

IMAGINING THE TEXT: IGNATIAN CONTEMPLATION

1. THE POWER OF IMAGINATION TO MAKE THE TEXT COME ALIVE:

- a. Ex: **Finding Neverland:** Similarities/Differences in approaching the Scriptures

2. EXPERIENCING VS. STUDYING THE WORD

- a. **John 5:39-40:** *"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."*
- b. **Question:** *Does our study of the Scriptures prevent us (at times) from experiencing the God of the Scriptures? Meaning, is there a difference between reading/examining words, and meeting the God of the words?*

3. PERSPECTIVES ON ENCOUNTERING GOD IN HIS WORD

- a. "We do not understand that once God's word has rung out in the midst of the world, in the fullness of time, **it is so powerful that it applies to everyone**, all with equal directness; no one is disadvantaged by distance in space or time.

To be sure, Jesus addresses a particular Samaritan woman at the well, but, at the same time, in her, he also addresses every sinner, woman or man.

When Jesus sits, tired, at the well's edge, it is not for this one person alone. Therefore it is not a mere "pious exercise" when, in spirit, I put myself beside this woman and enter into her role. Not only may I play this part: I must play it, for I have long been involved in this dialogue without being consulted. I am this dried-up soul, running after the earthly water every day because it has lost its grasp of the heavenly water it is really seeking.

So it is not at all enough to see the dialogues and encounters presented in the gospels as mere "examples," like the instances of valor in a heroic tale, which a boy reads and feels inspired to emulate. For the Word became flesh at that particular point in order to speak to us, on whatever particular occasion he addresses us, he is concerned with every particular, unique occasion; **in addressing this repentant sinner he addresses every sinner; in speaking to this woman listening at his feet he is speaking to every listener. Since it is God who is speaking, there can be no historical distance from his word; hence too our attitude cannot be merely historical. Instead, there is that utter directness which confronted those who met him on the roads of Palestine: "Follow me!," "Go and sin no more!," "Peace be with you!"...**

Moreover, it is futile to leaf through the writings of the Old and New Covenants in the hope of coming across truths of one kind or another, unless we are prepared **to be exposed to a direct encounter with him, with this personal, utterly free Word which makes sovereign claims upon us.**" (*Prayer*, by Hans Urs von Balthasar, pp. 16-19)

- b. **"We can descend with the mind into the heart most easily through the imagination.** In this regard the great Scottish preacher Alexander Whyte speaks of 'the divine offices and the splendid services of the Christian imagination.' **Perhaps some rare individuals experience God through abstract contemplation alone, but most of us need to be more deeply rooted in the senses.** We must not despise this simpler, more humble route into God's presence. Jesus himself taught in this manner, making constant appeal to the imagination, and many of the devotional masters likewise encourage us in this way. St. Teresa of Avila says, 'As I could not make reflection with my understanding I contrived to picture Christ within me.' **Many of us can identify with her words, for we too have tried a merely cerebral approach and found it too abstract, too detached...**

Some of us have objected to using the imagination out of concern that it is untrustworthy and could even be used by the Evil One. There is good reason for concern, for the imagination, like all our faculties, has participated in the Fall. **But just as we can believe that God can take our reason (fallen as it is) and sanctify it and use it for his good purposes, so we believe he can sanctify the imagination and use it for his good purposes.** Of course, the imagination can be distorted by Satan, but then so can all our faculties. God created us with an imagination, and as Lord of his creation he can and does redeem it and use it for the work of the kingdom of God.

...It is so vitally important for us to be thrown in utter dependence upon God in these matters. We are seeking to think God's thoughts after him, to delight in his presence, to desire his truth and his way...**To believe that God can sanctify and utilize the imagination is simply to take seriously the Christian idea of incarnation.** (*Celebration of Discipline*, by Richard Foster, pp.29-30).

4. IGNATIAN CONTEMPLATION

- ♦ **Principle and Foundation: Using a Sanctified Imagination**

- ♦ **The Process:**

- Quiet yourself in the conscious awareness of God's loving presence.
- Read the selected gospel text, first noticing all the details.
- Ask the Lord for what you desire from this time of contemplation.
- Compose or place yourself in the scene.
- Enter into the event:
 - *Application of the senses (Hear, Smell, Touch, Taste, See)
 - *Play the role of one of the characters
 - *Be an observer on the scene
 - *Be a companion one of the persons in the story
- Keep yourself engaged in the action listening for God's *rhema* (personal word) for you.
- Respond from your heart to the Lord on the basis of your contemplation.

5. **AN EXPERIENCE IN IMAGINING THE TEXT:** Pick a text of Scripture to practice!