

## **From the Last Supper to the Agony Inclusive - Gethsemane [200-205], [290]**

*Mt 26:30-46; Mk 14:32-44; Lk 22:39-46*

### **[200] Usual Preparation Prayer.**

**[201] First Prelude: The history:** This is the history of the mystery. Here it will be as follows: Christ our Lord descended with the eleven disciples from Mt. Sion, where the Supper was held, to the Valley of Josaphat. Eight of the disciples were left at a place in the valley, and the other three in a part of the garden. Then Jesus began His prayer, and His sweat became as drops of blood. Three times He prayed to His Father and went to rouse His disciples from sleep. After His enemies had fallen to the ground at His word, and Judas had given Him the kiss, after St. Peter had cut off the ear of Malchus, and Christ had healed it, Jesus was seized as a malefactor, and led down through the valley and again up the slope to the house of Annas.

**Second Prelude: The composition of place:** This is to see the place. It will be here to consider the way from Mt. Sion to the Valley of Josaphat, likewise the garden, its breadth, its length, and appearance.

**Third Prelude: The petition:** I will ask for the grace I desire. In the Passion it is proper to ask for sorrow with Christ in sorrow, anguish with Christ in anguish, tears and deep grief because of the great affliction Christ endures for me.

Ignatius also gives us two qualifying notes that should be borne in mind throughout this third week of the Exercises.

**[204]** In this second contemplation, after the preparatory prayer and the three preludes given above, the same way of proceeding in the points and colloquies is to be observed as was followed in the first contemplation on the Supper. About the time of Mass and Vespers, two repetitions are to be made of the first and second contemplations. Before supper the Application of the Senses should be made on the subject matter of the two contemplations. The preparatory prayer, and the preludes, adapted to the subject of the exercise, are always to precede. The form to be observed is the same as that given and explained in the Second Week.

**[205]** As far as age, health, and physical constitution permit the exercitant to do so, he will use five exercises each day, or fewer.

In [290], Ignatius gives us three very simple points to follow:

**First Point:** When the Supper was finished, and after the hymn was sung, Jesus, full of fear, goes forth with His disciples to Mt. Olivet. He left eight of them in

Gethsemane, saying, "Sit you here whilst I go yonder and pray."

**Second Point:** Accompanied by St. Peter, St. James, and St. John, He prays three times to the Father, saying, "My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me, yet not as I will but as thou wilt." "And falling into an agony He prayed the more earnestly."

**Third Point:** So great was the fear that overwhelmed Him that he said: "My soul is sorrowful unto death." And He sweat blood so copiously that St. Luke says, "His sweat became as drops of blood falling down to the ground." This supposes that His garments were saturated with blood.

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As with some of the other contemplations we have considered, Ignatius doesn't give a very detailed contemplation. He gives only the basic steps and then reminds us to follow the same model as we did before: to *see* the people, then to *hear* the people, then to *examine what they are doing*, each time gathering some fruit for my life.

Fr. Ricciotti gives us a good description of the place and the mood to help with our composition of place: "Right after he has recorded the last words of Jesus' prayer, John says: 'After saying these things, Jesus went forth with his disciples beyond the torrent of Cedron, where there was a garden into which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, since Jesus had often met there together with his disciples.' That the chosen garden was 'beyond the torrent of Cedron' is enough to establish it in the vicinity of the Mount of Olives and this is confirmed by the Synoptics, which give us its name as well, Gethsemani. The name "oil press," suggests an olive grove containing a press and perhaps surrounded by a wall.

"It was just a comfortable walk from the Cenacle to Gethsemani. In the crisp spring nighttime, clear and bright with the moon at the full, Jesus and the Apostles descended from the Upper City to the Tyropean, probably down the ancient street of steps, crossed the Siloe quarter, and left the city by the Fountain Gate. Then they began to climb again, in a northerly direction, crossed the Cedron, and reached Gethsemani. The garden probably belonged to some disciple or admirer of Jesus, and that is why he used it so freely. . . . Like other small groves of its kind, Gethsemani must have had a little cabin near the gate that was used as a shelter for the gardener or as a storehouse, and further on there was probably a grotto in the side of the mountain in which (as is still the custom today), was set the oil press which gave its name to the place.

“On that night of the Pasch, the whole region was deserted, since almost everyone stayed at home with his family. And the solitude matched the mood of the little company, for Jesus seemed sad along the way, and so the Apostles were silent and thoughtful. When they reached the garden, Jesus bade his disciples make themselves as comfortable as they could for the night. For [those in the East], this was an easy matter, accustomed as they were to sleep outdoors wrapped in their cloaks, especially since this time there were shelter and dry leaves to be had in the cabin or the grotto.”<sup>1</sup>

This deserted, silent setting, mirrors what is happening in Christ’s soul. Let us now consider the matter of our contemplation.

