



## DAY #17: Contemplation

### THE INCARNATION [101- 109]

**Contemplation - [101]** THE FIRST DAY AND FIRST CONTEMPLATION IS ON THE INCARNATION, AND CONTAINS WITHIN IT THE PREPARATORY PRAYER, 3 PREAMBLES, AND 3 POINTS AND A COLLOQUY.

This contemplation includes the following steps:

1. Place oneself in the presence of God (as we always ought to do, this is first of all a prayer!)
2. Preparatory Prayer (beg God for grace)
3. History (consider the background of the mystery)
4. Composition of Place (a kind of image in the imagination to help us)
5. Petition (the 'form' of the meditation; the 'what' I'm asking for; the 'fruit' I hope to obtain)
6. Three Points (details below)
7. Colloquy
8. Examination of the Meditation (a good practice to conclude every meditation or contemplation)

First, place oneself in the presence of God:

[75] - *I will stand for the space of an **Our Father**, a step or two before the place where I am to meditate or contemplate, and with my mind raised on high, consider that God our Lord beholds me, etc. Then I will make an act of reverence or humility.*

*Preparatory Prayer:*

[46] *The preparatory prayer is to ask grace from God our Lord, that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be purely ordered in the service and praise of His divine majesty.*

Many of the contemplations will now include what St. Ignatius calls a 'history', that is, a brief background of the mystery at hand.

*History:*

**[102] 1st Preamble.** *This will consist in calling to mind the history of the subject I have to contemplate. Here it will be how the Three Divine Persons look down upon the whole expanse or circuit of all the earth, filled with human beings. Since They see that all are going down to hell, They decree in Their eternity that the Second Person should become man to save the human race. So when the fullness of time had come, They send the Angel Gabriel to our Lady. Cf. # 262. [St. Luke 1 26-38; St. Jn 1:1-18]*

See how the rebellion against God spreads. The image of God in man becomes more and more disfigured. “Through one man came sin...” (cf. Rm 5:12) And from sin? Death, particularly the second death. But God, having promised the redeemer (Gen 3:15), who so loves the world (cf. Jn 3:16) now sends the Son to take Flesh. Where is the Lamb? Here He comes.

(Note: it can be good to read Bible on these, during the day, etc. now much more focus on the mysteries of Christ, to see His virtues, to imitate Him)

*Composition of Place:*

**[103] 2nd Preamble.** *This is a mental representation of the place. It will be here to see the great extent of the surface of the earth, inhabited by so many different peoples, and especially to see the house and room of our Lady in the city of Nazareth in the province of Galilee*

*Petition:*

**[104] 3rd Preamble.** *Grace: This is to ask for what I desire. Here it will be for an intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man **for me**, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely.*

**[105] Note.** *Attention must be called to the following point. The **same** preparatory prayer without any change, as was mentioned in the beginning, and the three preludes, with such **changes of form** as the subject demands, are to be made during this Week and during the others that follow.*

I.e. – this is the general “format” we will follow (as we’ve discussing)

## Introductory Points

*Practical Points:*

- In Week 1, our emphasis was more on ‘reform’ (reforming what is *deformed*, my attachments, sins, etc.) We saw how we are creatures, how we are sinners, how great is our need for God.
- Now we go to the idea “**conform**”, that is, to conform our life to our Model, Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, the “light of the world”, “light from light”, who alone “**reveals** man to himself”, who in some way “united Himself with **each** person”. Now we walk with Christ. ““*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.*” (Jn 8:12)
- Notice the change in the grace we are asking for: an intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man **for me**, that I may love Him more and more.

**Christ as Revealer:**

- For this, I have come into the world, to bear **witness** to the truth (Jn 18:37)
- **learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart** (Mt. 11:29)
- Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, **but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son**, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. <sup>3</sup> He is the reflection of God's glory (Heb 1:1-3b)

### The Great Mystery – *we can never exhaust a mystery (it's above us)*

- Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself" (St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Hominis*)
  - God's **love** was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him (1 Jn 4:9)
- **He must, so to speak, enter into him with all his own self, he must "appropriate" and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself.** If this **profound process** takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deep wonder at himself. How precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he "gained so great a Redeemer" (Exultet of Easter), and if God "gave his only Son "in order that man "should not perish but have eternal life" (cf. Jn 3:16). (St. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*)

So this is the **mystery** – the mystery of **God's love** – that we are seeking to penetrate in this (and following) contemplation. St. John writes the following:

*Cf. 1 Jn 1:1-3 "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have **seen with our eyes**, which we have **looked upon and touched with our hands**, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest and we saw it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father, was made manifest to us...that which we have **seen** and **heard** we proclaim to you"*

Now in this meditation, more actually a "contemplation", we too will seek to 'touch' with our hands, see with our eyes, etc. But then we also turn to reflect. Let's not forget this.

