



DAY 41: Contemplation

AGONY IN GETHSEMANE

Today's exercise is a contemplation on Christ's agony in the garden of Gethsemane, found in #200 in the exercises book. You can notice we're calling them contemplations and not meditations; there's a real difference here, Ignatian contemplations are much more about experiencing the event with all our senses, reaching the fruits we're looking for in a less discursive way. And so the anatomy of these exercises is going to change, and Ignatius leaves some notes and recommendations for how to make them in #204 - 207.

He says that as we go into these exercises we ought to "make an effort to be sad and grieve because of the great sorrow and suffering of Christ our Lord... [we should] take care not to bring up pleasing thoughts, even though they are good and holy, for example, of the Resurrection and glory of heaven. Rather, rouse yourself to sorrow, suffering, and anguish by frequently calling to mind the labors, fatigue, and suffering which Christ our Lord endured." He also then recommends that we make our Particular Examination of Conscience on how well we maintain this recollection of Christ's sufferings.

1. Act of the Presence of God

2. Preparatory Prayer, as in #46

Lord, I ask that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be directed purely to the praise and service of Your Divine Majesty. Amen.

3. Prelude 1: History

Ignatius then gives us a summary of the events of the contemplation in #201. He writes "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."

This is essentially a collation of the four Gospel accounts of this moment, and in light of this, I'll leave you select one of them to read through- Matthew's is maybe the most orderly and detailed, you can find that in Matthew chapter 26, verses 30-56.

4. Prelude 2: Composition of Place



“Consider the way from Mt. Sion to the Valley of Josaphat, likewise the garden, its breadth, its length, and appearance.” We can add some detail to that.

Let’s see the streets that Jesus walked with his disciples- they would have passed near the Temple, then out of the city, on the path down into the Kidron valley. This is the 13th day of the month of Nissan, meaning that the night is cold. We can imagine the look on Our Lord’s face- there would have been joy and gratitude for the great mysteries He had just instituted at the Last Supper, mixed with sadness over the approaching passion. The Kidron Valley is really a small ravine between the temple hill and the mount of olives. It’s scattered with stunted trees. King David trod this same path on his flight from Absalom, in order to retreat into the desert. Finally, see the garden itself. Gethsemane was a farm with an olive grove on the eastern side of Jerusalem, on the western hill of the Mount of Olives. There were old olive trees there, and an olive press.

5. Prelude 3: Petition

Our petition is the one proper to the contemplations of the third week, in which we “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.”

6. Main Points for Meditation

FIRST POINT: This is to see the persons [in the garden,] and to reflect upon myself, and strive to draw some profit from them.

SECOND POINT. This is to listen to their conversation, and likewise seek to draw fruit from it.

THIRD POINT. This is to see what they are doing, and to seek to draw some fruit from it.

FOURTH POINT. This will be to consider what Christ our Lord suffers in His human nature, or according to the passage contemplated, what he desires to suffer. Then I will begin with great effort to strive to grieve, be sad, and weep. In this way I will labor through all the points that follow.

FIFTH POINT. This is to consider how the divinity hides itself; for example, it could destroy its enemies and does not do so, but leaves the most sacred humanity to suffer so cruelly.

SIXTH POINT. This is to consider that Christ suffers all this for my sins, and what I ought to do and suffer for Him.

7. Developing the Main Points

When we consider the Agony in the Garden, we can highlight three particular things- firstly, this is the first moment where Christ’s kenosis, his self-emptying, reaches its maximum intensity.



The other moment will be at the cross. Secondly, we have proof here of the true humanity of Jesus- it all its weakness and susceptibility to pain and suffering. In all the mortal anguish that his soul goes through because of our sin. Thirdly, we have the greatest example of the submission of the human will of Jesus to the Divine will. So we'll look at each of these closely.

Firstly, this aspect of maximal suffering. According to the Gospels this was for several reasons. Firstly, he was abandoned by his friends. Although Peter, James, and John are there with him, they have no idea what is happening and no capacity to empathize with Him. They are tired and troubled, and so they do what most of us would- they take the path of least resistance and sleep. Already in the Last Supper, especially in John's recounting of Jesus' heartfelt discourse to them, the disciples did not understand many of the things that Jesus told them. They murmur, they ask questions at the wrong time, they fail to connect with Christ's intimate revelations about Himself and His mission, and at this moment, even more so.

The first time Jesus returns and finds them sleeping He reproaches them: "Could you not watch with me one hour? Pray that you might not enter into temptation." But they fall right back asleep, and after Jesus turns again to them two more times, he speaks with a sorrowful irony: "Sleep now, take your rest." The opportunity to share with Christ the beginning of His hour, and to be strengthened by prayer to stay with Him, has passed the Apostles by. They will fly when the soldiers come, they will abandon Jesus.

While it is true that John will stand and support Jesus' Mother at the foot of the cross, everyone else will flee, and Peter, the one to whom our Lord had given a special office, and special signs of his friendship and confidence, will deny him outright. The betrayal and abandonment of our friends- how much it wounds us to find that those who professed love for us, in whom we placed our trust, turn away from us in our hour of need.

Generally, it takes much smaller slights than what Jesus suffered to cause resentment and even hatred in us. When we detect the smallest bit of falseness in a friend, instantly a kind of shield comes over our heart. How much more must the abandonment of the Apostles caused the pure heart of Our Lord, which was so capable of self-giving and love, to suffer? When I say delicate I mean sincere, not weak.

