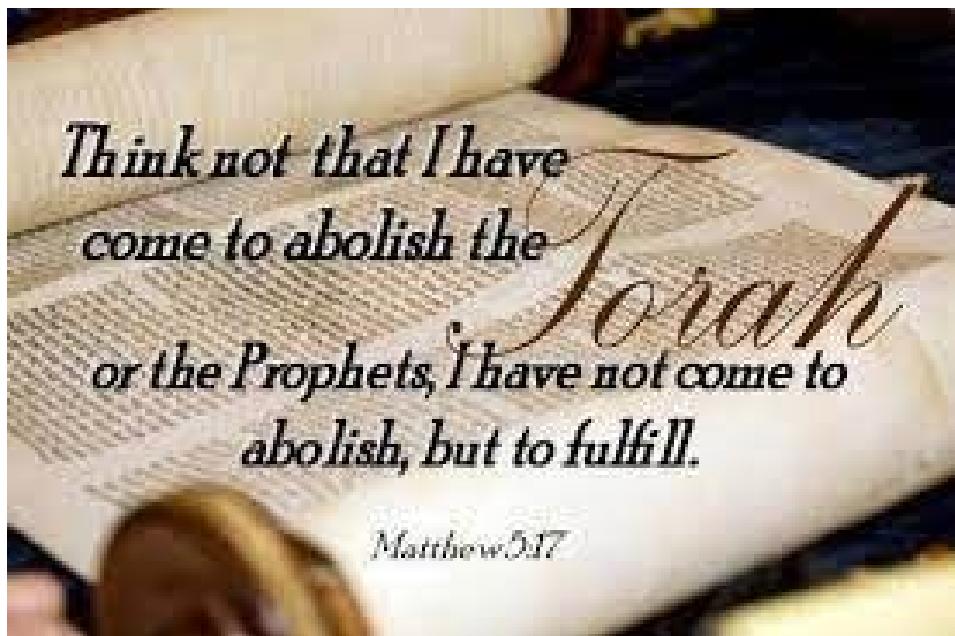


Imaginative Contemplation – Do not think I have come to abolish the Law



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 enable us to see beyond the Law to that we can enter more deeply into our faith.

Reading Matthew 5:17 – 37

At that time: Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

‘You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgement.” But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, “You fool!” will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

It was also said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.” But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

‘Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.” But I say to you: Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply “Yes” or “No”; anything more than this comes from evil.’

Contemplation

Today’s Gospel reading on the 6th Sunday in Ordinary time, is part of the Sermon on the Mount discourse and follows directly from last weeks Gospel Reading. Jesus continues to tell us that our relationship with God goes beyond the keeping of the ten commandments and the Law. We must go further than what the Law requires. Let us enter the scene and listen to Jesus emphasise that he has not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it.

- Imagine you are in a quiet, sunny mountainside, with the crowd hushed and attentive. Feel the warmth of the sun, the gentle breeze, and the texture of the ground.
- Who are you in the passage? One of his disciples? One of the crowd? A bystander? Yourself?
- How long have you been listening to Jesus or have you just arrived? What time of day is it?
- Where are you in the crowd? Close to Jesus or in the margins?
- Look at the people around you. Look at the expressions on their faces. What do you notice about their expressions particularly those of the scribes and Pharisees who are present in the crowd?
- What about Jesus? Has he remained sitting? What is his mood like? What is the tone of his voice like? Is it still strong and audible during this long discourse? Does it still hold your attention?
- Listen to Jesus as he tells you that he has not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to complete them. Consider what he means by that he came to complete the Law, moving from rigid rule-following to a deep love for God and neighbour. How does that make you feel? Do you feel that you can be like the scribes or Pharisees, practising your religion externally?
- Listen to Jesus as he tells you that the Law condemns murder but he condemns anger. The Law condemns adultery and he condemns even lustful looks. Do you find this surprising and/or challenging?
- Jesus explains that even harbouring anger is a matter of judgment.

How does this strike you? Is there someone in your life you need to reconcile with? Is there someone in your life with whom you harbour a grudge?

- Reflect on the examples Jesus gives from the Law of Moses as he takes each one to another level. In what way can you apply this to your life and to your experience?
- When Jesus says, "Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,'" reflect on your own truthfulness. Do you sometimes find yourself making excuses or sitting on the margins to mask a lack of commitment?
- How does Jesus' call to a deeper, heart-centered morality challenge your current life?

As we spend 10 minutes in quiet contemplation, speak to Jesus about your own efforts to shape your behaviour and attitudes by his life and teachings and how his teachings impact on you. Reflect on what it means to follow the Law with the heart rather than just the head.

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