

Imaginative Contemplation – The Greatest Commandment



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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 contemplate the importance of love in our lives: the love of God and the love of our neighbour. Let us pray for a truly loving heart.

Reading Matthew 22:34 – 40

At that time: When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?'

And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'

Contemplation

In today's Gospel of the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, we see the continuing confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders. The Pharisees now come to Jesus with their own challenge. So let us enter the scene and listen to that challenge and how Jesus addresses their question.

- Who are you identify with in the scene? Do you feel like the testing lawyer? Or do you feel like a bystander? Or perhaps you identify with one of the disciples?
- Imagine where you are standing in the crowd. Are you beside the disciples, in the background, or near the questioning scholar?
- Imagine you are in Jerusalem, within the crowded, noisy Temple courtyards. Feel the dry heat of the sun beating down on you. Listen to the low hum of pilgrims whispering, the footsteps on the ground. Notice the gathering of the Pharisees and look at the expressions on their faces. Do they have a look of curiosity?

Frustration? Challenge? Smell the dust in the air mixed with incense from the inner temple.

- Look at the faces of the crowd as they gather to listen to the confrontations between Jesus and the different religious leaders. Now look at Jesus' face. How does he look? Calm? Tired? Focussed?
- Watch the lawyer as he steps forward to put Jesus to the test. Is his posture and tone one of arrogance, aggression or respect?
- Watch as the lawyer asks him "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?". Do you think it is a fair question or that he is not searching for the truth but only trying to entrap Jesus? Do you too wonder which out of the six hundred or so Laws is the greatest? Are you grateful to the lawyer for asking the question?
- Notice where Jesus is standing. How does he look at this lawyer? Does he look defensive? Does he have a welcoming posture?
- Watch Jesus as he looks directly into the man's eyes and answers him with profound authority and absolute clarity. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
- Look at the faces of the Pharisees. Jesus has compressed hundreds of complex religious laws into a single, beautiful, and demanding call to love.
- Now imagine Jesus turning his eyes away from the crowd and looking directly at you. As he repeats, "Love your neighbour as yourself," who is the specific neighbour that instantly comes to your mind?
- Do you see that loving God and loving neighbour are complementary and inseparable in that God's love shines through us and flows out to our community? Do you see that God created us out of love and that confirmation of our love for God requires love of our neighbour?
- How will loving God with all your heart soul and mind change your pattern of lifestyle? Have you ever thought that God lives in your neighbour so loving your neighbour is also loving God?

Let us now spend 10 minutes in the company of Jesus. Talk to him as a friend and tell Him honestly how hard it is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Tell Him about the difficult neighbours in your life right now. Listen quietly for what He might say back to you.

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
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