

Imaginative Contemplation – How often must I forgive my brother?



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 we can feel the love of God who “forgives us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”.

Reading Matthew 18:21-35

At that time: Peter came up and said to Jesus, ‘Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

‘Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, “Pay what you owe.” So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you.” He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.’

Contemplation

This passage on the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time is a continuation of last weeks Gospel in which Jesus tells us how we are to deal with someone in the community who has done something wrong and the lengths we must go to in order to bring him back into the fold. This scripture passage goes on to emphasise that God's forgiveness is without measure as should be our forgiveness of others. So let us enter the scene and listen to Jesus' explain to us the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation.

- Who are you in the scene? One of the disciples? If so, which one? A passer-by? Someone eavesdropping into the conversation between Jesus and his disciples? Someone who is not mentioned in the passage?
- Where is this conversation taking place? Perhaps an outdoor space where Jesus sits with his disciples.
- Listen to the background murmur of the other disciples. Listen to the sounds on the road, perhaps of birds singing or the breeze blowing through the trees.
- Watch Peter as he leans forward, asking Jesus if forgiving seven times is enough if someone wrongs you. Are you pleased when Peter asks for clarification as to the number of times that you must forgive? Are you ever tempted to quantify forgiveness as Peter tried to do?
- Are you shocked by Jesus' answer "Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times"? Feel the tension in the air as you and the disciples absorb this impossible standard of endless forgiveness.
- How does Jesus's teaching on forgiveness make you feel? Does it seem over the top to you? Surely there is a limit to the number of times you are expected to forgive a wrongdoer. How do you react to someone who wrongs you? What about someone who persistently wrongs you?
- Now place yourself in the grand palace of the King in Jesus' parable. Watch the servant being dragged in, trembling as he is ordered to pay the 10,000 talents he owes. Look at his terrified face as his family is ordered to be sold. Feel the cold floor as he falls to his knees, begging for time.
- Watch the King's expression change from sternness to compassion. Feel servant's relief as he walks out a free man. What is going through your mind as you listen to Jesus' parable about the merciful king? Are you astonished by the clemency and forgiveness of the king who is able to forget the enormity of the sum the servant owes him?

- Now follow the forgiven servant outside into street. Watch his face harden as he spots a fellow servant who owes him a tiny amount. See him grab the man by the throat. Hear the plea of the debtor as he uses the exact same words he just used before the King. Feel the harsh contrast of his refusal as he throws the man into prison. How does this injustice make you feel? Are there times when you have struggled to forgive others or show compassion?
- Now return to the palace. Hear the voice of the King, who is now filled with anger. "You wicked servant!" Feel the weight of the guards' hands as they lock the unforgiving servant away until he can pay the his debt.
- What is going through your mind when Jesus tells us how God will treat those whose when his mercy is not reciprocated, and who cannot let go of grievances? Do you feel you need God's help as you try to figure out what Jesus' message means to you in your life?

As you spend 10 minutes in the company of Jesus, speak to Him about the times you have received God's forgiveness yet held back small mercies from others. Talk honestly with Him about the person you find hardest to forgive. Tell him about what is going on in your mind and heart as you reflect on mercy, forgiveness and compassion and ask him for the grace to be merciful in your life.

Sharing

Let us now 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