

Imaginative Contemplation – My Eyes have seen the Salvation



Simeon in the Temple - Rembrandt

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 so that we, like Simeon and Anna, recognise Jesus as the fulfilment of the promise of our redemption. Let us pray that we have the courage to speak about him to all.

Reading **Luke 2:22-40**

When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord. - observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-borne male must be consecrated to the Lord- and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law if the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.

Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord, Prompted by the Spirit he came to the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said:

"Now Master, you can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel."

As the child's mother and father stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "You see this child: he is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected – a sword will pierce your own soul too- so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare."

There was a prophetess also, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, the tribe of Asher. She was well on in her years. Her days of girlhood over, she had

been married for 7 years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty four years old and never left the temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came in just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.

When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and Gods favour was with him.

Contemplation

On this Feast of the Holy Family, St Luke describes Joseph and Mary as being faithful Jews who bring Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem. Here they present their firstborn son to the Lord. Jesus is thus consecrated as required by the Law of Moses. Let us enter the scene and be with Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus as they enter the temple and watch the events unfold.

- Who are you in the passage? Are you travelling with Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus? Or are you in the temple where Anna and Simeon are on this day?
- If you are travelling, what does the road to Jerusalem look like? What does the surrounding scenery look like? What time of day are you travelling? Feel the atmosphere around you. Smell the air. What do you see and hear?
- What about Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus? How are they travelling to Jerusalem? Do you travel with them or follow at a distance? Do you interact with them? Is there anything special about this family? How do they interact with each other? Do you walk with them as they enter Jerusalem and make their way to the temple?
- Are you also going into the temple? Why? Is this your first time in the temple of Jerusalem? Look around you? Is the temple grand? Adorned with fineries? Do Mary and Joseph also look around admiring the splendour? Are you and they overawed?
- Do you notice Joseph buying two turtle doves to offer as a sacrifice? Do you notice Mary and Joseph offer Jesus to be consecrated as the Law of Moses prescribes? What does this tell you about the family?
- Do you notice Simeon, an elderly man, approach Mary and Joseph and take Jesus in his arms? Do you hear his message of salvation that they baby will bring, the prediction he makes to Mary about Jesus' destiny and her own suffering to come? What is going

though your mind when you hear Simeon's words? How do Mary and Joseph react to Simeon's prophesy?

- Do you notice the elderly Anna approach? Do you hear her words words of praise, gratitude and redemption? How do you react to her words?
- How do you feel as you hear these elderly people's words? Do you feel comforted, troubled or moved by the interaction between the family and Simeon and Anna? Is there something about these two elderly people bearing witness to something no-one else could see? What do you do? Do you talk to the family, to Simeon or Anna? What do they tell you?

As we spend 10 minutes in quiet contemplation, speak to Mary, Joseph, Simeon or Anna about your experience. Tell them about your hopes and desires and your expectations of this encounter.

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