

Imaginative Contemplation – The Passion and Death of Jesus

Contemplation

As we listen to the Passion and death of Jesus by St Matthew, ask the Spirit to place us in the scene. Let the Spirit enter our hearts and enlighten our minds to the suffering and pain of Jesus. Let us imagine what it must have been like to be present as we watch him being betrayed, denied, tried and found guilty and then unjustly put to a horrific death on the cross. Let us follow him in this Gospel with a sense of sorrow or alternatively stay with the section that most touches our heart.



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

Matthew 27:11-54 - Excerpts

The Agony in the Garden

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me." He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will." When he returned to his disciples he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

- What feelings arise in you as you hear Jesus ask his Father to let this cup pass him by? Can you feel his fear and distress?
- How do you think Jesus feels about his close friends sleeping whilst his soul is sorrowful? Let down? Abandoned? Understanding that they are tired?

Jesus' betrayal by Judas

Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a large crowd, with swords and clubs, who had come from the chief priests and the elders of the people. His betrayer had arranged a sign with them, saying, "The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him." Immediately he went over to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and he kissed him. Jesus answered him, "Friend, do what you have come for." Then stepping forward they laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Jesus said to the

crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to seize me? Day after day I sat teaching in the temple area, yet you did not arrest me. Then all the disciples left him and fled.

- How do you feel about one of his friends betraying him in the manner he did? Do you think Judas would have betrayed him if he knew the outcome?
- What do you notice about the arrest of Jesus? How was he treated?
- How do you feel about the disciples fleeing? Why do you think they fled?

The Trial of Jesus

The chief priests and the entire Sanhedrin kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward who stated, "This man said, 'I can destroy the temple of God and within three days rebuild it.'" The high priest rose and addressed him, "Have you no answer? What are these men testifying against you?" But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I order you to tell us under oath before the living God whether you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him in reply, "You have said so. But I tell you: From now on you will see 'the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power' and 'coming on the clouds of heaven.'" Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need have we of witnesses? You have now heard the blasphemy; what is your opinion?" They said in reply, "He deserves to die!"

- How do you feel as you watch this trial? Anger? Bewilderment? Fear?
- What do you notice about the scene and the people in it? The interrogators? The witnesses? The scribes and Pharisees?
- Notice Jesus during his trial. What feelings may arise in him as he listens to this false evidence?

Peter denies Jesus

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. One of the maids came over to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it in front of everyone, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about!" As he went out to the gate, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus the Nazarene." Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man!" A little later the bystanders came over and said to Peter, "Surely you too are one of them; even your speech gives you away." At that he began to curse and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately a cock crowed. Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had spoken: "Before the cock crows you will deny me three times." He went out and began to weep bitterly.

- How do you feel about Peter as you hear him denying all knowledge of his friend? Scandalised? Sympathetic?
- What do you think was going on inside him as he maintained he did not know Jesus? Do you wonder what you would have said?

Jesus before Pilate

When it was morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. Now Jesus stood before the governor, and he questioned him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they are testifying against you?" But he did not answer him one word, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

- How do you feel about Pontius Pilate as you watch and listen to him questioning Jesus? Sympathetic? Do you feel he is in a no-win situation?
- How does he respond to Jesus as he questions him? Do you think he is impressed by Jesus' courage? How does Jesus look at him?

Jesus is crowned with thorns

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped off his clothes and threw a scarlet military cloak about him. Weaving a crown out of thorns, they placed it on his head, and a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat upon him and took the reed and kept striking him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the cloak, dressed him in his own clothes, and led him off to crucify him.

- How do you feel about the violence towards Jesus in this scene? How do you respond as you witness this torture? Do you feel helpless?
- How does Jesus respond to the degrading way he is being treated?

Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry his cross

As they were going out, they met a Cyrenian named Simon; this man they pressed into service to carry his cross.

- How did Simon react as he was being coerced into helping Jesus carry his cross? Annoyed? Frightened? Embarrassed? Inconvenienced?
- Did Jesus and Simon look at each other? If so what do you now notice about Simon's attitude towards this task?
- How might you have reacted if you had been asked?

Jesus is Crucified

They crucified him and divided his garments by casting lots; then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And they placed over his head the written charge against him: This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and the other on his left. Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, if you are the Son of God, and come down from the cross!" Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him and said, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. So he is the king of Israel! Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in

him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

- How do you feel at this moment as you watch the way Jesus is being tortured and mocked? The way the soldiers gamble for his clothes? The loss of his dignity?
- Are you shocked, terrified, ashamed that human beings can act in this way?

Jesus dies on the cross

But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit. And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

- How do you feel as you hear Jesus give up his Spirit? Do you appreciate he died for us? That this is how it was meant to be? A journey from this world to his Father? That he made this journey for me?

Jesus is placed in the tomb

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in clean linen and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed.

- How do you feel at this moment as you watch Jesus being taken down from the cross and prepared for his burial? As you watch Joseph of Arimathea treat Jesus' body with tenderness and respect? As you see the grief of Mary, his Mother and those who have stayed?
- Perhaps you could stay with this scene and let the silence speak for you.

We will sit with our thoughts and imagination for 10 minutes. You may want to engage with someone in the scene.

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.