

Imaginative Contemplation – Man cannot live on bread alone



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 pray that we are not led into temptation.

Reading Luke 4:1-13

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf'.

But Jesus replied, 'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone.'

Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, 'I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me, then, and it shall all be yours.'

But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says:

You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone'.

Then he led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said to him 'throw yourself down from here, for scripture says:

He will put his angels in charge of you to guard you, and again:

They will hold you up on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.

But Jesus answered him, 'It has been said:

You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him, to return at the appointed time.

Contemplation

On this, the First Sunday of Lent, we read St Luke's' account of Jesus going into the wilderness to pray and fast prior to him embarking on his mission. We read about his temptations and how he overcame them. I would like to offer you my reflections as I enter the wilderness to be with Jesus.

I was not surprised to see yet another preacher retreating to the wilderness in order to spend some time with God, before starting on his mission. As a shepherd, the wilderness is the place I look after my flock so I spent a lot of my time there and it is not unusual to come across people praying and fasting, some even trying to emulate the forty days and nights Moses spent on mount Sinai. Usually, no matter their strength of mind and body, they give up after a few days usually tempted by the thought of a nice meal and a warm bed. But this man was different. A strength emanated from him and as he prayed he seemed to be at one with God. Sometimes at a distance, I watch him pray and wished I could enter into prayer as deeply as him when I prayed.

Then one day, he was approached by a good looking man. I hid behind a rock and watched and listened to the conversation between them. 'If you are the Son of God' he said 'tell this stone to turn into a loaf'. My heart stopped. Who was this stranger? Was he taunting this holy man and was he really the Son of God? 'Don't listen to him', I thought to myself. 'You have done well this far'. But the man replied, 'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone'.

Then the stranger, still taunting him, offered him power in exchange for worshipping him. But the man replied 'Scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone'.

Then the stranger, taunting even more, tested this man's faith in God but the man yet again quoted Scripture saying 'It has been said: 'You must not put the Lord your God to the test.' With this final answer, the stranger left.

I stayed behind the rock and reflected on what I had just seen and heard. This man had resisted temptation through his trust and dependence on God even though he was at his most vulnerable,. He rebuked temptation because of his faith that God would protect him.

He quoted Scripture to rebuke his tempter. Could this man's tempter have been the devil? He didn't look like it but then again, what does the devil look like? All I know is that the devil tempts me with appealing and plausible offers when I am at my most vulnerable – just like this man. This man's faith and trust in God inspired me. There was so much I wanted to ask him but when I came out from behind the rock, he was gone. My heart felt restless. I wanted to know more about this man and I will make it my quest to find out.

I now invite you to enter the scene and ponder on how you react to temptation. Do you know yourself and your temptations? Do you put your trust in the protection of God so that you can resist them? Do you ask God daily to "Lead you not into temptation?"

As you start your journey through Lent this year, ask Jesus to help you follow him with the same confidence and trust that he had in the face of temptation: God's word alone being enough and that His promise of protection can be trusted. "Lead me not into temptation"

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.