

Imaginative Contemplation – Receive the Holy Spirit



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 your 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

As you listen to the account of the Spirit of God coming down on the disciples, allow the same Spirit to come into our hearts and open the horizons of our mind so He too can loosen our tongues to sing God's praise.

Reading **John 20:19-23**

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you', and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you.' 'As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.'

After saying this he breathed on them and said:

'Receive the Holy Spirit.

For those whose sins you forgive,
they are forgiven;

for those whose sins you retain, they are retained."

Contemplation

Let us start our contemplation by setting the scene for the coming of the Holy Spirit. After his Ascension into heaven the apostles returned to Jerusalem as the Lord instructed '**Stay in the city, then, until you are clothed with the power from on high**' (Luke 24: 49), they entered the upper room, and "**all these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers** (Acts 1:14). They awaited the coming of the Spirit with fear and trembling and locked themselves away for fear of the Jews. At His Ascension into Heaven, Jesus had instructed them to '**Go out to the**

whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation'. No wonder the disciples were in fear of death - Jesus didn't tell them what to do, how to do it or give them any assurance of their safety. The only instruction he gave them before he ascended was ***"Stay in the city, then, until you are clothed with the power from on high"***. So with this in mind, imagine the scene in the upper room, find a place within it. With the help of the Spirit, let the story unfold in your imagination.

- Who are you within the story? Are you one of the disciples in the upper room? If so, which one? Are you one of the women, perhaps even Mary, Mother of Jesus? Perhaps a person that is not specially mentioned in the printed story e.g. one of the servers?
- What is it like in the upper room? Hot and stuffy? Dark? Overcrowded? Filled with an atmosphere of fear? Why are you so fearful? Why are you shut up in that upper room? Do you think that your fate will be the same as Jesus'?
- Are you talking together, perhaps in whispers? If so what are you talking about? Maybe you are recounting stories of your life with Jesus.
- Are you silent? If so, what are you thinking about? Perhaps you are trying to discern what the next step is. Perhaps although you know Jesus has risen, you are unclear what to do next.
- Are you praying? If so, what are you praying for? Perhaps you are praying for the courage to carry out Jesus' mission if only you knew what it was. Perhaps you are praying for your fear and timidity to be taken away.
- How do you feel when suddenly you see Jesus standing there in front of you? Are you afraid? Bewildered?
- When he shows you his wounds, how do you feel? Overjoyed that it is really Jesus? Has all your doubt now vanished? Do you want to say something in recognition? Do you feel his peace?
- How do you feel when Jesus gives you your mission: "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." Do you now know what your mission is? That it is the same as Jesus' mission - to continue doing what he did.
- When he breathes on you saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit.", do you feel new life in you – the life of his Spirit? Has his Spirit given you the courage you need to continue his mission?
- When he goes on to say, "Those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained." how do you feel about being given the authority to bring people back to

God and the authority to decide which people are not yet ready for reconciliation? Does it feel daunting? Do you think you will have the wisdom to distinguish whose sins to forgive and whose sins to retain? Or do you feel empowered with the courage that the Spirit has given you?

Speak to Jesus about how you feel regarding your mission. Ask him for the gifts of his Spirit, the gifts of wisdom to exercise good judgement; understanding to think clearly and discern; counsel to give good advice; fortitude for an unwavering commitment to God; knowledge to retain what you learn and put it to good use; piety for devotion to God and avoidance of sin, and fear of the Lord so that you have awe, reverence and respect for God. Pray that it is these gifts that will empower you to carry out his mission.

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