

Imaginative Contemplation – Take up your cross and follow me



Get Behind me Satan – James Tissot

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 to to be able to bear our cross with courage that we may follow Jesus as one of his disciples.

Reading Matthew 16:21-27

At that time: Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.'

Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.'

Contemplation

This week's Gospel Reading, that of the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary time A, is a continuation of the Gospel of last week where Peter acknowledges that Jesus, their friend and teacher, is the Son of God. Jesus, in return bestows on Peter the keys of the kingdom and on him will be built the Church Community. We enter the scene in which Jesus confides in the twelve the outcome of his mission. Let the Spirit enter our hearts and minds as we listen to Jesus revealing to us the consequences of being his disciple.

- Who are you in the scene? One of the disciples? If so, which one? Perhaps you are yourself following Jesus?
- Imagine you are on the road, walking from Caesarea Philippi toward Jerusalem. What kind of day is it? Hot? Clammy? Dusty?

- Listen to the crunch of sandals on gravel. Hear the sudden drop in Jesus' voice as he speaks of suffering, rejection, and death. Are you shocked by this disclosure?
- Watch Jesus' face as He reveals this disclosure. Look at the faces of the disciples. Watch their confusion turn to shock. Do you hear Peter taking Jesus aside to challenge this disclosure?. Watch as he pulls Jesus aside in a protective way, telling him firmly, "This shall never happen to you". Hear the panic and love in Peter's voice as he tries to correct his Teacher and friend.
- Feel the sudden tension in the air. Feel the weight of Jesus' gaze as he turns back to face the entire group to deliver his rebuke. Watch Jesus turn. Hear the sharp sound of His words to Peter: "Get behind me, Satan!" Feel the stunned silence that falls over the other disciples as they look down at the ground.
- Where are you standing in this circle? Are you next to Peter, nodding along with his protective instinct? Or are you frozen by Jesus' intense words? What is going through your mind?
- Perhaps I think that the rebuke is also for me for all the times I, too, have failed to recognise God's way and for the times I've relied on my own human reasoning.
- What is the look on Jesus' face? Is he angry? Saddened? Frustrated? What about the look on Peter's face? Is he upset, afraid? Confused?
- Jesus turns His gaze past Peter and looks right at you. He speaks quietly to you about denying yourself and taking up a cross. What is he asking you to do? What is this cross he is asking you to bear? Picture what your own cross or daily struggle feels like right now.
- What does it feel like when Jesus mentions the cross? Is there a part of your life where you are trying to save your life but feel like you are losing it? Could Jesus be asking you to give up something so that you can live life more fully? What difference is there between your way of thinking and that of Jesus?
- Listen to his final promise about the Son of Man coming in glory. Let that hope balance the weight of the cross. Are you willing to walk the way of Jesus and bear a cross? Are you willing to exchange your life so that you can find a life in God?

Speak to Jesus about what is going on in your mind and heart as you contemplate what being his disciple means and the cross you may have to bear? Tell him honestly what scares you, what challenges you, or where you feel tempted to take the easy road rather than the path of discipleship. You may recall painful times when you have been asked to deny yourself

and pick up your cross. What was that like? Listen to what he says back to you.

Sharing

Let us now spend 10 minutes in the company of Jesus reflecting on this Gospel Passages and 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
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