

## Imaginative Contemplation – He was Lost and is found



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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.

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 enter our hearts and enlighten our minds to the unconditional mercy and love the Father has for each one of us.

## Reading      **Luke 15:1-3.11-32**

The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus 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 the 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time C, we read that it is the tax-collectors and sinners who are seeking the company of Jesus. They are the ones listening to his message unlike the scribes and Pharisees who are suspicious of the fact he is associating himself with the people who are the outcasts of society. In this Gospel passage we hear three parables about losing, searching, finding and the joy associated with the finding of that which is lost. We will concentrate on the last of these parables, that of the Prodigal Son. Let us enter the scene and listen to Jesus tell the most memorable parable in scripture.

- Who do you associate yourself with in the parable?
- One of the tax-collectors and sinners
  - who is seeking the company of Jesus to hear his teaching;
  - who has lost their way and wants to find the way back.
- One of the scribes and Pharisees
  - who looks disapprovingly at Jesus eating with sinners;
  - who is hard of heart and stuck in their dutiful ways;
  - who feels sinners should be punished and not rewarded.
- The younger son
  - who dreams of freedom and wants to be liberated from the ties of family life;
  - who out of selfishness and self-centredness does not think of the grief he has caused and the consequences of his actions;
  - who takes what he feels he deserves and squanders his gifts;

- who experiences hardship, considers his options and reflects on his wrongdoings;
- who has the courage to recognise he was wrong and ask his father for forgiveness despite not expecting to be accepted back;
- who accepts the warm embrace of his father despite his feeling of unworthiness;
- who repents and accepts his father's love and forgiveness.
- The elder son
  - who rigidly keeps the law and commandments;
  - who remains behind like a dutiful son to tend the farm;
  - who resents his brother going off with his fathers abundant gifts.
  - who resents his father for giving in to his brother's demands;
  - who is outraged at the reception his wastrel brother receives when he returns home having squandered his gifts;
  - who is indignant at the love and forgiveness so freely given by his father to his undeserved brother;
  - who was so caught up in his own self-righteousness that he cannot enter into his father' loving embrace.
  - who wants justice by the way his brother has behaved, not the mercy shown by his father.

Spend some time talking to Jesus about who you identify with in the parable. Ask Jesus to help you open your heart to God's love and compassion.

## Sharing

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

## 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