

Imaginative Contemplation – Love your Enemies



The Sermon on the Mount" (1870) by Arsène Robert (1830-1895).
Castelnau-d'Estrétefonds. St. Martin Church - Prix de Rome.

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 guide our hearts and enlighten our minds as we reflect on the challenges of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus –be perfect just as our heavenly Father is perfect."

Reading Matthew 5:38-48

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have learnt how it was said: "Eye for eye and tooth for tooth". But I say this to you: offer the wicked man no resistance. On the contrary. if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone orders you to go one mile. go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

"You have learnt how it was said: "You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy". But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax: collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? "Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Contemplation

Today's Gospel reading on the 7^h Sunday in Ordinary time, is the last part part of the Sermon on the Mount and follows directly from last weeks Gospel Reading. This passage deals with love and we hear Jesus asking his followers to take a completely different approach to conflict by resisting retaliation altogether. Let us enter the scene and listen to Jesus' discourse.

- Who are you in the story? A disciple of Jesus? A Scribe or a Pharisee? One of the crowd on the mount listening to Jesus' discourse? Someone who is not mentioned in the passage?
- Look around you. What do you notice? What is the mood of the crowd as a whole? Are they still listening attentively? How long have you been there? Have some people left? Why do you stay? What sort of reaction is Jesus' teachings having on you? On those present? On the Scribes and Pharisees? On his disciples?
- What about Jesus? Has he remained sitting? What is his mood like? What is the tone of his voice like? Is it still strong and audible during this long discourse? Does it still hold your attention?
- What is going through your mind when Jesus tells you: offer the wicked man no resistance? Do you think he is being unreasonable? Do you think he is asking too much of you? Have you ever thought that turning the other cheek is not a sign of weakness at all? That it requires great inner strength, self-respect and even respect for the dignity of your attacker? Have you ever thought of taking that approach rather than revenge? That this approach could in fact be more productive?
- Do you start to think of all those you consider your enemy? Those you have closed your heart to or sought vengeance for their offence against you? Do you wonder how you can bring people such as those into your heart and do as Jesus asks – to love them?
- Did you realise that being a follower of Jesus would be so difficult? Are you prepared to welcome Jesus' way of loving, even those you find difficult to love? Are you prepared to look for the best in people and make allowances for their faults and failings with the hope that people look for the best in you and overlook your faults and failings? Can you think of a time when someone was merciful to you?
- Do you think you are ready to respond to the world as Jesus did by loving and forgiving everyone, by giving to anyone who asks? Do you think you are ready to go that extra mile for someone you don't particularly like?
- Do you realise that you need help to achieve Jesus' way of loving? That to act with a generous spirit, you will need the grace of God our Father so that you be able to have the space for everyone in your heart?

Feel what is going on inside you as you listen to Jesus' words. Is there anything you want to ask him? Approach Jesus and talk to him about what is going on inside you. Ask him to help you find the areas that you need

more generosity or freedom to respond to the vision that he has put before you.

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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