

Second Sunday of Easter – We are Witnesses



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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.

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 and enlighten our minds and our hearts that our bearing witness to the Good News of Christ is guided by the Holy Spirit

Reading Acts 5:27-32.40-41

The high priest demanded an explanation of the apostles. "We gave you a formal warning," he said "not to preach, in this name, and what have you done? You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and seem determined to fix the guilt of this man's death on us."

In reply Peter and the apostles said, "Obedience to God comes before obedience to men; it was the God of our ancestors who raised up Jesus, but it was you who had him executed by hanging on a tree. By his own right hand God has now raised him up to be leader and saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins through him to Israel. We are witnesses to all this, we and the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

They warned the apostles not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them. And so they left the presence of the Sanhedrin glad to have had the honour of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name.

Contemplation

In the first reading of this third Sunday of Easter, we read about the apostles who having been so fearful at the time of Jesus' death, are now boldly and publicly proclaiming his Resurrection. Enter the scene in the Sanhedrin and listen to the accusations being brought against the apostles by the high priests and listen to Peter's reply.

- Who are you in this scene? One of the apostles? Peter? The high priest? One of the accusers? Perhaps a spectator?
- Do you know anyone in the courtroom? Any of the accusers or the apostles?
- What is the atmosphere like in the Sanhedrin? One of hostility on the part of the accusers? One of enthusiasm and fearlessness on the part of the apostles? One of confusion with everyone talking at once?
- Look around you? What do you notice? Do you recognise the high priest and accusers as being the same ones who presided over Jesus' trial and death? Do you recognise Peter as being the same person who denied Jesus at the time of his trial? Do you recognise the apostles as being the same people who abandoned Jesus at the time of his trial and crucifixion? What do you think has changed in Jesus' followers?
- Do you think the high priests are confused because they saw Jesus die? Do you understand their confusion at the apostles' claim that Jesus has been raised from the dead? Do you understand their anger at being blamed for Jesus' death? How would you feel if you were in their shoes listening to the apostles publicly proclaim Jesus' resurrection? Or do you feel that they are narrow-minded and are thinking only of their own self-interest?
- What about Peter and the apostles boldly proclaiming that God raised Jesus from the dead to forgive us of our sins? Do you believe their claims as they speak with conviction? Would you have continued to speak out so boldly and publicly even though you were ordered by the high priest not to?
- Would you be happy and proud to suffer for the sake of proclaiming the message of the Good News? Do you feel that you have no other choice to do so because you were witnesses? Do you see the Sermon on the Mount in action in the apostles? Do you recall the words "Happy are those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Happy are you when people abuse you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven" (Matt 5:10-

12). Do you think this is the reason why Peter and the apostles 'left the presence of the Sanhedrin glad to have had the honour of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name'. Do you wonder what gave the apostles the courage to proclaim the good news even though they faced flogging and humiliation?

Speak to the Risen Christ about how you feel and the words of encouragement you would like to hear from him? Ask him for the courage and enthusiasm to be able to share your faith with others.

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.