



DAY 20: Contemplation

THE NATIVITY [110]

Placing Oneself in the Presence of God

Preparatory Prayer:

[46] ...to ask grace of God our Lord, that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be purely ordered to the service and praise of His Divine Majesty.

History:

[111] (Luke 2:1-20)

1st Prelude. The first prelude is the story: here it will be how from Nazareth Our Lady, pregnant almost nine months, as one can devoutly meditate, was seated on a donkey, and Joseph, leading an ox, went to Bethlehem to pay the tax that Caesar imposed on all those lands, no. [264].

Composition of Place:

[112] 2nd Prelude. Seeing the place; here one should, with imaginative sight, see the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem, considering its length, its width, whether it is flat or passes through valleys or hills; also seeing the place or cave of the birth, how large, how small, how low, how high, and how it was arranged. See the house of Nazareth. Joseph receives the order from Caesar Augustus to register in the town of his family, which was Bethlehem, for he was from the family of David, a native of Bethlehem. Caesar Augustus is a sign of how God uses men to accomplish His plans. In Rome, by the Tiber, there is a temple called the "Ara Pacis Augustana." It is a monument erected by that emperor to commemorate that, after so long, Rome had peace on all its borders... He did not know that it was a providential moment, that is, marked by Providence for the Birth of our Peace: "He will be called the Prince of Peace," Isaiah had said: "For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called 'Wonderful Counselor,' 'Mighty God,' 'Everlasting Father,' 'Prince of Peace.' Great is his government, and peace will have no end upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to restore and uphold it with justice and righteousness" (Is 9:5-6). The Letter to the Hebrews presents Melchizedek, King of Salem, as a figure of Christ, that is, "King of Peace" (Heb 6:20).

God was also acting in sending this census because it prepared the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you shall come forth one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient times" (Mi 5:1).

Joseph sets out, and Mary, though not obliged, accompanies him. Here we see the instinct of the Holy Spirit acting on the Virgin. Her pregnancy is very advanced, almost nine months. It seemed imprudent to make such a long journey mounted on a donkey... And yet, she knows that God asks her to go, and she does not hesitate.

Let us consider the journey. The road is about 150 kilometers, taking around four days, and for every good Israelite it was lined with traditional memories. They had to pass through much of Galilee, then through Samaria, and finally part of Judea. How many events had taken place in those lands that Joseph and Mary now saw with new eyes! In those places, Elisha had performed miracles; Jezebel had stained the people with her crimes; on the hills to their left, the hills of Gilboa, Saul and Jonathan had died; in Shechem they had to draw water from the well dug by the patriarch Jacob; they had to pass through Shiloh where the Ark of the Covenant had rested for many years.

It was the rainy season, and although winter was not as harsh as ours, it was still uncomfortable and bothersome.

St. Ignatius wants me to be in contemplation. Let us imagine ourselves as one who voluntarily places himself at their service and accompanies Joseph and Mary, perhaps helping to lead the donkey. Let us look upon these places with Mary's eyes.

Petition:

[113] 3rd Prelude. The third is the same and in the same way as in the previous one [104]. Here we must ask for internal knowledge of the Lord, who became man for me, so that I may love and follow Him more closely.

Body of the Contemplation

[114] 1st Point. The first point is to see the persons, namely, Our Lady, Joseph, the handmaid, and the Child Jesus after His birth, making myself a poor, unworthy little servant, looking at them, contemplating them, and serving them in their needs, as if I were present, with all possible reverence; then reflect upon myself to draw some profit.

[115] 2nd Point. The second: observe and contemplate what they say; and reflecting on myself, draw some profit.

[116] 3rd Point. The third: observe and consider what they do, such as walking and working, so that the Lord is born in utmost poverty, after so many labors, hunger, thirst, heat and cold, injuries and insults, to die on the cross; all this for me; then reflecting, draw some spiritual profit.

Bethlehem

They arrived in Bethlehem. It was a small town, slightly larger than Nazareth, but not by much. Luke sadly says: *There was no room for them in the inn.* The inn was a caravanserai, a place where everyone stayed overnight. When they arrived, it was full. There was no place for Mary, who was about to give birth. Nor was there room in the homes of Joseph's relatives... As John says in the Prologue: *He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him;* Jesus already begins to experience the rejections of grace He will receive from many... even from us. Jesus allows Himself to be rejected... for me.

“When the book of history is complete down to the last temporal word, the saddest line will be the following: ‘There was no room for them.’”

