

Imaginative Contemplation – For God so loved the world



The Trinity – Elizabeth Wang

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 telling Nicodemus about God and his love for us, allow the Spirit, the advocate between Father and the Son, into your heart so that you can feel his love.

Reading John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Contemplation

Today, on this Sunday immediately after Pentecost, we celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity. Let us start our contemplation by setting the scene for this passage from the John Chapter 3. Nicodemus, a leading Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, comes alone to Jesus by night for religious instruction. So, with the help of the Spirit, listen to what Jesus has to say about being saved and let the story unfold in your imagination.

- Imagine the scene: a secluded, dim space illuminated only by candles. Imagine the deep quiet of a Jerusalem night.
- Who are you within the story? Are you Nicodemus? Are you eavesdropping in on the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus? Perhaps you are that proverbial “fly on the wall” or someone or something else not mentioned in the scene.
- Feel the cool, quiet night air. Listen to the gentle, earnest tone of Jesus' voice. Smell the oil lamp burning and notice the intense look of love in Jesus' eyes. What other scents can you smell? Is there a smell of the scent of flowers? Can you smell the night air?

- Can you hear anything? Voices? Night sounds like birds or insects or a light wind rustling the leaves? Can you see the stars?
- You are sitting near Jesus, perhaps on a rooftop or in a small room lit only by a flickering candle.
- Notice the face of Nicodemus. Is he perhaps looking nervous as he sits with Jesus? Are Nicodemus and Jesus sharing a drink or some food?
- Look at Jesus. Is He tired from a long day, or does He seem energised by this conversation? Notice the kindness and understanding in His eyes and the patient tone of His voice as He reveals God's heart to Nicodemus and you.
- When you hear Jesus say that God gave his only Son to the world, because he loves us so much and so that we can have eternal life, what emotions stir in your heart? What do you understand by eternal life? Do you feel worthy of this immeasurable love, or do you find it hard to believe? What does it say to you about the depth of God's friendship for you that he desires your salvation?
- What stirs in you when Jesus says that God sent his only Son not to condemn the world but so that through him the world might be saved? Can you feel the relief of hearing that God's first instinct is not to judge you, but to save you. If you have felt condemned by your past or your failures, how do these words feel as you hear them? Are you afraid of this intense love? Are you afraid what might be asked of you if you accept his invitation to love? Or does it make you feel joyful?
- How does it make you feel that God's first and only instinct is to love you? How do you experience that love? Are you convinced of God's love for you or do you feel God is always judging you? Why do you feel that way?

What is going on in you alone in the candlelight, seated next to Jesus? What are you imagining? Ask the Spirit to guide you with the questions you would like to ask Jesus. In your heart, what do you want to say to him? What does he say to you?

Let us now spend 10 minutes in the company of Jesus.

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

