



DAY 46: Contemplation

THE SOLITUDE OF MARY

Today's meditation comes from #298 in the book of the exercises- that exercise is titled "From the Cross to the Sepulchur Inclusive," but what I will focus on in this contemplation is the solitude, the loneliness, of the Virgin Mary after the death of Jesus.

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: Composition of Place

Our first prelude will be a composition of place. The first place where we can go, in imagination, is to Calvary- the darkness is deep now, and the dust is settling from the earthquake. We see the virgin holding the body as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea prepare the improvised cloth stretcher they will use to carry his body to the tomb. We can then see that tomb and Mary as she lays Jesus' body to rest. Certainly she would still be crying, but she never gives herself over to wailing or sobbing, because her energy is still focused on the body of the Lord, and even on those around her. Finally we can see her in the place where she and the other disciples stayed in Jerusalem, waiting. Watch her in the moments where she gathered the others around her and comforted them, watch her in the moments where she drew back to pray and mourn silently.

4. Prelude 2: 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,"** but we can also ask to participate in the **same way in the sorrow of Mary.**

5. Main Points for Meditation (SE #298)

First point: "He was taken down from the cross by Joseph and Nicodemus in the presence of His sorrowful Mother."

Second point: "The body was borne to the sepulcher, and anointed, and buried."

Third point: "Guards were stationed."

6. Developing the Main Points



The moment that we call the pieta, when Mary cradled the limp body of Her son, can hardly be described with words. Who would try to comfort the Mother of God with words? Doubtless, everyone around her was silent.

Jesus, who is the best human son in the history of mankind, did not wish to spare His mother from this pain. There can be only one answer why: He did this for us, so that men might understand the depths and extent of God's love for them, and Mary's love for them.

This is the final stretch of the most painful episode of human history: never has there been so much pain experienced at once: the two holiest persons ever to walk the earth, the persons whose souls are capable of exercising the most love, who are exercising that love to the fullest, are dying before each other- one in His body, the other in Her soul- and both are utterly innocent, they suffer only out of love.

Fulton Sheen says that "No one can tell the griefs that either bore, and no one can tell the holiness that she achieved through sharing, as much as she could as a creature, in His act of redemption... All the fatherless, motherless, sonless, husbandless, and wifeless griefs that ever tore at the hearts of human beings were now bearing down on the soul of Mary. It is hard to lose a son or a daughter, but it is harder to bury Christ. To be motherless is a tragedy but to be Christless is hell."

According to Saint Anselm, if God had not worked a special miracle to preserve her life, Her grief at the cross would have been enough to kill Her. And according to St. Bernardino of Siena, if that sorrow had been divided among all men, it would have been enough to kill every one of us.

Firstly, this was because of her unique capacity to suffer. The capacity to suffer depends on one's capacity to love, for the lover suffers when the beloved suffers. But Mary loves with the love given to her by the grace of divine Maternity, the greatest love ever possessed by a human creature.

Secondly, because she understood the price of Her Immaculate Conception. Mary was conceived without sin, but this happened at a very great cost. Christ had to merit that grace for her, because in justice, she should have received original sin like the rest of the descendants of Adam and Eve. Dionysius the Carthusian has said "Christ suffered all the more for a person, the higher the dignity to which that person has been elevated." Mary knew, when she saw her Son on the cross, that an outsize portion of His suffering was for her. In her humility, she knew she did not merit that in any way- it was a gratuitous gift.

Thirdly, Mary suffered because of all her other children. At the cross she heard the words "Behold, your mother." Here She is, participating to the maximal degree possible for a creature in every aspect of the sufferings of Her Son. And it was in this moment that God chose to make Her the mother of us all- far from being a fruitless pain, God made her sufferings to be the



pangs of birth, wherein she became the mother of every Christian soul, the Mediatrix of all grace. She gave her fiat to Gabriel, and the Incarnation took place, and it was then that we can say she conceived us also, but it is here at Calvary that she now bears us and holds us in her arms. It was in the moment of Her greatest suffering and loss that God entrusted Her a tremendous charge of motherhood- not just to concern herself with Jesus, but to concern Herself in a greater way with every man born of Adam.

It may be that in your most painful moment, God asks you to give yourself for someone else, to assume with Mary the mystery of redemptive suffering, so as to give life to others and help raise them up to be children of God.

We can consider the moments that came after Jesus' burial. Her solitude, while she awaited the Resurrection, has its own aspects. We can recall how, during her whole life, She was sinless, surrounded by sinners. As such, there had been only one human person who could enter into her experience and understand it fully: Jesus. She was now utterly without His human presence for the first time in 33 years.

And so, despite being utterly without Jesus' physical presence, and still experiencing the same darkness He experienced on the cross when He said "My God, why have you abandoned me," we can finish this contemplation imagining Mary, not isolating Herself, not sobbing uncontrollably in an empty room, but remaining that Mother that she is- drying Peter's eyes when he finally had the courage to return to the other disciples. Uniting them in prayer, caressing them and speaking consoling words to calm their frayed and wearied hearts.

7. Colloquy

Place yourself there in that dark room where the disciples are huddled with Mary, sharing Her sorrow, making childlike attempts to console your Mother, and listening to what she says to. Finish with a **Hail Mary**.