### St. Ignatius Points

*Point 1* – To **see** the persons: (think of this like a **picture** of the scene)

[106] This will be to **see** the different persons:

*First, those on the face of the earth, in such great diversity in dress and in manner of acting. Some are white, some black; some at peace, and some at war; some weeping, some laughing; some well, some sick; some coming into the world, and some dying; etc.*

*Secondly, I will see and consider the Three Divine Persons seated on the royal dais or throne of the Divine Majesty. They look down upon the whole surface of the earth, and behold all nations in great blindness, going down to death and descending into hell.*

*Thirdly, I will see our Lady and the angel saluting her.*

*I will **reflect** upon this to draw profit from what I see.*

- People on the earth (diverse: black/white; sick/well, etc.; Romans; ancient tribes; Jews; rich and poor, etc.)
- Divine Persons (looking down)
- Our Lady and the Angel (cf. Luke 1:26)

*Point 2 – to **hear** the persons (this is like a **radio**)*

*[107] This will be to **listen** to what the persons on the face of the earth say, that is, how they speak to one another, swear and blaspheme, etc. I will also hear what the Divine Persons say, that is, "Let us work the redemption of the human race," etc. Then I will listen to what the angel and our Lady say. Finally, I will **reflect** upon all I hear to draw profit from their words.*

- People on earth (swearing, yelling, shouting, selfishness)
- Divine Persons ("let us work redemption of the human race")
  - *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."* (Gen 3:15)
- Our Lady "hail, full of grace"; "fiat" - A fiat created the world; now a fiat opens the new creation of redemption, of the sacraments, etc.
- Ps 12:3 (*their throats were open sepultures, their mouths full of cursing*; 11:3; 118:85)

*Point 3 – to see the **actions** (this is like a scene **movie**)*

*[108] - This will be to consider what the persons on the face of the earth **do**, for example, wound, kill, and go down to hell. Also what the Divine Persons do, namely, work the most holy Incarnation, etc. Likewise, what the Angel and our Lady do; how the Angel carries out his office of ambassador; and how our Lady humbles herself, and offers thanks to the Divine Majesty.*

*Then I shall reflect upon all to draw some fruit from each of these details.*

- People on earth (fighting; killing, going down to hell)
- Ps 53:3 (*not one was good, not even one*)

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### Additional Points

In these three scenarios that St. Ignatius proposes and through which he makes us pass in this meditation, there are several underlying ideas that are very important, which can serve as "lines" of meditation, paths through which each one can enter and walk, meditating, reflecting...

## 1. The Necessity and Novelty of the Incarnation

The first is the "necessity" of a savior, on our part. How God saw that. Man can plunge into sin, but cannot get out of it. "The man" who sins is Adam, but it is also each one of us.

To sin is like jumping into a deep hole in the earth. We can go down, but we cannot get out. It's beyond our power. We need someone to come in and rescue us

Here, then, we can reflect deeply on what would become of us without the Incarnation (of humanity..., of all those we know, and of ourselves—reflect much on this). Without universal salvation, and without personal grace, and without particular graces, left to our own devices, delivered to the dominion of passions... to the dynamic of sin, which does not stop... No, do not think you would have managed... because it is not so, not at all.

Without the Incarnation, we could not even call God "Father." Just to give an idea...

The Word says, "I will descend, even if it costs me my life." How from Creator He has come **to become a creature...**

*Thus newly incarnate:* St. Ignatius wants us to understand and experience the absolute **novelty** of the Incarnation. (It is very easy for us to simply 'take this for granted')

There where nothing could be done, God did everything. And He did it by giving us His Son, and with Him, He gives us everything.

## 2. Interior Knowledge of the Lord Who for Me Became Man...

Here it is about "knowing **..personally**) ..." instead of "knowing ... *about*..." (compare between the **historian** and the family of a historical figure). Knowing Christ much is through the life of prayer and the imitation of His virtues and His life. Because there He makes Himself known to us. (a **real** relationship).

\*Remember – the points are only to help us pray. We aren't here so much to 'study'; we are here to pray.

*That I may **love** Him more and **follow** Him...* which is what we asked for in the meditation on Christ the King: to be able to **follow** Christ. To stop wasting time following ourselves, our projects, ideas, plans,

desires... We cannot direct our lives to heaven unless we follow Christ and imitate Him, because **He is the way**. It is an entire **lifestyle**, a way of **thinking, judging, deciding, and living**.

It is much more than three "tips for living well."

From His Incarnation, Christ is the **model** of our spiritual life. To discover this is to **meditate**:

Virtues of **self-emptying**.

*Who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross (Phil 2)*

Radicality, *self-emptying*... When we speak of the virtues of self-emptying in Christ, we speak properly of virtues. That is, their goodness comes from the free choice of the Lord, and therefore they are an example for us. Otherwise, it would be like setting an angel as an example.

In the Incarnation, in the birth, in the first difficulties and in the last, we speak of **poverty, humility, simplicity, mortification** (cold, need, not being received, etc., etc.). All **difficult** things, all things endured by the Lord with great patience and great love. But here is the key: not only endured, but positively chosen.

That is very powerful. He chose that cold, that poverty, that need, that adversity, to show us the value of things and to give us an example. Let us enter into the heart of Christ in that choice; that is to meditate.

