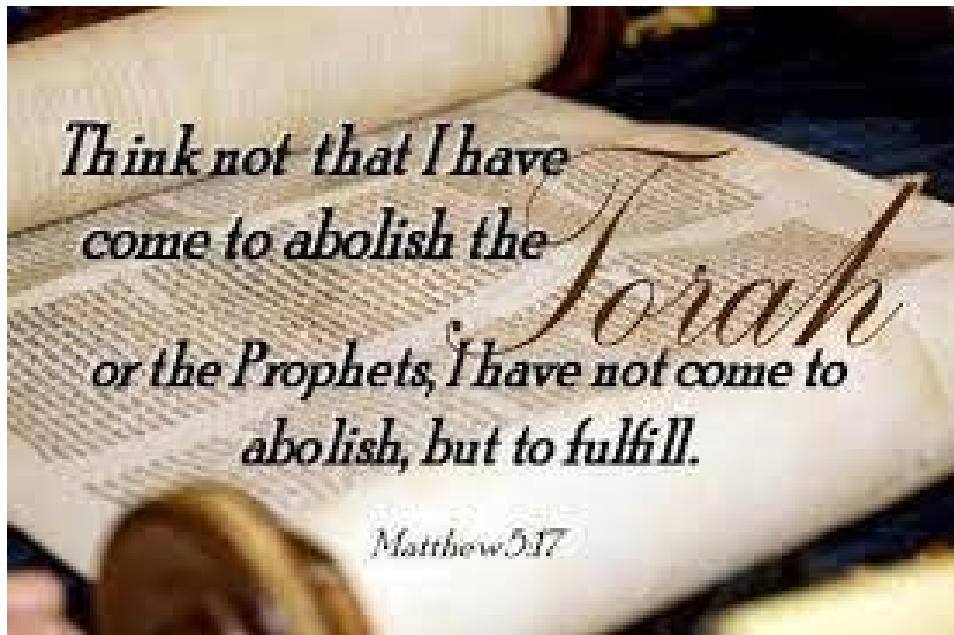


Imaginative Contemplation – I have not come to abolish the Law



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 to see beyond the Law to that we can enter more deeply into our faith.

Reading Matthew 5:17 – 37 (Abridged)

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish them but to complete them. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved.

Therefore, the man who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but the man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I tell you, if your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

"You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment. But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

"You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

"Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow. But I say to you, do not swear at all. Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one."

Contemplation

Today's Gospel reading on the 6th Sunday in Ordinary time, is part of the Sermon on the Mount and follows directly from last week's Gospel Reading. Jesus continues to tell us that our relationship with God goes beyond the keeping of the ten commandments and the Law. We must go

further than what the Law requires. Let us enter the scene and listen to Jesus emphasise that he has not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it..

- Who are you in the passage? 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?
- Are you surprised when Jesus says, "I have not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to complete them"? Why do you think he said this? Do you think that although he is asking you to obey the Law he wants you to go beyond the rules and regulations of the Law so that you can enter more deeply into your faith? Do you think Jesus wants you to follow the Law with your heart and not your head? Do you feel that although he says he has not come to abolish the Law, he is introducing you to a new way of thinking? That keeping the Law without having love in your heart is not how Jesus envisages discipleship to be?
- Do you see that when the Pharisees rigidly keep the Law because they think they are obeying God, they very often neglect the needs of others? What is your attitude towards the Law? Do you find that by trying to be holy you pay too much attention to the trivial externals and follow the rules unquestioningly? Do you feel that that you have been following the law so rigidly that you are not able to see beyond it? Do you see that what Jesus is telling you that rigidly following the Law can blind you to what is important, i.e. the love of God and the love of neighbour?
- When Jesus gives an example from the Law "You shall not kill." how do you feel when he then goes on explain that you must not even get angry with others? Could Jesus be telling you that the dignity and rights of every person must be deeply respected? That if you do not respect others deep within your heart, you cannot say you respect God?
- What about when Jesus gives another example from the Law "You shall not commit adultery"? Do you see he is also emphasising the respect you should have for those you encounter?
- As you listen to Jesus giving these examples of breaking the Law,

do you think he is telling you that actions are not always necessary: a look or a word is often enough?

- What about when Jesus tells you that when you swear an oath "Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.'" do you think Jesus might be telling us that oaths are not necessary if you are acting out of love? That the word of a truthful person is sufficient

As we spend 10 minutes in quiet contemplation, speak to Jesus about your own effort to shape your behaviour and attitudes by his life and teachings and how his teachings impact on 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 and Doubleday and Company Ltd