



DAY #22: Contemplation

THE PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD IN THE TEMPLE [132, 268]

Welcome to day 22 of the Spiritual Exercises online! We continue with Week 2 (the second ‘stage’) of the exercises, with another contemplation on one of the great mysteries in the life of Christ, that of the presentation. As always, our contemplations will follow the same structure:

- 1 – Place oneself in the presence of God [75]
- 2 – Preparatory Prayer (asking God for grace; [46])
- 3 – Composition of Place (a sensible image in imagination related to the meditation at hand)
- 4 – History (this applies more to ‘contemplations’ on the life and mysteries of Christ. Often this will come directly from Sacred Scripture)
- 5 – Petition (the specific grace we are asking for in a particular spiritual exercises)
- 6 – the “Points” (the substance of the meditation)
- 7 – the Colloquy (our conversation with God, Christ, and Mary, depending on the meditation)
- 8 – Examination (after our meditation, sometime can be devoted to seeing how we were in the time of prayer).

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] – I will beg God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions and operations may be directed purely to the praise and service of His Divine Majesty.

Preludes

1 – History - The first Prelude is to call to mind how, forty days after the birth of Jesus, Mary went to the Temple of Jerusalem to fulfil the twofold precept of the Law of Moses-that of her own Purification and of her Son's Presentation to the Lord ; and how Simeon and Anna recognized Him as the long-promised Messiah (You can read the account in its entirety in Luke 2: 22-38).

St. Ignatius divides the account in the following three points:

[268] The Purification of Our Lady and the Presentation of the Child Jesus



First Point - They take the Child Jesus to the temple to be offered as the first-born to the Lord, and they offer for him “a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.”

Second Point - Coming into the temple, Simeon received Him into his arms saying, “Now thou dost dismiss, O Master, thy servant in peace.”

Third Point - Anna “came upon them and gave thanks to God, and spoke of the Child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.”

2 – Composition of Place [103]: This is a mental representation of the place. The second Prelude is to see the road from Bethlehem to the Temple of Jerusalem, and in the Temple, the Women's Court where, it is believed, the mystery took place. It was a square courtyard, 233 feet on each side (for comparison, a football field is 360 feet long). Within it stood four massive lampstands, each 86 feet tall.

It's not that this was a place *only* for women, but it was the farthest point that women could go toward the Temple. This is the place where the 84-year-old prophetess Anna worshiped “with fasting and prayer night and day,” and who became a grateful evangelist when she saw Mary and Joseph with baby Jesus at his dedication

See the many people coming and going, the smell of the burnt offerings and incense, the noise of the animals, the discourses of the teachers of the Law, and, almost unnoticed, Joseph and Mary with the baby Jesus, and Simeon and Anna, old, out of the way, but watching the couple closely.

****3 – Petition/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.

Let us ask light to know intimately my Divine King Who offers Himself to the Father for me, and grace to love Him and be with Him a victim on the altar of God's Will, for my salvation and the salvation of others.

Contemplation: As always, we ought to **see** who is there (picture), **listen** to what they say (radio), and **watch** what they do (movie).

Who is there? Mary, Joseph, Child Jesus, Simeon, Annah

POINTS OF THE MEDITATION

And now follows four points for your consideration. Don't feel you must pass through all of these. The idea is to pray and consider the mystery, but if you find something that draws you, that calls your attention, that invites you to prayer, it can be very helpful to dwell on that thought. As long as you always go through the beginning 'steps' (placing oneself in the presence of God, preparatory prayer, composition of place, consideration of the history, asking for the grace (petition), and conclude with a colloquy, the particular points in the 'body' of the meditation, will vary greatly by each person).

