

Imaginative Contemplation- Who do people say I am?



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 with his disciples, let the Spirit enter your heart and mind so that when Jesus asks you the question “Who do you say I am?” you can answer with the same conviction as Peter “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”.

Reading Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ‘But you,’ he said ‘who do you say I am?’

Then Simon Peter spoke up, ‘You are the Christ,’ he said ‘the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven”. Then he gave the disciples strict orders not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Contemplation

Today, on the 21st Sunday in Ordinary time, let us start our contemplation by setting the scene. This passage comes from Matthew Chapter 16 and Jesus has journeyed with his disciples to Caesarea Philippi which is located along the southern slopes of Mount Hermon and is the source of the River Jordan. When Herod died, his son Philip renamed the town Caesarea in the emperor’s honour. Hence, the town became known as Caesarea Philippi. With this in mind, and with the help of the Spirit, find a

place within this passage and amidst the beauty of the location and contemplate “Who is Jesus to you?”

- Who are you within the story? Are you one of the Twelve? Perhaps a passer-by? On looker? Or someone who is not mentioned in the passage.
- What time of day is it? What is the weather like? Did you have a long journey to get to Caesarea Philippi? Are you wondering why Jesus took you to this place, a place of beauty but a place of known pagan worship. Are you wondering why you are here or have you come to accept that Jesus is full of surprises?
- Where does Jesus settle down to talk to you? In the temple dedicated to Caesar? At the source of the Jordan? Or are you sitting on one of the rocks?
- When he asks you “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Are you the one who replied “Elijah” or “John the Baptist” or “one of the prophets”? or do you sit quietly listening to everyone else?
- When Jesus asks “But you, who do you say I am?” what is going through your mind? Is Jesus looking at you? Have you thought about who Jesus is? Who do you think he is? Do you find it difficult to put into your own words thus you are glad that Simon Peter spoke first?
- Are you surprised with Simon Peter’s declaration of faith in Jesus, not just as Messiah, but as the Son of God? Is Jesus someone different for you? Are you still thinking he has come for political purposes?
- What is Jesus’ reaction at Simon Peter’s declaration of faith?
- Do you wonder what it is about Jesus that makes Simon Peter answer “You are the Christ, the son of the living God”. Do you think it was an answer that came from his heart?
- When Jesus says that it is his Father in heaven who has revealed Simon Peter’s outpouring of faith, how does it make you feel?
- How do you think it made Simon Peter feel when when Jesus renamed him Peter and said that he would build his Church on him? That he would give him the keys of the Kingdom of heaven? What do you think was going through his mind?
- How would you have felt if you were in Peter’s shoes? A feeling of pride that Jesus chose you to lead a Church which the powers of hell could not overcome? A feeling of dread because you don’t feel worthy? Not qualified for such an enormous task? Are you thinking why choose me – a sinner?
- How do you feel about this great responsibility that Jesus has bestowed on Peter? Are you pleased that Peter was chosen as you

feel he is a natural leader? Do you wonder what you can do to help Peter build this Church? Perhaps you can help lay the bricks of love and compassion. What is going through your mind and heart?

- Notice what is going on around you. Look at the faces of the other apostles? How do they react to what Jesus is saying? With surprise? With awe?
- Is there anything you want to say to Peter? Is there anything you want to say to Jesus? Do you perhaps want to ask him who you are in his eyes?

Let us sit for 10 minutes and imagine the scene and perhaps write down how and what you feel, your emotions – anything that comes into your mind.

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