In the most repugnant place in the world, in a stable, Purity was born. He who would later be sacrificed by men acting like beasts, was born among beasts. He who would call Himself “*the bread of life that came down from heaven*” was placed in a manger, precisely the place where cattle eat. Centuries before, the Jews had worshiped the golden calf, and the Greeks the donkey. Men had bowed to these animals as to God. Now the ox and the donkey were present to perform their innocent reparation by bowing before their God.

There was no room in the inn, but there was in the stable. The inn is the place of public opinion, the center of worldly ways, the gathering place of popular and successful people. But the stable is the place of the outcast, the obscure, the forgotten. The world could not have expected that the Son of God would be born—in case He was truly to be born—in an inn. A stable was the last place in the world where He could be expected. **Divinity is found where it is least expected** (Mons. Fulton Sheen). ...And this is precisely why many do not want to believe in Him. Divinity is always found where it is least expected...

Some have suggested a cave that served as shelter for animals, open to the elements but at least with a roof. It was neither beautiful nor comfortable. Joseph would arrange the place as best he could. Let us listen to the conversations of Mary and Joseph. The concerns of the great patriarch; his anguish seeing that he cannot find anything for his wife who is about to give birth to the Son of God. His pains: he was appointed by God as guardian of the Virgin... and cannot secure a place for the birth... Has he failed in his mission? The Virgin encourages him to go to this stable... God has not revealed anything to them, but She senses that the Child has prepared everything to be born in this way, to begin giving example, to begin attracting generous souls who are not afraid or disgusted to assume voluntary poverty and misery...

And while they were there, she gave birth to a son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger. Thus is the birth of God recounted. The delivery was virginal and miraculous, just as the conception of the Son of God was virginal and miraculous. There was no pain nor any similarity to human births.

St. Thomas, following St. Augustine, says that the Child was born of her as light passes through glass, without touching it.

Let us imagine the first contact of the Virgin with the Child. How she must have remembered all the saints of the Old Testament who had longed for that moment.

Let us contemplate the virtues reflected in this mystery: “*If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will know whether my teaching is from God or whether I speak on my own authority*” (Jn 7:17).

- a) **Poverty and extreme poverty:** Though rich, He became poor for us, to enrich us with His poverty, says St. Paul (2 Cor 8:9). Joseph, Mary, and Jesus experienced not just any poverty, but near-misery; for misery is not having a roof even on the day of birth; misery is not having a cradle but an animal feeding trough; misery is not even having a door in the house to shelter from the cold, but only an opening like those in caves.

- b) **Humility**, inseparable companion of poverty. It is humility because this lowering of oneself is voluntary.

“When humility comes from the God-man as happens here, it is obvious that it will be through humility that men will return to God.” Let us reflect on ourselves: our humility, our detachment, our spirit of sacrifice.

The Shepherds and the Angels

St. Luke recounts that while this was happening in the grotto, in the nearby fields, the army of angels appeared to the shepherds tending their flocks and announced the great mystery to them:

“In that region there were shepherds staying out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them: ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is the Christ the Lord; and this shall be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.’ And it came to pass that when the angels had departed from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.’ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw it, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it marveled at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, as it had been told them” (Lk 2:8-20).

Peace to men. Peace has just arrived: the Prince of Peace.

Why to the shepherds?

Because despite being rough and unlearned, they were simple of heart. Through them begins the revelation of the mystery of God’s Coming into the world.

Let us consider the reactions this announcement caused in the shepherds’ hearts; imagine the mixture of fear, surprise, and admiration at seeing an entire army of angels, celestial spirits appearing and singing...

See the shepherds setting out, choosing gifts from the poor things they have at hand. The angels have given them signs that they will find the Child in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes. They understand well: this is a poor child, for they know that is how their own children are born. And so they immediately realize what this mother and child need and bring gifts that are poor but useful: a little lamb, milk, cheese, some sheepskin... They have nothing more, but they also know that a God who chooses a cave to be born wants no more... They are generous, giving all they have.

See the shepherds entering timidly and telling Saint Joseph what they have heard from the angels, and looking with eyes of wonder at God made man: He is no different from their own children; like their infants, He is weak and fragile, eyes closed, very small, hungry, cold... But the angels have told

them that this is God, the angel of Peace, the Creator of the World, the one all men have awaited since the world began. This is He who now directs the course of the stars, who gives permission to the clouds to let rain fall, who directs the winds...

Let us look at the Child with those same eyes... Let us reflect upon ourselves...

Colloquy:

[117] End with a colloquy, as in the previous contemplation, and with a *Pater Noster*.

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.