

Imaginative Contemplation – Mary treasured all these things



Adoration of the Shepherds by Giorgione 1510

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 so that we too can sit with the shepherds as they gaze upon the baby Jesus in the manger in Bethlehem and share in their wonder and joy.

Reading Luke 2:16-21

The shepherds hurried away to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child, they repeated what had been told about him; and everyone who heard it were astonished at what the shepherds had to say. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it was exactly as they had been told.

When the eighth day came and the child was to be circumcised; they gave him the name Jesus, the name given the angel had given him before his conception.

Contemplation

On this first day of the New Year, the eighth day of the Christmas Octave, what better way to celebrate it than by meditating with Mary, the Mother of God who herself was a reflective woman, one who had faith and trust in God and who observed the Jewish tradition. The Gospel reading of this Solemnity is a continuation of the Gospel proclaimed at Midnight Mass in which the shepherds were visited by an angel of the Lord who brought them news that a saviour had been born. In this passage we see the shepherds acting with haste on the message they have just received. Let us enter the scene and join with the shepherds in praising the Lord.

- Who are you in the scene? One of the shepherds? Mary? Joseph? Someone whom the shepherds told the story to? Someone whom Mary or Joseph told the story to? Perhaps you are yourself watching the scene unfold before you?
- As the shepherds journey in haste to see their saviour, what do you think is going through their mind? Do you think they are excited

thus the reason they went in haste? Do you think they may react by finding their Saviour in a manger surrounded by animals in a dark smelly stable? Surprised? Disappointed? Or do you think they felt at home in these conditions and were neither surprised or disappointed? After all it was the sign told to them by the Angel. Do you wonder what they were thinking when they met Mary, Joseph and the baby?

- We know that the shepherds were amazed at what they found. Do you think that they in their simplicity saw something special that others with their analytical minds may have missed? Do you wonder why the shepherds who are considered outcasts by society were chosen to be the first proclaimers of the Good News? Do you think they themselves wondered why? Do you think it is because they have no social status that God held them in high regard? Could they be thinking that the words of Isaiah are becoming true i.e. "The people that walk in darkness have seen a great light"? The passage tells that they went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Do you wonder who they told and what the reaction was?
- No words spoken by Mary and Joseph to their visitors are recorded in this Gospel but imagine what they may have said to the Shepherds when they visited.
- But what about Mary? What do you think was going through her mind when the shepherds arrived and repeated what they had been told by the angels? Do you wonder what she was pondering? Could she have been thinking that God works in surprising and unexpected ways? That the fact she has given birth to the Son of God has become a reality? Could she also have been pondering the fact that she had just given birth and that this little baby is a gift from God? Could she also be pondering what the future has in store for her little baby? That by his birth, the world would be a different place? Put yourself in Mary's shoes and try to imagine what she is pondering and treasuring in her heart.
- What about Joseph? Do you wonder what is going through his mind? Do you think he was overwhelmed what the shepherds told him and Mary? That he began to see Mary in a different light? That when he looked at her and he saw her as the Mother of God? That he was afraid of what the future held for them as a family? That he had a great responsibility? Or do you think, like Mary, he has put his faith and trust in God.

As we spend 10 minutes in quiet contemplation, speak to Mary about what is going through your mind as you reflect on this Gospel. Ask her to help you be a good disciple of her Son by praying and reflecting on the events of your life as she did, by trusting God's will for you as she trusted in God's will for her and by being faithful to God as she was faithful to him.

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