Sometimes we may believe that we imitate the Lord in His poverty because we do not steal, that is, because we do nothing illegitimate to escape a state of poverty or simplicity, greater or lesser, but which we accept anyway as a current condition that comes from circumstances, and little more. Perhaps it is a virtue, but it will be very incipient. Or that we are humble or patient because we do not shout at the one who offends us, but in the same external act there can be an interior act of humility or one of pride (I do not shout so that they do not think I am impatient or proud).

Radicality is fulfilled not in the degree of external imitation, but **internal**: the more we are poor by free **choice**, the more mortified, patient, etc., etc., following the example of Christ, who did not merely endure each of the difficulties and trials of virtue He passed in His life—He **chose** them.

*Overall meaning of life, "life project" of the Incarnate Word? Consider the letter to the Hebrews: Behold, I have come to do your will, O God.*

### 3. The *Fiat* of the Blessed Virgin Mary

In this same line, we can meditate on the "yes" of Mary most holy. On her unconditionality.

If we examine her life from the outside and from the distance of time, it could well be a series of "exceptional situations" that she "would never have imagined" at the moment of giving her yes. Her surprise and distress at the loss of Jesus in the Temple is already a sign.

*The virtues of Mary before the will of God.*

In three moments, that is, when God's will is (or presents itself as):

### 1 – "unknown"? She responds with *humility*

She opens herself to the Word of God, meditates on it, waits for God to show His will. Without conditions, without her own plans. With humility. It is what God looked upon, what pleased Him, and that is why God made her the happiest of women. This is how God works; His plans are never to ruin our lives.

### 2 - "difficult"? She responds by placing **her *trust* in God.**

Difficult to understand, so admirable: Mary has no reservations; she is transparent, crystalline to the love of God. *Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive...* But she loved her virginity. *How can this be, since I do not know man?* She only asked what she needed to know to give her consent. She asks, not because she doubts, but because she is amazed; it is not incredulity that her question manifests but astonishment. And therefore, as St. Thomas observes, she receives an explanatory answer: **"the angel does not repeat the proof to demand belief from incredulity, but rather to remove her astonishment"** (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (III, 30, 4, ad 2).

[2] Ibid. (III,3,1).

### 3 – "scarcely known"? She answers with **prompt *fidelity***

First, she had wondered, then she shows her reserved discretion. But immediately she gives herself. When God's order is clear, she answers with a resounding and immediate "yes". She pronounces her *fiat*. *Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat* (let it be done unto me according to your word). As if to say: My consent is not necessary; I am the handmaid of the Lord, He can dispose of me as He pleases. However, since He wills it, behold the handmaid of the Lord. She is a docile soul.

She proclaims herself a handmaid. She proclaims herself ready to obey the Word. Her response is the response of the whole world, as St. Thomas says: **"At the Annunciation, the consent of the Virgin was awaited in the place of the whole human nature"** (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, III, 3,1). Men and women from all of human history were awaiting this response.

How many virtues! Real, solid, firm, profound, sincere.

The vocation to which God calls her does not free her from difficulties and crosses; rather, it leads her along that royal way. God's grace is not miraculously too free her from difficulties: it inspires her to begin with the "gospel of charity" by visiting Elizabeth, but it does not carry her flying. It makes her see that she will have to be espoused to Joseph knowing her Son is of God, but it does not free her from the possibility of Joseph thinking ill of her except when he must take her into his home...

Let us examine very seriously if in the depths of our heart we place conditions on the unconditional yes we have given. Expressly or in our works, attitudes, etc.

In other words, do I accept God's will without reserve? Or do I ask God to conform His plan to my wishes?

Mary is happier for having accepted the Word in her heart than for receiving Him in her womb. It is not the gifts that God wishes to give us that make us happier and more blessed, but accepting them as He wills, in the soul. To receive His word and fulfill His will.

### Some tips on prayer

Notes on contemplations:

- A contemplation is something **alive**; don't see 'in a distance', but 'enter the scene'. Spiritually we are able to make this present to us. Don't be a stranger. Be part of the mystery. Consider the older paintings with a Dominican or Franciscan at the foot of the Cross. Does this not happen in the Mass? Does this not happen when we read the word of God, something **living and effective**? Do not allow yourself to be bound by space and time, but enter into the mystery.
- See, hear, watch → but also **reflect**, consider. What is happening? Why? This will invariably accompany these other acts. We see more on this in the Nativity.
- Don't worry on struggles; you can come and ask for counsel, share difficulties; we don't "fail" the exercises if we have some early "learning curve". We are all relatively new to this. Also ask God for help during the contemplation!
- The interior senses "open the way", but we don't stop at this level. Let us be open to what God is asking us.

As always, St. Ignatius invites us to conclude with a colloquy:

#### [109] Colloquy

*I will think over what I ought to say the Three Divine Persons, or the eternal Word incarnate, or to His Mother, our Lady. According to the **light** I have received, I will beg for grace to follow and imitate more closely our Lord, who has just become man **for me**. Close with an **Our Father**.*