

Imaginative Contemplation – I am the door of the sheepfold



Image from Bible Art

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 our 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

Let the Spirit guide our hearts and enlighten our minds as we read the Gospel and reflect on what it means to envisage Jesus as a shepherd. Let the Spirit enter you so that you too can hear the voice of Jesus, our shepherd.

Reading John 10:1-10

At that time: Jesus said, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.' This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So Jesus again said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.'

Contemplation

Today, the Fourth Sunday of Easter is also known as Good Shepherd Sunday because in each of the three Lectionary Cycles, we reflect on Jesus as the Good Shepherd as described in Chapter ten of John's Gospel. Jesus says, "I AM the door of the sheepfold." and is the second of the seven 'I AM' statements made by Jesus in this Gospel. Imagine the scene, find a place within it. With the help of the Spirit, let the image of Jesus as the door of the sheepfold unfold in your imagination.

- Who are you within the story? Are you one of his disciples? Or one of the Jews listening to Jesus? Or a Shepherd? Or even one of the

sheep? Perhaps a person that is not specially mentioned in the printed story?

- Where are you listening to Jesus? Outside? In the temple? In someone's house? You could place yourself inside a stone walled sheepfold on a Galilean hillside so that you are protected.
- Feel the cool early morning or evening air, smell the sheep and dust, hear the quiet stirring of the flock.
- Perhaps you are in the crowd listening to Jesus. If so where are you in this crowd? Look around you and notice those who are listening. What kind of people does the crowd comprise? What is their mood like? What do you notice about your own feelings as you listen?
- As you listen to Jesus' voice, what do you detect? Is his voice gentle, firm, comforting, strong, inviting? In the silence of your heart, hear him calling you by name? What does it feel like knowing that you are protected.
- How do you react to Jesus comparing himself to the door of the sheepfold? What images are conjured up in your mind as you hear this? Is it one of security, safety and comfort knowing that he is the only safe entrance and exit?
- Reflect on how you distinguish the voice of Jesus from "thieves and brigands" in your own life. How do you recognise the voice of Jesus amidst all the other voices competing for your attention?
- Do you like the analogy Jesus is making regarding the relationship between the shepherd and his sheep? Do you find it comforting knowing that the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep is one of familiarity and trust?
- Do you find freedom in this analogy in that you can come and go from the pen, but Jesus is always there for your safety? Do you find the analogy of the sheepfold restricting or Jesus being the door inhibiting? Why?
- Consider his final promise: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly". What does "abundant life" look like for you right now? Reflect on how Jesus has brought you abundance and the blessings you have received. Contemplate what "life in all its fullness" means to you personally in this moment.

Feel what is going on inside you as you listen to Jesus' words. Is there anything you want to ask him? Tell him about what is going on inside you, your emotions – anything that comes into your mind.. Listen to what he tells you. Tell him about the "thieves" in your life—the distractions or fears

that try to steal your peace. Ask him to help you distinguish his voice from all the others.

We will sit with our thoughts and imagination for 10 minutes

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.