

Imaginative Contemplation – Invite the poor



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.

Let us sit and relax so that together we can contemplate the Gospel using our imagination.

Prayer

We acknowledge we are in the presence of God so let us say together:

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 of God enter our hearts and enlighten our minds to “teach me to serve as you deserve and to give without counting the cost” (Prayer for generosity attributed to St Ignatius of Loyola).

Reading Luke 14:1.7-14

On a sabbath day Jesus had gone for a meal to the house of one of the leading Pharisees; and they watched him closely. He then told the guests a parable, because he had noticed how they picked the places of honour. He said this, "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take your seat in the place of honour. A more distinguished person than you may have been invited, and the person who invited you both may come and say, 'Give up your place to this man.' And then, to your embarrassment, you would have to go and take the lowest place. No; when you are a guest, make your way to the lowest place and sit there, so that, when your host comes, he may say, 'My friend, move up higher.' In that way, everyone with you at the table will see you honoured. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the man who humbles himself will be exalted."

Then he said to his host, "When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not ask your friends, brothers, relations or rich neighbours, for fear they repay your courtesy by inviting you in return. No; when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; that they cannot pay you back means that you are fortunate, because repayment will be made to you when the virtuous rise again."

Contemplation

On the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary two weeks ago, in her great prayer, The Magnificat, Mary extols the mightiness of God who “brings down the powerful from their thrones and raises the lowly”. In today’s Gospel, Jesus reiterates this by giving some practical advice on table manners. Let us enter the scene and sit with Jesus as we

listen to what he tells us about where we should sit at a banquet table and who we should invite if we are holding a dinner party.

- Who are you in the scene? The Pharisee who invited Jesus for the meal? One of the other guests? One of the servants? One of Jesus' disciples? Or you may be someone watching on.
- What do you notice about where people are sitting? Were they trying to sit beside Jesus or the host? How many people are sitting around the table? Is there a mixture of men and women or is it only men who are present? Do you know the Pharisee who invited Jesus.
- Look around you and take in the atmosphere round the table. What sort of food is being brought to the table? Is it an extravagant dinner party or a modest affair? What is the ambience like? What are the guests talking about? What do you notice about Jesus? Is anyone talking to him at the table? Why do you think the guests are watching him? Do you think they are waiting to hear him preach? Or do you think they are waiting for him to do something out of the ordinary which in their minds would break the Law of Moses?
- When Jesus starts to speak, what do the guests at the table do? Do they stop eating so that they could listen? Are all eyes on Jesus at this moment? How do you react? When he tells you how you should behave as a guest, what is going through your mind? Have you ever felt the elation of being guest of honour or the deflation of not being treated as importantly as you thought you should?
- Do you think you are more deserving or are you happy to sit at the back and not be noticed? Or would you like to be somewhere in the middle so that you can be alert to the needs of the people around you?
- When Jesus says, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the man who humbles himself will be exalted", what does being humble mean to you? Do you think it means that everyone is better than you? That everyone else's gifts are better than yours? Or do you think it means that your focus is not on you and your gifts? Could it mean that you are happy in your own skin and are content with your God given talents so you don't really mind where you sit?
- When you invite people to a dinner party, are you thinking of how your invitation can be repaid? Or are you inviting those people because you are more interested in their company? Do you see that Jesus is telling you to "give and not count the cost", to "labour and not look for any reward"?

Say the prayer below and ask Jesus for that generosity of spirit and humility of heart to be able to see the needs of others and do your best to serve them with love.

Sharing

Let us now share what we thought, felt etc. only if you are comfortable to do so.

End Prayer Prayer for Generosity attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola

Lord, teach me to be generous,
to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to look for any reward,
save that of knowing that I do your holy will.

Scripture texts: from the Jerusalem Bible 1966 by Dartington Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday and Company Ltd