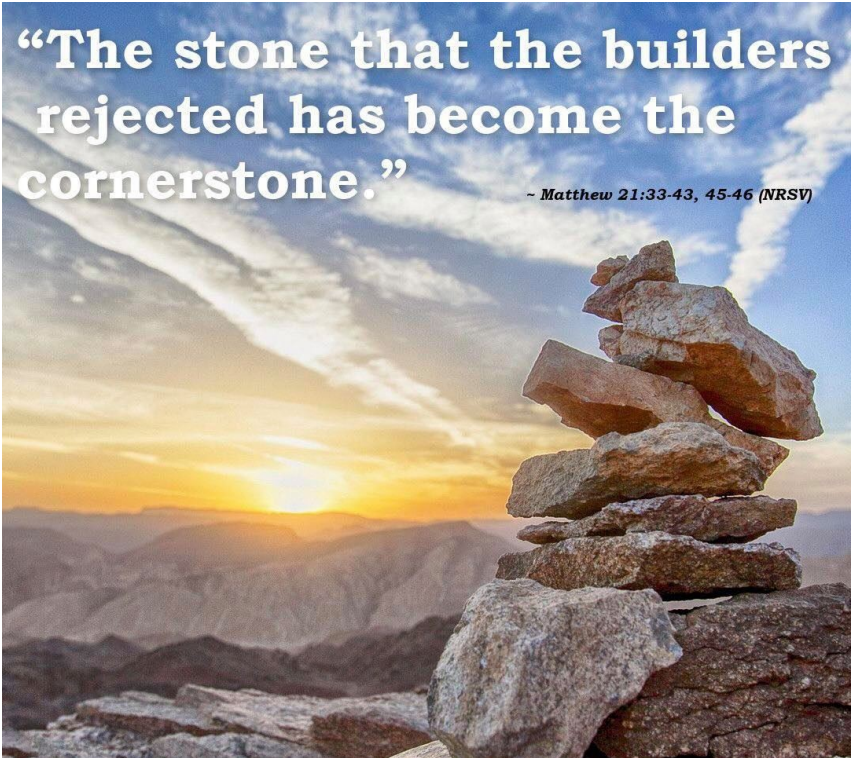


Imaginative Contemplation – They will respect my Son

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”

~ Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46 (NRSV)



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 to our responsibility of being good tenants in God's vineyard and producing fruit that will last.

Reading Matthew 21:33-43

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people, "Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a wine press in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance.' So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They answered, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him when the season arrives."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures:
"It was the stone rejected by, the builders that became the keystone.
This was the Lord's doing
and it is wonderful to see
"I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."

Contemplation

The reading of the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A is a continuation of last Sunday's Gospel about the parable of the two sons sent by their father to work in his vineyard. However, today's reading is not a parable as such but an allegory, a story containing hidden meanings. With this in mind, let us enter the scene and listen to Jesus continuing to talk to the

disbelieving religious leaders and see what connections you make regarding the characters of the story..

- Who are you in the scene? One of the disciples? One of the religious leaders? Someone coming to hear Jesus? Perhaps one of the tenants or one of the servants? Someone who is not mentioned in the passage?
- Where is Jesus talking to you? In the open air? In the Temple? In a private room? Why are you there?
- Are there many people listening? Look around you. Who is there? What is the atmosphere like? Is it noisy? Hostile? Attentive? What is Jesus' mood like? Is he angry? Calm? Prayerful? Frustrated?
- What is going through your mind as you listen to this parable? Do you make the connection between the landowner and God; the vineyard and the fruit of your labours; the religious leaders, you and his tenants; the servants and the prophets; the son and Jesus himself?
- How do you feel when you hear that the tenants have abused the servants sent by the landowner to collect his produce? Not surprised since the landowner is not there to monitor what is going on? Do you feel that the landowner was too trusting of the tenants whom he had chosen to care for his vineyard? Do you think they needed supervision? Or do you think that the landowner wanted to allow the tenants to use their free will in tending to the vineyard?
- Who do you think the tenants are? The religious leaders or all of us? Do you think that you that you are one of those tenants put in the vineyard to produce a harvest? Do you realise that God has given you the tools (your talents and gifts) necessary to produce the fruit and the freedom to run the vineyard to the best of your ability?
- How do you see your labours? A challenge? A joy? What do you do with the fruits of your labours? As a tenant, do you protect the vineyard and treasure its fruits and share them with those in need? Or do you store the fruits for yourself thinking that you worked for them so you think they are yours and not God's?
- How do you treat those servants who come to remind you of your responsibility to your tenancy? Do you listen, take note but do nothing? Or are you afraid of the consequences if you don't listen and act on their advice? Can you think of anyone in particular who are prophets? Is there anyone in particular who inspires you to be a better tenant?

- As you listen to Jesus, do you realise that he is that Son, the one who will be put to death? Or are you listening to the parable in a literal sense and feel sorry for the landowner who thinks they will respect his son?
- Again, do you realise that Jesus is the cornerstone, the one who has been rejected and who has now become the keystone? Do you realise that through Jesus' word and deeds, we can all become better tenants? That by recognising this we can put the fruits of our labours to better help the community in which we live?

Is there anything you want to say to Jesus, ask Jesus, discuss with Jesus about what is going on in your heart and mind about your tenancy.

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