

Imaginative Contemplation – Be merciful to me, a sinner



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 need for God in our lives and to be humble in prayer.

Reading **Luke 18:8-14**

Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else,

"Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, 'I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of mankind, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get.' The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' This man, I tell you, went home again at rights with God; the other did not. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted."

Contemplation

Today's Gospel, the 30th Sunday of Ordinary Time C, is a continuation of last week's Gospel about never losing heart and is the second parable Jesus tells us regarding our attitude in prayer. Let us enter the scene as we listen as Jesus offers us an unlikely person, a tax-collector as a model for prayer.

- Who are you in the scene? Are you one of the disciples? Someone accompanying Jesus on the road to Jerusalem? An onlooker? Someone who prides themselves as being virtuous? A Pharisee? A tax-collector?
- Where is Jesus telling this parable? Outside in the open air? Inside a house? Notice what is going on around you. The sounds that you hear. The smells that fill the air. Is there a business about the place? Is there a crowd of people listening? What is the mood like

of those around you? What is Jesus' mood as he starts this parable?

- Why are you there? Is it because you want to learn from Jesus about how change your attitude to prayer? Or do you feel comfortable with your prayer life?
- When Jesus started, "Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector", did you immediately assume that the Pharisee was the model for prayer? That the Pharisee being a teacher of the Law of Moses would be used as an example by Jesus of how to pray with piety? Do you assume this because the tax-collectors are despised by society, in league with your oppressors and a traitor to their own people?
- When the Pharisee began to pray by boasting of his spiritual and moral observances, can you identify with him? Do you sometimes thank God you are not like certain people/person because you feel you are morally superior to them? Do you sometimes look around you as you are praying and compare yourself to those around you? Do you sometimes feel you have to justify to God your virtues and achievements? Do you find it difficult to accept that you are loved by God without having to justify yourself by telling him the good you have done?
- How do you feel when the tax-collector, the man despised by the Pharisee, stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner?' Are you surprised by his humility? His honesty? Can you see that he feels he does not deserve to be pardoned but prays to God for his mercy? Can you see that he does not doubt God's love despite his sinfulness and failures?
- Can you see that Jesus does not condemn the Pharisee, it is his prayer he condemns? Do you notice that the Pharisees prayer is judgmental and self centred whereas the tax-collector's prayer is God-centred? That the Pharisee trusts wholly in his own righteousness, whereas the tax-collector trusts in God's mercy and compassion? That the Pharisee is filled with the pride of his own achievements but the tax-collector is aware of his faults and failings and is truthful about them?
- Are you shocked by this parable? Which of these two people do you identify with? Perhaps a bit of both!

Speak to Jesus about how this parable makes you feel regarding your attitude to prayer. Ask him to help you be like the humble tax-collector and to realise that you are a sinner who is loved by God.

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
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