Point 1 – Presentation in the Temple

²² *When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord*²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"),²⁴ *and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."* (Lk 2:22-24)

Where are they? The Temple was the center of the religious and national life of the Jews. It was the great external sign of the indwelling of God in the midst of His people, and the place where the various victims were offered to Him throughout the year. Though at the time of Jesus the Temple could rival neither the splendor nor the sanctity of the one built by Solomon, it was destined to be far more glorious. It was to witness the coming of God, not, as of old, in the shape of a passing cloud enveloping the Tabernacle, but in the form of Man pitching His tent in the midst of men, like one of them... Christ enters the Temple to fulfil whatever the Temple stood for. He is the true Emmanuel, God with us, throwing open to all, by His **sacrifice**, the way to the true Holy of Holies.

Why are they there? Neither Jesus nor Mary were **obliged** to follow these prescriptions. No legal impurity had been contracted by Mary, for she had conceived and given birth virginally; nor did the law of the redemption of the firstborn concern Jesus, the true Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. And yet, three times, in a few verses, emphasis is made that everything was carried out in **strict obedience** to the Law of God.

The Church discovers in this episode a deeper reason. First, the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy: *the Lord whom you seek will come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire* (Mal 3:1). Furthermore, Mary understood that Jesus had to be brought to the Temple, not to be redeemed like other firstborns, **but to be offered to God in true sacrifice**. This is expressed in the Letter to the Hebrews: *When he came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight in. Then I said, 'As is written of me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do your will, O God.'"* (Heb 10:5-7)

What do we see? The great **sacrificial nature** of the Divine King. So far He had been slain in the many victims that were constantly offered in the Temple to appease and propitiate God. Now He comes to renew the oblation He made at the moment of His Incarnation: *"Sacrifices and offerings you have*

not desired, but a body you have prepared for me;⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.⁷ Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God' (Heb 10:5-7)

What do Mary and Joseph **offer**? In their poverty, they may only offer the turtle doves: *⁸ If she cannot afford a sheep, she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement on her behalf, and she shall be clean. (Lv 12:8)*

He is the Priest and the Victim, " the first-born among many brethren," offering Himself to the Father for all of us. That is why Mary need not bring an ordinary lamb with her as an offering. She offers on the altar of God's Will the "Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world ".

Recollection and Modesty of Mary and Joseph

See their happiness, having travelled 6 miles to Jerusalem. Why? Because they have Jesus with them, the one object of their thoughts and their affects. See their conduct in the temple, offering the Child to God.

How do I behave in the house of God? Do I genuflect with intention? Do I act with reverence? Do I place myself in the presence of God? How do I receive Communion? Do I offer to God as Mary and Joseph offered Christ?

The Offering of Mary

The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple could be compared, in a certain way, to the Offertory of the Sacrifice of Calvary, which the Mass would make present at all points in time and space. In the preparation of that sacrifice, as later in its realization on the summit of Golgotha, a special place was reserved for the Mother of Jesus. From the first moments of His earthly life, Jesus associates Mary in the redemptive sacrifice He had come to fulfill.

This participation in the mystery of the Redemption was revealed to the Virgin gradually. The angel of the Annunciation had told her nothing about this, but now it will be communicated to her by the words of Simeon, a righteous and God-fearing old man who had received the revelation from the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Christ of the Lord (Lk 2:26).

The encounter between the Virgin and the old man must have happened before the Nicanor Gate, which gave access to the court of the Israelites. In that place stood one of the priests in charge of attending to the women offering sacrifice for themselves and their children.

Mary, accompanied by Joseph, took her place in line. While awaiting her turn, an event occurred that filled the bystanders with astonishment. A venerable old man approached the line. His face shone with joy. And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, he took Him into his arms and blessed God, saying: *"Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel."* (Lk 2:29-32)

But immediately, that announcement clouded the joy: the Messiah would fulfill His mission through **suffering**; and the Mother was mysteriously associated with the Son's pain. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, His Mother: *"Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted—and you yourself a sword will pierce—so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."* (Lk 2:34-35)

In the light of Simeon's words, she understood—beyond appearances—that Jesus was the true Lamb who would redeem men from their sins. And that She, as Mother, in a way she could not fully comprehend, would be united closely to the fate of her Son.