## **FROM MOUNT ZION TO THE MOUNT OF OLIVES**

When Jesus finished the Supper which was the memorial of His Passion, He said, *“Arise, let us go . . .”* (John 14: 31). The small group crossed the city which was at that hour completely deserted. It was about ten o’clock in the evening. The bright moon, now at its full, gave abundant light. Their walking was slow. They did not have to go far, and Jesus had much to say . . . Just the narrations of the way to the Mount of Olives occupies three chapters in John’s Gospel.

**Two of these chapters contain Jesus’ conversation with his disciples. He told them:**

- *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”* (John 15: 5)
- *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love no man has than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”* (John 15: 12-13)
- *“A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.”* (John 15: 20)
- *“I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”* (John 16: 12-13)

**Then Jesus spoke with the Father. It is the prayer we find in the third chapter:**

- *“He lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”*

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<sup>1</sup> *Life of Christ*, 586-587.

(John 17: 1-3)

## **GETHSEMANE**

As is his custom, Jesus enters the garden with the Apostles. *Gethsemane* means: “oil-press.” It was an enclosed part of the great olive plantation, which covered the whole mountain. Here a press had been installed to crush the olives that have been gathered. The place had plenty of shade. Jesus was accustomed to withdraw to Gethsemane when He needed a secure place to stay. Sometimes He would spend the night there.

At first everything seems to happen as usual, except that Jesus, who normally loves to pray alone, now takes with Him Peter, James and John, his favorite disciples. “Stay here” *he begged them* “and watch with me.” (Mk 14: 34) *He has often spoken of “watching” but He had never said “with me.” Now, Jesus was begging them not just to watch but show to Him mercy.*

Then the crucial moment of the agony begins. An agony that no human being can endure. He does not merely kneel, but He “*falls*” upon his knees, and lies prostrate with His face to the ground. And He weeps with his whole being. Tears pour not only from his eyes but from his whole body in form of drops of blood.

And Christ says, “**My soul is sorrowful even unto death.**” Psalm 54 pre-announced his words, “My heart is troubled within me: and the fear of death is fallen upon me. Fear and trembling are come upon me: and darkness has covered me.” The son of Man has come to take as his own all the burdens of his sons.

***Then, Christ had three painful visions***

***First, his sufferings***

He wants to suffer all that He can, and He uses His omnipotence to increase, not to alleviate, His suffering. He wants to suffer at that moment, what he will suffer afterwards in detail. He sees Himself betrayed, bound, led from tribunal to tribunal, calumniated, denied, spat upon, considered as a fool, worse than the worst of men, scourged, crowned with thorns, nailed to the Cross, and finally dying in an agony of torments. And he suffers now whatever each member of his mystical body will suffer down the centuries, even to the end of the world. ***Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*** He suffers with his martyrs.

He was skinned alive with Bartholomew, sawed in half with Simon, cut limb from limb and left to die of thirst with the Martyrs of Uganda, kept in a cage and

torn by pliers with the Martyrs of Vietnam, beaten to death with Jerzy Popiełuszko, burned alive with Joan of Arc, imprisoned, starved, and tortured with thousands upon thousands of the victims of persecutions, and the list goes on. . . .

He suffers with those who are persecuted for his cause. And we can see that his suffering was greater than ours, because his Heart was infinitely more sensitive than ours, and his knowledge was more penetrating than ours. Then, Christ said, ***“My soul is sorrowful even unto death.”***

### ***Second, the sins of men***

He has come to atone for sin and to destroy its kingdom. *“Behold the Lamb of God, behold him Who takes away the sin of the world”* (Jn 1:29). He came for sinners and He knew, all along, that He must fully satisfy for each and every one of them. Now he is face to face with God’s Justice and Sanctity. His face is crushed to the ground beneath the weight of the almost infinite number of the sins of men. *Who can imagine his horror when He finds His eyes and hands and feet, his heart and soul, as if they were the eyes, hands, feet, heart and soul not of God, but of the evil one.* (Cardinal Newman, *The Interior sufferings of Christ*) And we too, sinners, were present to Him there.

Fulton Sheen explains this well: “It is beyond human power to realize how God felt the opposition of human wills. Perhaps the closest that one can ever come to it is when a parent feels the strangeness of the power of the obstinate will of his children to resist and spurn persuasion, love, hope, or fear of punishment. A power so strong resides in a body so small and a mind so childish; yet it is a faint picture of men when they have willfully sinned. What is sin for the soul but a separate principle of wisdom and happiness working out its own ends, as if there were no God? The Anti-Christ is nothing else but the full unhindered growth of self-will.

As sufferers look to the past and to the future, so the Redeemer looked to the past and to all the sins that had ever been committed. He looked also to the future, to every sin that would be committed until the crack of doom. It was not the past beating of pain that He drew up to the present, but rather every open act of evil and every hidden thought of shame. The sin of Adam was there, when as the head of humanity he lost for all men the heritage of God’s grace. Cain was there, purple in the sheet of his brother’s blood; the abominations of Sodom and Gomorrah were there; the forgetfulness of His own people who fell down before false gods was there; the coarseness of the pagans who had rebelled even against the natural law was there; all sins were there. Sins committed in the city, in the city’s fetid atmosphere of sin. Sins of the young for whom the tender heart of Christ was pierced; sins of the old who should have passed the age of sinning. Sins committed

in the darkness, where it was thought the eyes of God could not pierce. Sins committed in the light that made even the wicked shudder; sins too awful to be mentioned, sins too terrible to name: Sin! Sin! Sin!

