

Principle and Foundation Talk #2 – The End of Creatures

In the Book of the Exercises:

[23]. “Man was created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul; and the other things on the face of the earth were created for man’s sake, in order to aid him in the prosecution of the End for which he was created. From this it follows that man is to use them as much as they help him on to his end, and ought to rid himself of them so far as they hinder him as to it.”

Usual Preparation Prayer.

First Prelude: The composition of Place: Heaven opened above me and hell yawning under my feet; also myself placed on this earth, halfway between heaven and hell, and saying to myself: “For all eternity I’ll either be in heaven with God, Mary, and all the saints, or else in hell suffering the torments of Satan; and it depends on me alone, which of these two conditions will be my lot within a few years, perhaps within a few months, weeks, or days; it depends on me alone whether I am to gain so great a good or to incur so great an evil.”

Second Prelude: The Petition I need to ask for light to know clearly, to realize intimately the supreme importance of this matter of my salvation and sanctification, as well as strength to adopt resolutely all the means that will most surely bring it to a successful issue. This, then, I must implore with all the energy of my being, with the utmost earnestness and fervor.

Again, the commentators on the Exercises often give three days dedicated to the Principle and Foundation: one day dedicated to the end of man, another to creatures and their end, as well as their right use, and a third dedicated to indifference. Although we mixed the two last night, tonight we will consider solely creatures and their end.

So, for this meditation, let us consider, simply, some basic truths about creatures, and some practical considerations regarding them.¹

Regarding some basic truths about creatures, let us begin by considering three points: first, that God has absolute dominion over creatures, second, that creatures have an essential and necessary relation to Him, and, thirdly, that misusing creatures is an injustice and something anti-natural.

Considering the first, that God has absolute dominion over creatures, we must remember that all creatures belong to God as to their owner. God creates them from the nothing, He holds them in being, and He directs them to their end, usually through their

¹ These notes are taken, more or less, from Luis Gonzalez and Ignacio Iparraguirre, *Ejercicios Espirituales – Comentario Pastoral*, 160-162,

very nature. This is part of God's providence, that ordering of the universe for an end. In His infinite wisdom, God has established that creatures can be causes with Him, and that they participate in His goodness by means of that ordering.

To man, God gives the use of creatures, but not possession, as it were. They are still "His creatures," we could say. Creatures belong to God; they are His. On one hand, if creatures belong to God, and not to us, we don't really own them like property; we are simply beneficiaries of them, taking advantage of them, like a tenant might lease a vineyard, or like a person might lease a car. If I misuse a creature, no matter what it is, I'm like the slug that messes up the train. True story: it happened in June that a little slug got onto the wires of the high speed trains in Japan, and because it was fried, that little one inch slug shut down huge portions of the railway system.² When we misuse creatures, we're slugs that get in the way of the well-ordered providence of God, and distort them for our purposes. Electrical boxes aren't homes for slugs; they just aren't. Nor are creatures meant for my own ends, but rather for God's.

On the other hand, having these creatures speaks to us also of God's goodness and providence. He provides us with what we need, and so we could say that God's wisdom, omnipotence, and goodness are really the root of our obligation to use creatures for God. He is their owner, and, since He adopts us as His children, He transforms us and elevates us. In each creature, then, again, no matter what it is, we should be able to see an image or reflection of God's love for us.

Secondly, we should note that creatures have an essential and a necessary relation to God (necessary, in the sense of a mixed relation: God does not depend on creatures, but creatures do depend on Him). For this reason, just like us men, creatures are meant to tend to God's glory. We know that God does nothing without seeking some good, and, when He acts outside of Himself, extrinsically, what He seeks is His glory. This is because, as He is infinitely perfect in Himself, He doesn't need creatures to make Him happy or to perfect Him. Rather, He creates creatures in order to make His own perfections known, adored, and loved.

Hence, all created beings tend to that end, that is, to God's glory, in virtue of a natural ordering, almost a natural virtue, we could say, because perfection consists precisely in seeking that end.

Thirdly, we should consider, then, if creatures are naturally meant to tend towards God's glorification, then to abuse creatures is an injustice, an inversion of the right order, a sort of idolatry.

It follows that creatures that separate us from God are vain and useless, because, in means, in the things we use to accomplish an end, as a mean, it has no goodness in itself outside of the end. Since all things have been created so that, as means, they help us to

² <https://nypost.com/2019/06/24/slug-shorts-out-huge-section-of-japans-high-speed-railway/>

reach our end, it follows necessarily that there is no goodness in them if they are separated from their end; all goodness would be merely vain, false, or deceptive.

Again, we can consider the example we used earlier: you can try to clean your hands with motor oil or bacon grease, but it doesn't work. Those things have a purpose; they have an end, but cleaning hands isn't it.

