

Imaginative Contemplation – Blessed is the fruit of your womb



Image taken 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.

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 so that like Mary we can proclaim the greatness of God in our lives and give thanks for the great things he has done.

Reading Luke 1:39-56

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.'

And Mary said,
'My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring for ever.'

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Contemplation

In today's Gospel, the Feast of the Assumption, we see Mary going in haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth having just been told that Elizabeth, in her old age is to bear a son. Mary herself has just been given the news that she has been chosen by God to bear his son. Let us enter the scene and watch these two joyful women as they meet and chat.

- Who are you in the scene? Are you walking alongside Mary? Are you a servant waiting at Zechariah's house? Or are you an invisible observer watching from the doorway? Are you Elizabeth watching Mary hurry with haste to her house or Zechariah watching?
- Imagine you are with Mary walking fast down a dusty, rocky path in the hill country of Judah. Feel the warm sun on your skin and hear your sandals crunch on the dirt. Notice the olive trees and the ruggedness of the countryside.
- Feel the physical exhaustion of Mary's journey because she is travelling with haste. Do you think she goes in haste because she want to share her cousin's joy and help her during her pregnancy since Elizabeth is elderly? Do you think Mary feels that Elizabeth would understand that her pregnancy is all part of God's plan and that both pregnancies are in some way linked?
- Watch the moment when Mary arrives at Elizabeth's house and Elizabeth appears. Imagine this elderly couple being there to welcome her. Look at the contrast: a very young woman and an elderly woman, both miraculously pregnant.
- Watch Elizabeth's face light up at the sight of Mary. Hear Mary's voice call out a greeting. Instantly, notice the sudden gasp from Elizabeth as the baby leaps in her womb. Listen to Elizabeth cry out with a loud, happy voice, praising Mary and the special child she carries. Feel the deep, loving bond between the two women. What are the emotions that you feel as these unexpectedly pregnant women greet one another?
- Feel the overwhelming wave of relief washing over Mary. Up until this moment, she was isolated. Now, someone completely understands the workings of God. Witness the deep, tearful joy and mutual embrace between these two women. Recall a moment of joy when you have greeted a much loved friend or relative after a long time apart.
- Watch Mary smile, close her eyes, and begin to sing her song to God. Hear her voice rise as she thanks God for lifting up the

humble and feeding the hungry. Notice the passion in her voice—she is praising a God who turns the social order upside down.

- Look around the room while she speaks. How does Elizabeth react? What do the expressions on their faces look like as the weight of salvation history settles into this small room?
- Imagine yourself in the room, soaking in the peace, joy, and power of God moving in this simple home. Do you feel privileged to be listening to the conversion of these two pregnant women who have said yes to God in their lives no matter how unlikely their pregnancies are? What is it that surprises you as you listen to them chatting about the mysterious workings of God in their lives and giving thanks for God's goodness?
- What are you feeling as you listen Elizabeth praising Mary for her strong faith in God? What are you thinking and feeling when Mary responds by praising God and reveals God's activity in the world?
- As you watch and listen to Mary and Elizabeth, do you realise that it is their sons who will be responsible for bringing the good news of salvation into the world?

Speak with Mary and ask her how she found the courage to believe the angel's word when no one else did. Speak with Elizabeth and ask her how to recognize and celebrate the presence of God in others. Speak to God about what is going on in your heart as you contemplate this beautiful Gospel about the miracles of life and how God's plans unfold through unexpected incidences.

Sharing

Let us now spend 10 minutes in the company of Mary and Elizabeth and afterwards we will 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