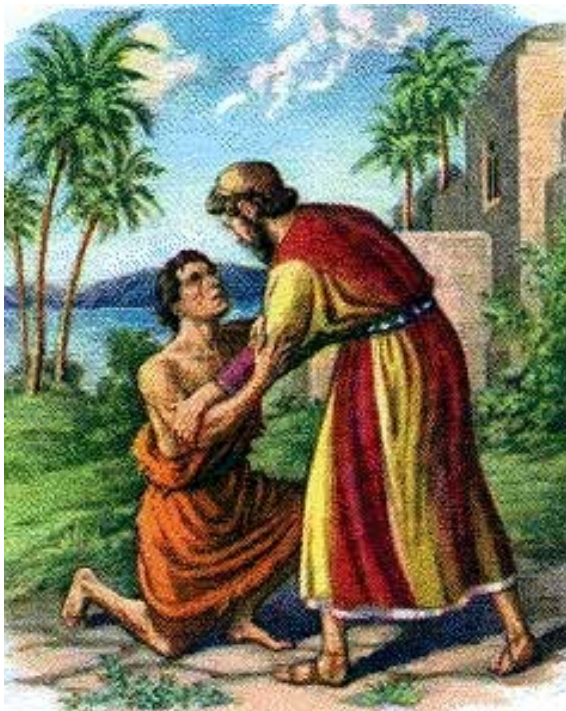


Imaginative Contemplation – He was lost and is found



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 that we may hear your call to come back to you and that we may be made aware of on your unconditional love for us.

Reading Luke 15:1-3.11-32

The tax collectors and the sinners, meanwhile, were all seeking his company to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. 'This man' they said 'welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he spoke this parable to them:

'A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me". So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery.

'When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants." So he left the place and went back to his father.

'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate.

'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. "Your brother has come" replied the servant "and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him but he answered his father, "Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property - he and his women - you kill the calf we had been fattening."

The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found."

Contemplation

On this 4th Sunday of Lent, known as Laetare Sunday (meaning rejoice) we read the parable of the Prodigal Son which shows us God's unconditional love, mercy and compassion for us, no matter how far we have strayed. I would like to share with you my reflections of this Gospel story as I enter into the Gospel passage.

My younger brother was always very frivolous and out-going. You just couldn't pin him down for more than 10 minutes. With the results it was always left to me to take care of farm and fix things around the house. It really annoyed me but when I complained my father always made excuses for his flightiness. I felt he was my father's favourite always indulging in his whimsical fancies.

Then one day, out of the blue my brother asked for his share of our inheritance and as usual my father gave in to his demands. Then my brother was off with hardly a good bye. I was angry. Angry with my brother for his selfishness. Angry with my father for giving into my brother's request. Why couldn't my father have put his foot down? He and I argued about it every now and then. I just couldn't understand why he still sided with him so much and made excuses for his behaviour. What made things worse was seeing my father look out every day for him to come back. Did he really expect him to return? My brother was probably enjoying himself too much to even think about our father. But still day after day, month after month, year after year he looked into the distance with love in his eyes in the hope that he would one day see him coming over the horizon. Meanwhile I looked after the farm and did all my duties as a son should.

Then one day as I was returning from the fields, I heard the sound of music and laughter. On approaching the house I asked one of the servants what was going on. "Your brother has returned," he replied, "and we have killed the fatted calf". I was outraged and refused to enter the house. My father came out and pleaded with me to come inside and join the party. I was furious that my brother who squandered his inheritance was welcomed back into the house and treated like a king when I had been left at home slaving away. Was a calf ever slaughtered for me? No! Was I ever welcomed home like that when I was working in the fields? No! I said this to my father who as usual made excuses saying "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found". I didn't listen. My brother should be punished, not rewarded. I stormed away and missed seeing the sadness in my father's eyes.

I was so angry, I barely went into the house. I ate with the servants and only returned after dark to sleep. One of the servants gave me snippets of what had happened to my brother whilst he was away. He told me about the famine, about

his work with the pigs and how he was treated. He came to his senses and decided to come home and ask his father's forgiveness. All I could think of was that he deserved his hardship and that of course he would come home and ask for forgiveness. He knows how easily my father is taken in with a sob story.

As time went on, the bitterness and the anger did not go. One day I looked towards the house and there was my father staring out into the distance. Had my brother gone again? I asked one of the servants. "No", he told me, "he is waiting for you to return". I was surprised at this. I hadn't gone away. I was still here tending the fields and working as I had always done. The servant told me that my father had been staring out ever since I refused to come into the house. Then the servant reminded me of when my brother and I were little. How much he loved us both. How much he indulged us with his love.

I dwelt on this and began to wonder when had I become so self-righteous. I realised that my brother loved my father more than me. I worked all these years for my father out of duty rather than love. I had become bitter towards my father, envious of my brother and I was filled with anger. My brother came back because he recognised the love of my father, something which I failed to see. He had the courage to see his own faults and failings whereas I thought I was right. He had the courage to ask for forgiveness. I felt shame and guilt. I walked towards the house. My father came out to greet me and held me in his arms.

I now invite you into the scene to ponder on the story. Who do you identify with? The loving father? The son who went astray? The son who stayed behind? Speak to Jesus about what is going on in your mind and ask him for the courage to return to the Father.

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.