

Imaginative Contemplation – Stay Awake



Noah's Ark, Italianate mural painting, mid 16th century studiolo

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 promise of hope that Christ will come again to make all things new.

Reading Matthew 24:37-44

Jesus said to his disciples: "As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept all away. It will be like this when the Son of Man comes.

Then of two men in the fields one is taken, one left; of two women at the millstone grinding, one is taken, one left. So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Contemplation

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, and is also the first Sunday of Cycle A of the new liturgical year for the Church,. The Gospel readings will primarily focus on St Matthew's Gospel which is believed is written for the Jewish Community after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. In today's Gospel Reading, we hear Jesus speak about the need to stay awake and the need for alertness in waiting for the coming of the Son of Man. Let us enter the scene and listen to the advice Jesus gives his disciples.

- Who are you in the scene? Are you one of the disciples? Someone on the margins? Someone or something not mentioned in the story?

- Notice what is going on around you. The sounds that you hear. The smells that fill the air. Where are you? Are you in the open air? In a house? In a public place?
- Look around you at those present. What expressions are on their faces as they listen to Jesus? Are they listening intently? Do they look afraid? Surprised? Are any of them asking questions?
- As you listen to Jesus, do you find the images of floods, being captured and thieves coming in the night frightening? Confusing? Do they make you sit up and listen? Do they make you feel angry? Challenged? Are you afraid of these life-changing images? Do you already notice these life-changing events that Jesus is describing going on around you?
- As you listen to Jesus what is going through your mind? Do you think that the people mentioned in this passage are doing very ordinary day to day things? Do you feel that it could be you living life and going about your daily business? Do you sometimes fail to give thought to your goal in life because you are too busy living? Trying to prepare for your future? Does he make you think about what exactly your goal in life is?
- As you listen to Jesus, do you take to heart what he says about the unexpected hour or are you too busy living to notice what is going on around you?
- As you listen to Jesus, do you wonder what your real future is? Do you think he is telling you that your real future is with God? Are you tempted to postpone things because you feel you have plenty time?
- Does Jesus make you sit up and think as he tells you there is not plenty of time in that “of two men in the fields one is taken, one left; of two women at the millstone grinding, one is taken, one left”? Do you realise that “you too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”? Do these remarks give you a sense of urgency?
- Do you see that Jesus does not mean for you to always stay awake but rather to remain alert and notice what is going on around you? That he means that staying awake is to live in the present and not in the past or the future?
- Are you blind to God’s presence in your life because you are caught up in thinking about your future? Or do you notice where the Spirit is at work each day?
- As you look ahead to the season of Advent, what can help you to be alert?

Speak to Jesus about what you should wake up to and act upon, not tomorrow or some future time, but today.

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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