

Imaginative Contemplation – The Kingdom of heaven is close at hand



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 commissioning you to help gather the harvest, let the Spirit of God enter you to give you the courage to be active in your community.

Reading Matthew 9:36 – 10:8

When Jesus saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest."

He summoned his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness.

These are the names of the twelve apostles; first Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee and his brother John, Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, the one who was to betray him.

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: Do not turn your steps to pagan territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. You received without charge, give without charge.

Contemplation

Following the Sunday's of Easter and the three great Feasts of Pentecost, the Most Holy Trinity and the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, we return to the Sundays of Ordinary Time, Year A and continue to follow the mission and ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of St Matthew. In this Gospel

passage, Matthew draws our attention to the mission the twelve disciples are being given. With the help of the Spirit, let us enter the scene and listen to Jesus send you out on your mission.

- Who are you within the story? Are you one of the disciples? One of the crowd? Perhaps a passer-by? Or someone else who is not mentioned in the passage.
- What is the setting for Jesus commissioning you? What time of day is it? What is the weather like? Why are you there? Have you been called by Jesus?
- Notice what is going on around you? Do you notice the people looking harassed and dejected? How do you feel about the crowds? Do you feel there is nothing you can do? Notice how Jesus looks at them. Notice the look in his eyes and the expression on his face. Do you sometimes feel harassed and dejected? Would you like to feel the compassion of Jesus' eyes upon you?
- When Jesus turns to you and says "The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest," do you realise he is about to ask you to help him? How do you feel about that? Do you want to slink away? What makes you stay? Is it because up until now Jesus has been working alone and he now needs your help? Do you feel free to help in some small way?
- How do you feel about him giving you authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness? Do you feel overwhelmed? Not qualified for the mission? Do you look round at your companions and wonder why you and they were chosen? Do you wonder what qualities Jesus sees in you? Do you wonder if you have the tools you require for your mission? Do you realise that perhaps there is something you could offer, however small? Do you realise you will not be doing this by yourself?
- Do you see that Jesus is first asking you to start small and go out to places that are familiar to you? To your families, your neighbours, your colleagues, and friends? Have you thought that you may be the only person who brings Jesus with his healing and compassion into the lives of those around you? That you can offer support, compassion, love and liberation to those you meet? Do you realise that it is in care and compassion that the kingdom of heaven comes into the lives of people?

Speak to Jesus about the large harvest of sick, outcasts, marginalised he is asking you to gather. Ask him to show you how to be compassionate so that you can bring the Father's tender heart to those we encounter.

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