It's worth noting what the *Catechism* says about idolatry; at 2113 and 2114 we read: "Idolatry not only refers to false pagan worship. It remains a constant temptation to faith. Idolatry consists in divinizing what is not God. Man commits idolatry whenever he honors and reveres a creature in place of God, whether this be gods or demons (for example, satanism), power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, etc. . . . Idolatry rejects the unique Lordship of God; it is therefore incompatible with communion with God. Human life finds its unity in the adoration of the one God. The commandment to worship the Lord alone integrates man and saves him from an endless disintegration. Idolatry is a perversion of man's innate religious sense. An idolater is someone who transfers his indestructible notion of God to anything other than God.

When we worship God alone, and keep Him in His place, our life is integrated. To abuse creatures is to lose that union and order, and to replace it a cheap imitation.

So, practical speaking, then, what does this mean? This is our second topic.³ It means that all creatures have one sole purpose in my life, that is, to help me get to heaven. I am to use them like the tools that they are.

Now then, just like the tools we have here in the garage are used differently, so, too, creatures are not all to be used the same way. We could think of four ways creatures are used: some are to be considered, some are to be used, some are to be endured, and some are to be abstained from. Considered, used, endured, and abstained.

First, some things are to be considered and meditated upon so as to bring our hearts to consider God and reverence and serve Him. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament proclaims the works of his hands. Day unto day pours forth speech; night unto night whispers knowledge" (Ps 19).

In a Wednesday audience regarding the gift of knowledge, Pope Saint John Paul the II explained it this way: "We . . . discover the theological meaning of creation, seeing things as true and real, although limited, manifestations of the Truth, Beauty, and infinite Love which is God, and consequently we feel impelled to translate this discovery into praise, song, prayer, and thanksgiving. This is what the Book of Psalms suggests so often and in so many ways. Who does not recall some instances of this raising of the soul to God? 'The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork' (Ps 18 [19]:2; cf. Ps 8:2). 'Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights.... Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars!' (Ps 148:1, 3)." This is an excellent point:

³ For this section, I follow, loosely, Coppens, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 13.

the natural world, in simply doing what it does, praises God, but we, through the gift of knowledge, can join in this “Canticle of Praise,” or, rejecting that gift, we can decide not to.

Other creatures are for the use of man, as food, drink, clothing, etc. Usually when we think of creatures and their “use,” this is usually what we have in mind, and, again, we spoke yesterday about signs of disorder in use.

Others creatures are to be endured, so that we can practice submission to God’s most holy will. In his book, *Uniformity with God’s Will*, Saint Alphonsus Liguori makes this point very well. He writes: “We should wish with the divine will for heat and cold, storm and calm, and all the vagaries and inclemencies of the elements. We should in short accept whatever kind of weather God sends us, instead of supporting it with impatience or anger as we usually do when it is contrary to what we desire. We should avoid saying, for instance, ‘What awful heat!’ ‘What terrible cold!’ ‘What shocking weather!’ ‘Just my bad luck!’ and other expressions of the same kind which only serve to show our lack of faith and of submission to God’s will. Not only should we wish the weather to be as it is because God has made it so but, whatever inconvenience it may cause us, we should repeat with the three youths in the fiery furnace: *Cold, heat, snow and ice, lightnings and clouds, winds and tempests, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever.* The elements themselves are blessing and glorifying God by doing His holy will, and we also should bless and glorify Him in the same way. Besides, even if the weather is inconvenient for us, it may be convenient for someone else. If it prevents us from doing what we want to do, it may be helping another. And even if it were not so, it should be enough for us that it is giving glory to God and that it is God who wishes it to be as it is.”

“An incident in point would be this one: Late one night St. Francis Borgia arrived unexpectedly at a Jesuit house, in a snowstorm. He knocked and knocked on the door, but all to no purpose because the community being asleep, no one heard him. When morning came all were embarrassed for the discomfort he had experienced by having had to spend the night in the open. The saint, however, said he had enjoyed the greatest consolation during those long hours of the night by imagining that he saw our Lord up in the sky dropping the snowflakes down upon him.” This gives us a good example of how things that must be endured can bring us closer to God. Creatures of this sort would be the failings and defects of others, sickness, death . . . really anything that we cannot change and simply must accept as it is, even though perhaps we might like it to be different. We can even, and eventually, transition from seeing these things are to be endured, to really being things that make me praise God.

Lastly, some creatures are simply to be abstained from, meaning, their use implies sin. This would be like the forbidden fruit in Eden, but also any number of things in this world that would be sinful.

We can ask ourselves then: what are the goods that we are using? Do we act like we own them, or that they’re mine, when in reality they are God’s? Do I have any idols? Are the things I use helping me to praise God? To serve Him? To revere Him? If not, why?

Colloquy: We can end with the same colloquy as last night, conversing with our Lord upon the Cross. We can recall what Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote: “Whoever wishes to live perfectly should do nothing but disdain what Christ disdained on the cross and desire what he desired.” Ask Him for the grace to love what He loves, to desire what He desires, and to disdain what He disdained.