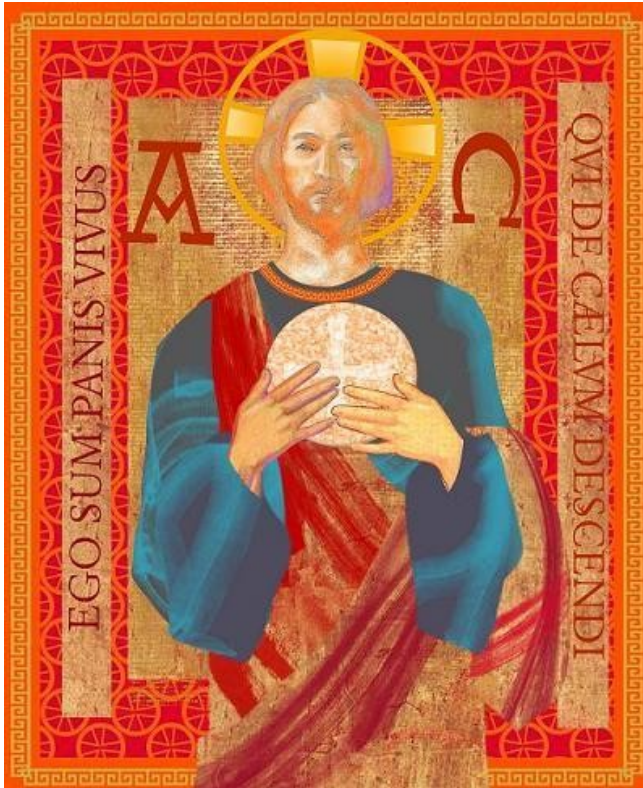


Imaginative Contemplation – For my flesh is real food



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 the crowd that He is the bread from heaven, let the Spirit of God enter you so that we can enter into Communion with God and one another.

Reading **John 6:51-58**

Jesus said to the Jews:

"I am the living bread which has come down from heaven.

Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever;

and the bread that I shall give

is my flesh, for the life of the world."

Then the Jews started arguing with one another: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they said.

Jesus replied: "I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,

you will not have life in you.

Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life,

and I shall raise him up on the last day.

For my flesh is real food

and my blood is real drink.

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him.

As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father,

so whoever eats me will draw life from me.

This is the bread come down from heaven; not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead,

but anyone who eats this bread will live forever."

Contemplation

Today is the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) so let us start our contemplation by setting the scene. The reading comes towards the end of Chapter 6 in John's Gospel. Prior to this, the crowds have just seen Jesus multiply the loaves and fishes and have participated in the meal so perhaps they are wanting another sign. With this in mind and with the help of the Spirit, let Jesus words on the Bread from Heaven unfold in your imagination.

- Who are you within the story? Are you one of the disciples? One of the Jews? One of the multitude? Perhaps a passer-by? Or someone else who is not mentioned in the passage.
- What is the setting for this discourse? What time of day is it? What is the weather like? Why are you there? Have you just witnessed the multiplication of the loaves and fishes? Did you partake in the feast?
- How many people have stayed behind after the miraculous meal to listen to Jesus? Tens? Hundreds? Thousands?
- Where are you in this group? Front? Middle? Back? On the margins?
- Notice what is going on around you. What is the atmosphere like? Are those who have gathered attentive? Inspired? Hostile? Intrigued? Or perhaps a mixture of temperaments?
- What is going through your mind when Jesus says, 'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'? Are you shocked by this statement? Do you wonder what it means?
- What about when he says that anyone who eats this bread will live forever and that this bread is his flesh? Do you think it sounds like an invitation to cannibalism or do you think there is another meaning which you do not yet understand? Perhaps you think it is a way to bond with God in some mysterious manner.
- What about this eternal life Jesus is offering you if you eat his flesh and drink his blood? You know God fed your ancestors with manna from the desert and as Jesus rightly says they are all dead. Do you want this eternal life? Do you want Jesus to live in you? Do you want to draw life from Jesus? Do you believe he has been sent by God whom he calls his Father?

- From what you know of Jesus do you think that in his narrative of his flesh and blood he may be asking you not to understand it but to experience it? At this point, is your faith being tested? Do you think that by eating of the Flesh and Blood of Jesus will change you? Will bring you life?
- What do you do next? Do you speak to Jesus? Do you want things clarified or do you want to ponder on what he has just said? Do you want to accept this invitation of Jesus to 'Eat', 'live' and 'abide' so that you can have life?

Sit and imagine the scene and perhaps write down how and what you feel, your emotions – anything that comes into your mind. Reflect on how bread nourishes you and as this is how Jesus is describing himself in the narrative, he obviously wants to nourish you in a personal, intimate and spiritual way. Talk to Jesus and listen to him and thank him for the closeness to which he calls you.

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