

Imaginative Contemplation – The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few



Image from the 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 commissioning you to help gather the harvest, let the Spirit of God enter you to give you the courage to be active in your community.

Reading Matthew 9:36 – 10:8

At that time: When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the twelve Apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.'

Contemplation

Following the Sunday's of Easter and the three great Feasts of Pentecost, the Most Holy Trinity and the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, we return to the Sundays of Ordinary Time, Year A and continue to follow the mission and ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of St Matthew. In this Gospel passage, Matthew draws our attention to the mission the twelve disciples

are being given. With the help of the Spirit, let us enter the scene and listen to Jesus send you out on your mission.

- Who are you within the story? Are you one of the disciples? One of the crowd? Perhaps a passer-by? Perhaps a labourer or a shepherd? Perhaps even a sheep without a shepherd who needs tending? Or someone else who is not mentioned in the passage.
- Where are you in this scene? Are you one of the twelve being called by name? Feel the weight of the authority Jesus gives you. What is it like to hear Him say the harvest is ready and you are the worker being sent?
- What is the setting for Jesus commissioning you? Imagine a dusty, bustling, or tired crowd in a rural area. Feel the heat of the day and hear the murmur of the desperate people. Have you been called by Jesus? Listen to the specific tone of Jesus' voice as He speaks to you and the other disciples.
- Notice what is going on around you? Look around and identify those who seem harassed and helpless in the world today. Do you feel there is nothing you can do? Notice how Jesus looks at them. Notice the look in his eyes and the expression on his face. Do you sometimes feel harassed and dejected? Would you like to feel the compassion of Jesus' eyes upon you?
- Notice the size of the crowd. Look at their faces—are they tired, hopeful, or desperate? Watch Jesus' expression as He looks at them. Does compassion show on His face? Focus on Jesus' eyes. What do you think he feels for the shepherdless crowd?
- Imagine Jesus calling you by name and giving you authority to bring healing, hope, or care to a specific person. Who would that be? What is going on in your heart when Jesus turns to you and says "The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest." Do you feel free to help in some small way?
- How do you feel about Jesus giving you authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness? Look round at your companions. Do you feel reassured that all of you together with your variety of gifts will be able to fulfil the mission Jesus has set out for you?
- Jesus tells you, "You received without payment; give without payment." What does "giving without payment" look like in your daily life?

Speak to Jesus about the large harvest of sick, outcasts, marginalised he is asking you to gather. Ask him to show you how to be compassionate so that you can bring the Father's tender heart to those we encounter. Ask Him what "lost sheep" in your own life or community He is calling you to serve. Listen to what He might want to say to you about the gifts you have "freely received".

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