

Second Sunday of Easter – Peace be with you



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.

Sit and relax by focussing on your breathing for a few minutes so that you can contemplate the Gospel using our imagination.

Prayer

Acknowledge you are in the presence of God by saying the following prayer:

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 read the Gospel and reflect on what it means to have Jesus appear in our midst. Let the Spirit enter you so that you too can see and hear the risen Lord.

Reading John 20:19 - 31

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you', and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again,

'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.'

After saying this he breathed on them and said:

'Receive the Holy Spirit.

For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven;

for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.'

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord', he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe'.

Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!'

Jesus said to him:

'You believe because you can see me.

Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'

There were many other signs that Jesus worked and the disciples saw, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name.

Contemplation

In today's Gospel, we see the risen Christ appearing to his disciples in physical form through a locked door. Imagine the scene, find a place within it. With the help of the Spirit, let the story unfold in your imagination.

- Who are you within the story? Are you, one of the disciples; the absent Thomas? Perhaps a person that is not specially mentioned in the printed story?
- What time of day is it? What is the atmosphere in the room like? Is it crowded? Cramped? Stuffy? Who is in the room with you?
- What about those present. Are you downcast? Full of grief? Full of tension? Full of confusion? Full of fear? Full of guilt? What are you afraid of? Were you there when the women told you that Jesus had risen? Do you believe the story or are you still in disbelief from your friend's cruel death?
- Why are you locked up in the room, rooted to the spot? Do you feel safe there? Are you talking? If so, what are you talking about and who are you talking to? Are you quiet? If so, what are you thinking about?
- What happens when you see Jesus standing amongst you? Are you afraid? Overjoyed? Do you believe your eyes? After all, the room was locked!.
- What about his words? How do you feel when He said "Peace be with you" and bestows on you the gift of the Holy Spirit? How do you respond to the Risen Christ? Do you allow him to pass through the locked doors of your fearful heart and offer peace?
- How did you feel when Jesus breathed on you? Breathed on your chaos and fear? Did it fill you with peace? Did it bring you new life? How do you feel when he entrusts you with a mission? Do you feel you can accomplish this?
- What do you tell Thomas when he returns? How does he take the news? How do you react to his retort that unless he can put

his fingers into the holes the nails made and his hand into his pierced side, he will not believe? Are you annoyed that he does not believe you?

- If you are Thomas, why are you not with your friends? Do you find it hard to come to terms with Jesus' death? How do you feel when you hear you have just missed Jesus? Why didn't you believe? Is it because you feel if your friends have really seen the Lord then why are they still locked up tight in that room, rooted to the spot? Is it your friends you doubt as opposed to the Lord? Are you like Thomas, wanting hard evidence before you believe?
- When Jesus appears again eight days later. What is the general mood like?
- If you are Thomas, what is your reaction? How do you feel when Jesus invites you to put your finger into the holes that the nails made in his hands and put your hand into his side? Do you say "My Lord and my God" because you are convinced that you are in the presence of the divine Jesus? How do you feel when he told you to doubt no longer?
- How did you feel when Jesus said to you 'You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'? What proof do you need to believe?

Speak to Jesus about how you feel and the words of encouragement you would like to hear from him? Ask him for the grace to believe without seeing and to be open to experiences where God's unmistakable presence can be recognised.

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.