Point 2 – Simeon receives Jesus in his arms; Anna spreads the good news.

Who are the first followers of the Divine King? The Shepherds, the Magi, and in this mystery, Simeon and Anna all simple and straightforward souls, conscious of their lowliness and spiritual poverty, seeking their salvation only in God and ready to welcome Him in whatever form He chose to appear to them. They may have had their own views and even their own prejudices, but these vanish in the presence of the Divine Child, their King and Savior.

Simeon had waited long for this moment, a just man and devout, one who looked for the consolation of Israel, with the Holy Spirit dwelling with him. "In a poor Child brought by poor people making a poor offering, Simeon discovered the riches of the world." (Sheen, Life of Christ).

With what care do I strive to practice the presence of God? Do I regularly visit the temple where Jesus is ever present in little visits to the Blessed Sacrament? What is the consolation I seek?

See the joy of Simeon, how he praises God when he finally takes the Savior in his arms, the light for revelation, the glory of Israel.

See Anna the widow; she never left the temple, but worshipped with her prayer and fasting, day and night. And now? She becomes an evangelist, praising God and speaking about the child.

Am I willing to **share** the **good news**? Not just in the mission, but on vacation, with my friends and family, with my colleagues and strangers on the plane?

There was a FOCUS missionary once who shared a story; he had a good friend of his who wasn't a Christian. They used to do various things together; the friend knew of his missionary work in the university, but the focus missionary didn't want to 'push him'. One day the friend asked the missionary if Jesus was an important part of his life. The missionary responded that of course He was, that was his goal as a missionary, to bring Christ to others. The friend answered, "**if He's so important to you, why do you never talk to me about Him?**" There of course are a time and place for everything, but at the end of the day, we are called to spread the Gospel. If we are truly friends with Jesus, should not our love of Him spill out into our conversation? Or do we stay superficial in the apostolate, talking only about cars and sports and music, hoping to 'win them over to us' to tell them about Jesus some 'later time'?

Point 3 – The Sign of Contradiction

*Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a **sign that will be opposed**³¹ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."* (Luke 2:34-35)

Is this not what our Lord says later? ³¹ *Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!* ³² *From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three;* ³³ *they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.*" (Lk 12:51-53)

Let us see the clear **choice** that is emerging – to be **with Christ** or **against Him**, there is no other option. There is no 'middle ground'. There is no 'half way'. We are either in or we are out. Here is the ultimate test of life: how do I react to Christ? One cannot serve two masters, they must either serve the world, with riches and temporal happiness, or seek Christ alone in poverty and suffering.

Point 4- Our Own Suffering

The presentation of Jesus Christ touches the bell of our conscience by reminding us how important it is to present ourselves, to offer ourselves to God. This presenting oneself acquires various nuances:

First, the donation we make of ourselves to God by listening to Him, by allowing each day to shape His work in our life. Each soul in particular was created with a purpose, with a concrete mission within God's provident plan, and God wants to speak and manifest Himself in the world, but He needs volunteers.

It also means that the surrender to God passes through the daily sacrifice of fidelity to Christ and to the Church.

Finally, this presentation assures, signs a pact, whose fulfillment will take place at the moment of our definitive embrace with God, when, tired of our pilgrimage on this earth, we can say to God: It was worth betting on you!

It is not the great preachings, nor the great works of apostolate or large-scale projects that elicit true admiration from people. The astonishment comes when behind all that there is a man who lives from God, a man who learned to present and offer himself to God and to others.

Mary Most Holy is an expert in bringing our works to a good port. A free decision and enthusiasm for what we have to do are enough.

Conclude with a 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**.

Recall that the Colloquy is a dialogue. Let us speak with our Lord, with the Triune God, with our Lady, with great reverence, as a friend to another friend, as a servant to a master, opening our hearts with whatever we have seen in the time of meditation. Let us always practice great confidence with our loving God, and listen to what He is calling us to.

Close with an *Our Father*.