

Imaginative Contemplation – Behold the Lamb of God



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 by our Baptism can make Jesus Christ known to the world through what we say and what we do

Reading John 1:29-34

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. He is the one of whom I said, 'A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.' I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing with water was that he might be made known to Israel."

John testified further, saying, "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and remain upon him. I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God."

Contemplation

Although we will be hearing from St Matthew's Gospel in this Liturgical year, (Cycle A), today's reading is taken from St John's Gospel. Last week we heard St Matthew's account of the Baptism of Jesus. In John's account, we hear John the Baptist announcing that he knows that Jesus is the Son of God by witnessing the Spirit coming down on him. Let us enter the scene in the company of John the Baptist.

- Who are you in the passage? John the Baptist? One of John's disciples? One to whom John was speaking? Perhaps someone or something not mentioned in the passage.?
- Picture the scene around you? Where is this discourse taking place? What is the terrain like? Are you near the River Jordan? Are you one of a crowd listening to John? Or are there only a few of you?

- Why are you there? Are you just passing through or are you there to listen to John? Do you recognise the one whom John is referring to as Jesus, Son of Joseph the Carpenter and of Mary? What do you notice as you look at the face of Jesus? Do you stop to listen? Or did you, yourself witness Jesus' baptism?
- When John says "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." What is going through your mind? Could it be the story of the Passover, where only those whose houses were marked with the blood of a slain lamb were spared? Or the verses in Isaiah where he recalls one who was led like a lamb to the slaughter? One who was an innocent victim who would endure his sufferings to redeem his people? Do you see this as a sign of your liberation? Do you wonder how this can be the destiny of the Son of God?
- As you continue listening to John, how do you feel as he acknowledges that his mission is now complete? That he acknowledges that his mission to prepare a way for the Messiah is now over? A mission to point people in the direction of the Son of God?
- How do you think John now feels that he is no longer centre stage? Perhaps at a loss of where to go now? Or perhaps he felt fulfilled that he has revealed the Messiah to the people?
- Do you see that John has a self understanding of who he is and what his mission is and thus was able to recognise the identity of Jesus and reveal him to those present? Do you recognise the identity of Jesus working in your own life? Who are the people who reveal Jesus to you?
- John proclaimed "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and remain upon him." Do you realise that it is the Spirit that inspires Jesus to carry out his mission - a mission to build the Kingdom of God here on earth? Do you realise that this is the same Spirit that came down on you in your Baptism? That to be Baptised by the Spirit is to be immersed in God's love? Does this knowledge inspire you also to carry out your mission, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus? In what ways do you feel the presence of the Spirit in your life?

As we spend 10 minutes in quiet contemplation, speak to Jesus about your own baptism and how, like John, we get to know the identity of Jesus so that we can reveal God's love to those we encounter.

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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