

Imaginative Contemplation – For my flesh is real food

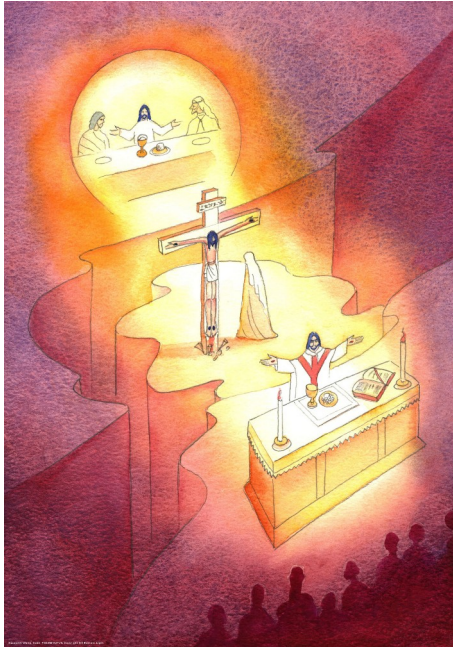


Image by Elizabeth Wang taken from Radiant Light, World Wide Web

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 the crowd that He is the bread from heaven, let the Spirit of God enter you so that we can enter into Communion with God and one another.

Reading John 6:51-58

At that time: Jesus said to the Jews, 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'

So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live for ever.'

Contemplation

Today is the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) so let us start our contemplation by setting the scene. The crowds have just seen Jesus multiply the loaves and fishes and have participated in the meal so with this in mind and with the help of the Spirit, let Jesus words on the Bread from Heaven unfold in your imagination.

- Who are you within the story? Are you one of Jesus' disciples trying to understand? One of the Jews? One of the multitude? Perhaps a sceptical passer-by? Perhaps someone whose hunger

is satisfied after the miraculous meal but is now feeling a different kind of hunger?

- Where is the setting for this discourse? Are you among the crowds that followed Jesus after the miracle of the loaves and fishes?
- What time of day is it? What is the weather like? Can you hear the murmur of the crowd shifting from curiosity to confusion?
- How many people have stayed behind after the miraculous meal to listen to Jesus? Tens? Hundreds? Thousands?
- Where are you in this group? Front? Middle? Back? On the margins?
- Notice what is going on around you. What is the atmosphere like? Are those who have gathered attentive? Inspired? Hostile? Intrigued? Or perhaps a mixture of temperaments?
- What is going through your mind when Jesus says, 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh'? Are you shocked by this statement, or do you sense a deeper, spiritual meaning you don't yet fully grasp? A way to bond with God in some mysterious manner?
- Listen to the dispute around you. People are arguing, their voices rising in disbelief: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?". Focus on Jesus as he speaks these difficult words.
- Hear the weight and solemnity in his tone. Notice Jesus doesn't back down or soften the metaphor; he repeats it more forcefully.
- Imagine him looking directly at you when he says, "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him". What does it feel like to imagine Jesus "abiding" or making a home within you? How do you feel about this close intimacy?
- What about this eternal life Jesus is offering you if you eat his flesh and drink his blood? You know God fed your ancestors with manna from the desert and as Jesus rightly says they are all dead. Do you want this eternal life? Do you want Jesus to live in you? Do you want to draw life from Jesus? Do you believe he has been sent by God whom he calls his Father?
- From what you know of Jesus do you think that in his narrative of his flesh and blood he may be asking you not to understand it but to experience it? At this point, is your faith being tested? Do you think that by eating of the Flesh and Blood of Jesus will change you? Will bring you life?

- What do you do next? Do you speak to Jesus? Do you want things clarified or do you want to ponder on what he has just said? Do you want to accept this invitation of Jesus to 'Eat', 'live' and 'abide' so that you can have life?

Talk to Jesus and listen to him and thank him for the closeness to which he calls you. Beyond physical bread, what are you truly hungering for right now—peace, forgiveness, or a sense of belonging?

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.