

Imaginative Contemplation – When two or three are gathered in my name...



Picture 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 when we gather together in Jesus' name we can feel his presence among us.

Reading **Matthew 18:15-20**

At that time: Jesus said to his disciples, 'If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.'

Contemplation

This Gospel Reading on the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A comes in the middle of Jesus's preaching on the importance of community. We enter the scene as he tells us how to respond if someone in the community commits an offence. So let your imagination take you back to first-century Galilee.

- Who are you in the scene? One of the disciples? A passer-by? Someone eavesdropping in on the conversation between Jesus and his disciples? Someone who is not mentioned in the passage?
- Where is Jesus talking to you? Are you in the open air? If so where? Perhaps you are sitting on a dusty, sunny hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Or sitting indoors around a table, just you, the disciples and Jesus.
- Look around you. Notice the texture of the rough stone floor or the grass beneath you. Feel the heat of the afternoon sun filtering

through the window. Hear the background noises: the distant voices of a village marketplace, the occasional bark of a dog or the singing of birds.

- Notice the expressions on the faces of those listening. What is the mood like? Notice how some look tired, others intense, leaning in closely, others confused and curious. Notice the face of Jesus. Look at the expression on His face - His eyes are warm, deeply focused, and filled with compassion.
- Are you surprised with Jesus' instructions regarding what to do if your brother wrongs you? Do you imagine a specific person who has hurt you, or do you feel a flash of defensiveness?
- What emotions arise as Jesus speaks? Is it anger? Fear of confrontation? Watch Jesus as you feel this. He does not look away from your discomfort. He challenges the circle: "If the member listens to you, you have gained your brother."
- Imagine walking up to the person who hurt you, not with a clenched fist, but with a vulnerable heart, seeking to win back the relationship rather than win an argument. Feel the vulnerability of that private conversation. How does this meeting make you feel? How would you feel if you are the wrong doer?
- Imagine the scene expanding. You are no longer alone with your hurt but part of a community. Look to your left and right at the disciples sitting next to you. Jesus is giving you a community to lean on.
- Are you surprised when Jesus reminds you that you are part of a community and thus have responsibility for one-another? Have you ever thought that your actions could affect the community in which you live? Your friends you go around with? Your community of disciples? Do you realise that by approaching the wrongdoer you are supporting him and helping him to goodness?
- What if someone you know has wronged the community in which you live? Do you feel responsible for them or do you think you are not their keeper and ignore the situation?
- Perhaps you feel the need to involve someone else's wisdom where you can avoid criticism or mere gossip?. Who are the wise, gentle witnesses in your life that you would bring with you to seek peace?
- Have you ever been approached for help to mediate? In what ways can you work with others to build up community?
- Watch Jesus' facial expressions as He details the final steps of bringing a stubborn issue to the whole church. His voice isn't harsh

or bureaucratic; it is heavy with the sorrow of broken relationships. Do you still feel it has nothing to do with you?

- When He says to treat an unrepentant person as a Gentile and a tax collector, remember how Jesus treated tax collectors. He loved them, ate with them, and continually invited them back into fellowship. Feel the patience required to love someone who has shut you out.
- Do you feel reassured when Jesus tells you that if two or three of you gather in his name, he will be there among you? Look at the two or three people sitting closest to you. Do you realise that Jesus is not a distant judge; He is physically sitting in the middle of your mess, your arguments, and your fragile attempts at peacemaking.

Let us now spend 10 minutes in the presence Jesus about what is going on in your mind and heart as you contemplate his instructions regarding bringing a wrongdoer back into the fold. Speak to Jesus and tell him honestly about the person you are struggling to forgive or the conflict you are avoiding. Tell Him how hard it is to take these steps. Ask Him to give you the courage to seek direct, private reconciliation. Hear what Jesus says back to you. Let yourself feel the comfort of His presence crowding out the loneliness of your conflict.

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