

Imaginative Contemplation – For God so loved the world



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 your 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

As you listen to Jesus telling Nicodemus about God and his love for us, allow the Spirit, the advocate between Father and the Son, into your heart so that you can feel his love.

Reading John 3:16-18

Jesus said to Nicodemus:
"God loved the world so much
that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost
but may have eternal life.
For God sent his Son into the world
not to condemn the world
but so that through him the world might be saved.
No-one who believes in him will be condemned;
but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already,
because he has refused to believe
in the name of God's only Son."

Contemplation

Today, on this Sunday immediately after Pentecost, we celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, Trinity Sunday. Let us start our contemplation by setting the scene for this passage from the John Chapter 3. Nicodemus, a leading Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, comes alone to Jesus by night for religious instruction. Prior to this passage, Jesus had been telling Nicodemus the necessity of new birth i.e. being born of water and the Spirit in order to be saved. So, with the help of the Spirit, listen to what else Jesus has to say about being saved and let the story unfold in your imagination.

- Who are you within the story? Are you Nicodemus? Are you eavesdropping in on the conversation between Jesus and

Nicodemus? Perhaps you are that proverbial “fly on the wall” or someone or something else not mentioned in the scene.

- What is the night like? Cold? Balmy? Hot? Pleasant? Is there a smell of flowers? Of the night air? Can you hear anything? Voices? Night sounds like birds or insects? Can you see the stars?
- Why have you come to see Jesus? Why at night? Are you a secret follower of Jesus? Have you been sent by the Sanhedrin? Do you want to learn more about the teachings of Jesus? What are you looking for?
- Is this your first encounter with Jesus? Are you nervous? Did it take courage for you to come this night? Are you afraid of being followed?
- How does Jesus seem to you? Hospitable? Friendly? Are you sharing food and drink together? Is the atmosphere relaxed? Are you sitting by candlelight? Are you enjoying the company of Jesus? What is his voice like? Patient? Understanding? Kind? Is Jesus alone?
- When you hear Jesus say that God gave his only Son to the world, because he loves us so much and so that we can have eternal life, what emotions stir in your heart? What do you envisage? Do you see this as a personal invitation to reciprocate in his love? What does it say to you about this relentless love? What does it say to you about the depth of God’s friendship for you that he desires your salvation? Are you convinced?
- What stirs in you when Jesus says that God sent his only Son not to condemn the world but so that through him the world might be saved? Are you afraid of this intense love? Are you afraid what might be asked of you if you accept his invitation to love? Or does it make you feel joyful?
- How does it make you feel that God’s first and only instinct is to love you? How do you experience that love? Are you convinced of God’s love for you or do you feel God is always judging you? Why do you feel that way?
- What is going on in you alone in the candlelight, seated next to Jesus? What are you imagining? Ask the Spirit to guide you with the questions you would like to ask Jesus. In your heart, what do you want to say to him? What does he say to you?

Sit and imagine the scene and perhaps write down how and what you feel, your emotions – anything that comes into your mind. How in your mind, does this passage relate to the Trinity? Can you imagine the

Father, Son and Holy Spirit looking down on you from heaven with a burning love?

Let us now spend 10 minutes in the company of Jesus.

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

Love George Herbert

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked anything.

“A guest”, I answered, “worthy to be here”:
Love said, “You shall be he.”
“I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on Thee.”
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
“Who made the eyes but I?”

“Truth Lord, but I have marred them; let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.”
“And know you not”, says Love, “who bore the blame?”
“My dear, then I will serve.”
“You must sit down”, says Love, “and taste my meat”
So I did sit and eat.