

Imaginative Contemplation –The Kingdom of Heaven is like ...



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.

Let us sit and relax so that together we can contemplate the Gospel using our imagination.

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

Let the Spirit enter our hearts and enlighten our minds as we listen to and reflect on Jesus explaining the Kingdom of heaven to the crowd. Let the Spirit enrich our hearts and minds so that we can identify with the Kingdom of heaven in these parables.

Reading Matthew 13:44-52

Jesus said to his disciples, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off happy, sells everything he owns and buys the field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea that brings in a haul of all kinds. When it is full, the fisher-men haul it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in a basket and throwaway those that are no use.

This is how It will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the just to throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth".

"Have you understood all this?" They said, "Yes." And he said to them, "Well, then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom things both new and old,"

Contemplation

This passage from St Matthew's Gospel, the seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, follows on from last week's Gospel reading in which Jesus is describing the Kingdom of heaven in parables, using every day imagery to capture the minds of his listeners. This Gospel passage concludes Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven. So close your eyes and listen to Jesus as he tells three more short parables. Find a place within

them and with the help of the Spirit, identify which image(s) the Kingdom of heaven most appeals to you.

- Who are you in the scene? One of the disciples? One of the crowd? One of the Scribes or Pharisees? A passer-by? Perhaps someone or something in the parables?
- Where is Jesus telling these parables? Can you see fields? Can you see the sea of Galilee? Do you think this is why Jesus chose this spot to speak to you in parables? Do you enjoy listening to the parables of Jesus? Do they stretch your imagination? Make you think? For you do they make moral ideas easier to engage with?
- Notice what is going on around you. Look at the faces of those who are listening. What do you see in them? Attentiveness? Anticipation? Hope? Understanding? Confusion? What about the face of Jesus? Does he look compassionate? What is his voice like? Loud? Engaging? Mesmerising? Does the tone of his voice compel you to stay and listen?
- When Jesus continues his parables about the Kingdom of Heaven do you continue to be surprised that He compares the Kingdom of heaven to every day life? Treasure? Material goods? Can you relate to these images?
- Which of the three Kingdom of Heaven parables most resonates with you? The person finding treasure buried in a field? A merchant looking for a fine pearl? A fisherman with his catch of the day? Someone tidying out their store room?
- If the Parable of the person finding treasure in a field captures your imagination, why? Is it because you have come across treasure by chance and you don't want to lose it? Is it because this treasure is so precious, nothing else matters? Is it because, you have become a follower/disciple of Jesus and you find his vision of life is liberating, inspiring? Are you excited at your unexpected discovery as it opens up new possibilities? What is this treasure for you? Why do you want to hide it? Is it because you want to ponder first on the joy of finding it? How will you know when you have found it?
- If the parable of the merchant looking for fine pearls resonates with you, why? Is it because you have been searching and have never yet found what you have been looking for? Why have you not found it? Is it because you have been looking in the wrong places? Not seeing the clues? When you do eventually find what you have been looking for, is it because this beautiful pearl was there all along and you didn't recognise it? When you do find this pearl,

does everything else seem irrelevant to you? What are you willing to abandon so that you can own this pearl?

- If you identify with the parable of the fishermen and the dragnet, why? Is it because, unlike the first two parables in which Jesus compares the Kingdom of heaven to treasure, in this parable the Kingdom is full of all sorts? Does this give you hope that the kingdom is full of both saints and sinners? Does it make you feel comfortable that you fit into Jesus vision of the Kingdom? Do you think Jesus is telling you that you should be leaving the judging to God? Does this parable remind you of the wheat and the darnel?
- What about the householder who brings out things old and new? Are you stuck in the past and only value the old way of life? Have you abandoned all the old ways and only want what is new? Are you looking at the old in a new way? Do you want to follow Jesus so that you can understand the Law in a new way?
- Do you find Jesus' depiction of the last days, separating the good from the wicked frightening, disconcerting? Is this so unlike the preaching you have become so used to with Jesus – a preaching of love, compassion, acceptance for everyone?

Speak to Jesus about what is going on in your mind and heart as you imagine the kingdom of heaven here and now. Ask Jesus to help you with this mission of establishing this Kingdom of God.

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.

Scripture texts: from the Jerusalem Bible 1966 by Dartington Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday and Company Ltd