Once this pure, sinless mind of Our Savior had brought all of this inquiry of the past upon His soul as if it were His own, He now reached into the future. He saw that His coming into the world with the intent to save men would intensify the hatred of some against God. He saw the betrayals of the future Judases, the sins of heresy that would rend Christ's mystical body. He saw the broken marriage vows, lies, slanders, adulteries, murders, apostasies—all these crimes were thrust into His own hands, as if He Himself had given them birth. Lies and schisms rested on His mind, as if He Himself had conceived them. Blasphemies seemed to be on His lips, as if He had spoken them. From the North, South, East, and West, the foul ocean of the world's sins rushed upon Him like a flood; Samson-like, He reached up and pulled the whole guilt of the world upon Himself as if He were guilty, paying the debt in our name, so that we might once more have access to the Father. He was, so to speak, mentally preparing Himself for the great sacrifice, laying upon His sinless soul the sins of a guilty world. To most men, the burden of sin is as natural as the clothes they wear, but to Him, the touch of that which men take so easily was sheer agony."<sup>2</sup>

Then, Christ said, "*My soul is sorrowful even unto death.*"

### ***Third, the ingratitude of men***

If only He knew that there would be some poor return of love and gratitude from those for whom He was suffering. But, he looks around . . . Where are the Apostles? The main group of the Apostles had remained near the entrance of the garden, and they had forgotten Him. The three special friends, Peter, James and John, were very close. They were close enough to hear the moans of Jesus and to realize his terrible suffering. But they were asleep. Peter and the two sons of Zebedee forsake Him. They were the ones that he had associated with at every important step in his public life and the sharers of His secrets. They were the only witnesses of the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus and the Transfiguration. Jesus had given them a proof of His confidence by allowing them to see His human infirmity. These three forsake Him. They did not understand his grief. Only once in his life Jesus had asked for help, but they would not give it to Him. In the meantime Judas was plotting against Him

### **He looks at all the ages**

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<sup>2</sup> *Life of Christ*, 378-380.

He sees ingratitude and indifference from the overwhelming majority of mankind. Millions will not even know Him; others will reject Him; many, even among friends, will prove ungrateful. We can apply to him the words of the Prophet Isaiah, *"I looked about, and there was no one to help. I sought, and there was none to give aid."* (63: 5) And the words of psalm (29: 10) *"What profit is there in my blood."*

We can think of Christ's words to Saint Margaret Mary: "I feel this ingratitude and contempt from men more than all that I suffered during My Passion. If only they would make Me some return for My Love, I should think but little of all I have done for them and would wish, were it possible, to suffer still more. But the sole return they make for all My eagerness to do them good is to reject Me and treat Me with coldness. Do you at least console Me by supplying for their ingratitude, as far as you are able."

Then, Christ says, ***"My soul is sorrowful even unto death."***

These are the three visions that oppressed the Savior to death. Look at him prostrate on His face. The whole drama is enacted between Jesus and Heaven . . . And now He prays to His Father. He appeals to the tenderness of the Father. *"Abba, Pater, Father."* And he adds, *"All things are possible to you, remove this chalice from me."* But this cry of distress is modified by a condition: *"If it is possible."* *"Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this chalice of sufferings from me; yet not what I will, but what you will."* (Mk 14: 36). "The 'cup' or 'chalice' was a frequent metaphor in rabbinic writings to indicate the lot that fell to a person" (Ricciotti, *Life*, 587).

It is written (Philippians 2:8): *"He became obedient" to the Father "unto death."* His offering was an offering of obedience. He came to fulfill the plan of the Heavenly father, and now, he will accomplish it. In order to heal human race from their disobedience, *his obedience was unto death*, "as by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners: so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just." (Rm 5:19)

We can see this encounter between the superior will of our Lord, determined to suffer and die in obedience to His Father, and his inferior will, seeking to flee from what is so repugnant to nature. In the midst of this conflict, the tormented Heart of Jesus begins to beat with violence. Then, drops of blood fall down. If his Heart does not break, it is because the Omnipotent Will of Christ wants to drink this chalice completely. It is the Passion of the Divine Heart to which we must specially direct our attention in our contemplation of the Agony in the Garden. We are called to contemplate the depth of his sorrow. We are called to contemplate the depth of

his love.

**Colloquy:** With a dialogue I will speak with Him, and renew my petition: sorrow with Christ in sorrow, anguish with Christ in anguish, tears and deep grief because of the great affliction Christ endures for me.

Also, I can reflect on myself and ask . . .

What have I done for Christ?

What am I doing for Christ?

What will I do for Christ?