

Imaginative Contemplation –The Kingdom of Heaven is like ...

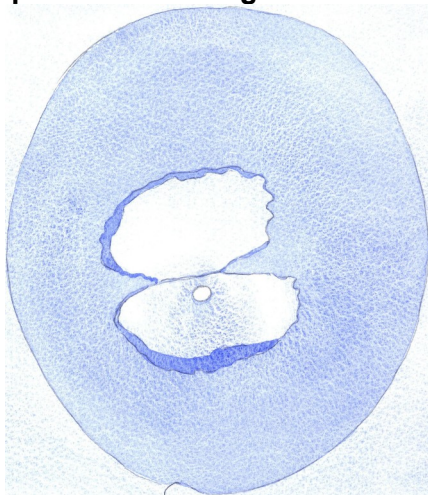


Image by Elizabeth Wang from Radiant light Website

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 as we listen to and reflect on Jesus explaining the Kingdom of heaven to the crowd. Let the Spirit enrich our hearts and minds so that we can identify with the Kingdom of heaven in these parables.

Reading Matthew 13:44-52

At that time: Jesus said to the crowd: 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into vessels but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

'Have you understood all these things?' They said to him, 'Yes.' And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

Contemplation

This passage from St Matthew's Gospel, the seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, follows on from last week's Gospel reading in which Jesus is describing the Kingdom of heaven in parables, using every day imagery to capture the minds of his listeners. So close your eyes and listen to Jesus as he tells three more short parables. Find a place within them and with the help of the Spirit, identify which image(s) the Kingdom of heaven most appeals to you.

- Who are you in the scene? One of the disciples? One of the crowd? One of the Scribes or Pharisees? A passer-by? Perhaps you are a labourer or a merchant or a fisherman or a scribe.
- Where is Jesus telling these parables? Can you see fields? Can you see the sea of Galilee? Perhaps you sit on the cool shoreline, your sandals pressing into the damp sand. Listen to the gentle lap of the Sea of Galilee which provides a rhythmic background to the murmur of the crowd.

- Notice what is going on around you. Look at the faces of those who are listening. What do you see in them? Attentiveness? Anticipation? Hope? Understanding? Confusion?
- What do you notice about the expression on Jesus' face? What do you notice about the tone of his voice? Does both the tone of his voice and his expression compel you to stay and listen?
- When Jesus continues his parables about the Kingdom of Heaven do you continue to be surprised that He compares the Kingdom of heaven to every day life? Treasure? Material goods? Can you relate to these images?
- Which of the Kingdom of Heaven parables most resonates with you? The person finding treasure buried in a field? A merchant looking for a fine pearl? A fisherman with his catch of the day? Someone tidying out their store room?
- If the parable of the person finding treasure in a field captures your imagination, why? Is it because you have come across treasure by chance and you don't want to lose it? Is it because this treasure is so precious, nothing else matters? What is the hidden treasure in your life that makes giving up worldly distractions a joyful choice?
- If the parable of the merchant looking for fine pearls resonates with you, why? Is it because you have been searching and have never yet found what you have been looking for? Why have you not found it? Is it because you have been looking in the wrong places? Is there a specific relationship, pursuit, or spiritual truth that is the "pearl" of your life? Is God asking you to release your disordered attachments to focus on Him? What are you willing to abandon so that you can own this pearl? Have you ever felt the deliberate, peaceful resolve in letting go of the old to embrace the ultimate prize.
- If you identify with the parable of the fishermen and the dragnet, why? Is it because, unlike the first two parables in which Jesus compares the Kingdom of heaven to treasure, in this parable the Kingdom is full of all sorts? Does this give you hope that the kingdom is full of both saints and sinners? How does it feel to know that God gently sorts out what is true, loving, and eternal from the distractions and destructive habits in your life?
- What about the householder who brings out things old and new? Are you stuck in the past and only value the old way of life? Have you abandoned all the old ways and only want what is new? Are you looking at the old in a new way? How can you use your history, your faith traditions, and your new spiritual insights to enrich the lives of the people around you? Do you feel the old truths you have

always known are not destroyed but are brought to life by the new things Jesus is teaching you right now?

- Do you find Jesus' depiction of the last days, separating the good from the wicked frightening, disconcerting? Does the imagery of the furnace of fire and the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" emphasise the absolute gravity of choosing or rejecting the Kingdom.

Speak to Jesus about what is going on in your mind and heart as you imagine the kingdom of heaven here and now. Speak to him about the "lesser pearl" you are holding onto that keeps you from buying the Pearl of Great Price. Let Him look at you with love as you consider what it means to bring out both the old and the new from the storeroom of your heart.

Sharing

Let us now spend 10 minutes in the company of Jesus and afterwards 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