Another cause of Our Lord's suffering is the momentary victory of His enemies. The victory of those who oppose us always causes pain, humiliation, a crumbling sense of failure. What we worked for seems to melt away, and how much more so in the case of Jesus, who had worked so intensely to bring human hearts to conversion? Satan and his legions are not ordinary enemies, they do not operate on a purely human level- they oppose God maximally, radically, and they had managed, in this hour, to turn the will of almost every man against Our Lord. Jesus Himself concedes that this hour belongs to them: "This is your hour, and the power of

darkness.” Although Jesus is certainly aware that this victory is temporary, that Easter will soon follow, this does not make His suffering less, because He did not allow Himself to anticipate that- He immersed Himself in the moment of the passion fully.

Second Point: This goes much deeper than the first point. Christ’s pain was maximal in the Garden because it was there that He had a clear vision of His coming sufferings- in essence, in His spirit, He lived out the whole events of the passion beforehand there in Gethsemane. This aligns with what we sometimes experience in our lives- the impending knowledge of physical or moral pain is more intense than the actual experience of it. Christ anticipates everything that the coming hours will hold.

He knew clearly what was about to happen, he had known it since the beginning of His life and had often prophesied about it, but now He wills to experience all the anxiety and pain that it entails. From a psychological and spiritual point of view, this intensified His suffering to an incalculable degree.

Specifically, because as God, He had a clear vision of each and every one of our sins. While his own bodily sufferings were a real cause of grief, He saw our own sins and what they do in us- he saw each sin of every human person in all of human history, and the evil fruit that these actions bore. Not in a homogeneous group. In the singular. **This means that He saw me personally, and all my individual sins, and that a quantifiable part of his grief in that moment was on account of those sins. He saw my ingratitude, my betrayal, and all the times that, despite my Catholic faith, my knowledge of what He did, I decided not to care, and trampled on His love.** When our mind begins to try to envision this, to compile a sense of the weight and gravity of all human sin, we very quickly reach a point where we know our understanding simply can’t do that justice. We can’t even do justice to a billionth part of it. And the real force of that was being pushed completely into the faculties of a human nature. In itself, this involves a sort of miracle- if we were to push the force of all the water flowing through the Hoover Dam into a water bottle the bottle would instantly explode. Christ’s body, His human intellect, was kept from bursting. Blood flowed from His pores, but He was kept from dying.

Another detail that makes Jesus’ suffering so bitter is that, because He is paying for every single sin, he sees how, in many people, this will bear no fruit. Many will use their freedom to persist in sin, and will refuse to repent, and will reject Him for all eternity. **On our part, we can never know what happens to the soul of any individual, even if they seem to die in stubborn unrepentance. It is always possible that God’s mercy work a great miracle of conversion- God is not bound by His sacraments, a soul may receive and accept conversion even as it leaves the body.** That is God’s business. But it is also undeniable, St Matthew and Revelation both confirm this, that there are souls that definitively refuse God’s Mercy. There are souls in Hell. The infinitely powerful God cannot overcome this obstinacy, because He has made man truly



free. He could force our will, but He refuses to do so, because He is interested in our love, and He is also just. **And so it is that he has to look on the uselessness of a great part of His pain. This was a source of extreme bitterness.**

Third point: how here we see the maximal submission of Jesus' human will. Although his human nature recoiled at the pain he was suffering, he freely remained firm. Many times he renewed that choice to fulfill God's will. In the letter to the Hebrews, Paul says that when he entered the world in the Incarnation, Christ said "Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me... Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God.'" Here in the garden we hear him reaffirming this as he says "no my will, but thine be done." **Fidelity in the midst of pain is one of the most challenging things for anyone.**

How can we be faithful to Him in this hour? Let's recall what Ignatius proposes to us: "sorrow with Christ in sorrow." "To consider how He suffers all this for my sins, and what I ought to do to suffer for Him."

Fundamentally, this should lead us to renew our intention to fulfill God's will in all things. In these Exercises, **it is assumed that at this point, you have received many lights from God about His will, that He's been showing you concrete things that He wishes you to leave behind, or take up.** What your dominant defect is, your common sins, your strengths and the virtues you've developed thus far. You've spent time on a reform of life based on these things. Well, the sight of Our Lord here in Gethsemane should lead us to desire to fulfill this plan of life in the most perfect way possible.

One other gem that we can take from this contemplation, though, is the fact that mysteriously, We can console Christ with our good works, our virtues, our attention to Him in prayer. **We can make up in a small way for the Apostles who slept, and for the times that we too have turned away from Him.** If it's true that each time we sin, we reach back in time and add another thorn in Christ's cross, it's also true that each time we resist and remain close to Him, we offer Him consolation in that hour.

Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical "Misericordissimus Redemptor" speaks about this, he says:

"Now if, because of our sins also which were as yet in the future, but were foreseen, the soul of Christ became sorrowful unto death, it cannot be doubted that then, too, already He derived somewhat of solace from our reparation, which was likewise foreseen, when "there appeared to Him an angel from heaven" (Luke xxii, 43), in order that His Heart, oppressed with weariness and anguish, might find consolation. And so even now, in a wondrous yet true manner, we can and ought to console that Most Sacred Heart which is continually wounded by the sins of thankless men."



Jesus sees the good works that we are doing, and trying to do, for love of Him. The acts of mercy, the alms giving, the overcoming of ourselves, the attempts to pray when we are dry. **They lighten his burden. Our reform of life is thus shown to be a matter of love, more than of duty.**

8. Colloquy

Set yourself there with the Apostles, but stay awake, and pray with Christ, and speak to Him, comfort Him, ask for strength to persevere in all the trials that may come. And we can then close with an **Our Father**.