

Imaginative Contemplation – The Beatitudes



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 enable us reflect on the qualities that are expected of us if we want to be a disciple of Christ.

Reading Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Contemplation

As we start our reflection on the Beatitudes, we notice that this discourse of Jesus takes place on a mountain. Mountains are traditionally seen as Holy Places, places where God is especially present. Take for example Mount Sinai where Moses was given the ten commandments, Mount Moriah where Abraham was going to sacrifice Isaac and the Mount of Transfiguration. We read that Jesus sat down to deliver his discourse. He assumed a position of authority which can be compared with in this day and age to when the Pope addresses an audience, sitting on his chair or

ex cathedra. So with this in mind, let us enter the scene and listen to Jesus telling the crowd what is required of them in order to deepen their relationship with God

- Who are you in the scene? One of the disciples? One of the crowd? Perhaps a Scribe or a Pharisee? A follower of Jesus? Someone who is not mentioned in the passage?
- Why are you there? Are you with Jesus? Are you there to listen to Jesus? Do you recognise anyone? Did you perhaps see the crowd and follow it? Did you come alone? Where are you in the crowd? In the front? Middle? On the margins?
- Look around you? What do you notice? What is the terrain like? Is it rocky? Is there much vegetation or is it desert-like? Is the day hot? Cool? Are there many people there? What is the atmosphere like as you notice the people? Are they attentive? Excited? Sceptical?
- Are you surprised seeing Jesus take a position of authority in order to make his address? Do you realise he was going to say something important? Does it make you listen intently?
- As you listen to Jesus, do you realise that your relationship with God goes beyond the keeping of the ten commandments? Does it make you ask of yourself the following questions or challenge your comfort zone?
 - Am I poor in spirit? Do I depend on God, acknowledge that God is the one with the loving power? Or is it material goods or lack of them that occupy my life?
 - Have I ever experienced an inner peace when I was in mourning? Have I ever experienced the loving hand of God when life seemed so negative and painful?
 - Am I meek? Do I show a kindness and gentleness to people I meet? Do I respect the dignity of others? Or can I be manipulative or arrogant, proud or haughty?
 - Do I hunger and thirst for what is right? Do I dedicate my energies to rectifying the injustices I see around me? Do I fight for the homeless, refugees, victims of human trafficking, those who live in poverty, those who do not receive a fair wage? Do I wonder what I can do to share God's love with them? Or do I fail to see the suffering and misery of those around me?
 - Am I merciful? Do I show a real compassion when I see others in pain? Or am I judgemental or prejudiced thinking that people deserve the predicament they are in?
 - Am I pure in heart? Do I see things with an unprejudiced eye or can I be selfish and narrow-minded?

- Am I a peacemaker? Do I try and reconcile and bring people together when I notice rifts in the family and community? Or do I ignore such hostilities because I don't want to get involved? Do I feel being a peacemaker is my responsibility or do I think that trying to maintain good relationships is not my duty?
- Do I wonder how being persecuted can be termed as blessed? Would I rather not suffer for the sake of the Gospel? Do I feel compassion for people in the world who are persecuted for the sake of their beliefs? What would I do in a situation of being persecuted for my faith and belief in the Good News?
- Do I realise that Jesus is telling me that in order to have a special relationship with God that I must have a deep concern of what is happening in the world that I live in? That I should have a part in helping to make the world a place of love, justice, and peace.

Let us now spend 10 minutes in the company of Jesus and talk to him about what is going on in your mind and heart regarding his teaching and what challenges you the most. Ask him to give you his Spirit of poverty, meekness, compassion justice and peace.

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