



DAY #9 : Meditation

PERSONAL SINS [55–61]

INTRODUCTION

Saint Padre Pío of Pietrelcina said that "The palm of glory is reserved for those who fight with courage until the end. Let us begin then, this year [in these Exercises] our holy battle. God will assist us and crown us with an eternal triumph".

We continue to enter our smallness and misery; the more we do it, the more the Lord will occupy the place that until now our self-love occupied.

We now turn to the meditation on **one's own sins**. Having contemplated sin as it appears in others—the fall of the angels, the sin of Adam and Eve, and the fall of one who is condemned for a single mortal sin—now we must look steadily at **our own sin**.

Saint Ignatius seems to follow the same path as the prophet **Nathan** in the Old Testament. Nathan first narrates to the sinner David an injustice committed by an unknown man, so that David might finally see the gravity and ugliness of his own sin—something he had been blind to. David had walked through a chain of grave sins:

- **sloth**, in refusing to go to battle with his soldiers;
- from that sloth came **distraction of mind**;
- from distraction came **impurity of the eyes**;
- which led him to sin with the wife of one of his soldiers;
- and to cover his guilt, he devised a cruel scheme to have that loyal soldier placed in the fiercest part of the battle and killed.

After the prophet Nathan reveals to David that he is the wicked man of the story,

David answers: "**I have sinned against the Lord.**"



Here the king's repentance begins—expressed most deeply in the **penitential psalms**.

Now, like David, we must hear the prophet's voice addressed to us:

“The sin of the fallen angels, the sin of Adam and Eve, the sin of the condemned man—that sin is yours.”

For this reason, Saint Ignatius now directs us to consider **our own sins**.

[55] The second exercise is the meditation on sins. It contains, after the preparatory prayer and two preludes, five points and a colloquy.

Why is it important to look at one's own sins? Because it belongs to the Christian life: one cannot advance along the way of Christ without turning away from evil and disorder. One must pass through the **purgative way**—the purification of sin. It is demanding and requires ascetic practice and penance.

The masters of the interior life speak of three primary stages:

1. the purgative way (beginners),
2. the illuminative way (proficient),
3. the unitive way (the perfect).

This meditation—and indeed all those of the First Week—belongs to the **purgative** path, the work of purification. It is the “negative” aspect of Christian life, marked by Christ's command: *“Let him deny himself.”* Turning from disorder prepares the soul to follow Christ freely, and so ascend toward union with God, our supreme and first end.

The principal fruit desired from this part of the Exercises is with God's grace to acquire:

- **true repentance**,
- **a total abhorrence** of all sin and disorder,
- and above all, **an intense sorrow** for having been the very subject of such disorder.

Saint Ignatius tells us to use the **memory** to recall all the sins of our life, the *process* of our sins—as though our sins were stitched together along the thread of our personal history. For this reason, this is the moment of the Exercises in which we ought to seriously consider a **general confession** of our whole life, as Saint Ignatius proposes in [44]. A good general confession is the “sacramental fruit” of the First Week. [We should not make the actual examination during our time of meditation. We need to dedicate another moment to this important work. This meditation on our own sins is to see the gravity and ugliness of our own sins, in order to recognize how much mercy God has shown me up to now, and thus be moved to make some generous change in my life.]

Now let us see how Saint Ignatius presents the meditation.



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 ordered purely to the service and praise of His Divine Majesty»

Composition of Place as before:

“To see with the imaginative sight my soul as imprisoned in this corruptible body, and myself as a whole cast into this valley among brute beasts—this composite of soul and body.”

Petition :

In this meditation the request is no longer merely shame and confusion, but: **a deep and intense sorrow for my sins, even to tears, if God so grants.**

Ignatius knows this is grace. One may recall sin without repenting; therefore, he urges us to beg for the **gift of tears**—not sentimentality, but the spiritual grace by which the heart melts in compunction.

Tradition tells that Saint Peter’s constant tears over his denials carved furrows into his face; the crowing of a rooster tormented him his whole life.

Let us ask for this sorrow and these tears.

POINTS FOR THE MEDITATION

1. The Process of My Sins – [56]

***“The first point is the process of sins: to call to memory all the sins of my life, year by year or period by period. Three things help:

1. the places and houses where I lived;
2. the dealings and conversations I had with others;
3. the occupations in which I spent my life.”**

This point must be done deeply—not stuck in the mere material details of sins, which can disturb a scrupulous conscience or excite an indifferent one. Rather, look at sin in its **essence**—as distance from God, as breach of His love.

This is not bookkeeping: it is a **lament over loss**, a realization of how often I departed from the Lord who loved me.

Augustine recounts:



“A high consideration drew up out of the depths all my misery before the eyes of my heart, and a storm broke within me with a flood of tears... I fled to solitude, and under a fig tree let my tears flow like a sacrifice to You.”

We need not fear looking at our misery, for when we accuse ourselves, God shields us.

2. Weighing the Sins – [57]

“The second point is to weigh the sins, considering the foulness and malice that every mortal sin has in itself, even if it were not forbidden.”

Sin is terrifying in itself—the “mystery of iniquity” of which Saint Paul speaks.

Psalm 51: *“My sin is always before me; against You, You alone have I sinned.”*

We must not hide filth under the carpet but place it before us so that sorrow may awaken.

Saint John Chrysostom knew that the only thing truly to be feared is sin. When the emperor asked what harm could be done to him, one courtier said:

*“Exile? The whole world is his homeland.
Chains? He will kiss them.
Confiscation? You take from the poor.
Death? You open heaven to him.
If you wish to harm him, force him to commit a sin—this alone he fears.”*

So we too must fear sin alone.

3. To Consider Who I Am – [58]

“The third point: to consider who I am, diminishing myself by examples...”

We are fleeting, small, easily forgotten. We often place ourselves at the center of the universe, yet a walk through a cemetery teaches otherwise. How few even know the names of their great-grandparents.

We are “nothing but sin,” says Augustine. As Christians, our sin makes us a wound in the Body of Christ—a diseased member harming the whole.

And yet I live. The infinite Majesty, who cast down the angels, has not crushed me.

This humility is essential before God.



4. To Consider Who God Is – [59]

“The fourth point: to consider who God is, against whom I have sinned, comparing His attributes with their contraries in me.”

His **Wisdom**—my ignorance.

His **Omnipotence**—my frailty.

His **Justice**—my iniquity.

His **Goodness**—my malice.

God knows all my sins, abhors them—and still has not destroyed me. Saint John Paul II said: “*We cannot grasp the evil of sin without plumbing the depths of God.*”

Saint Teresa of Jesus adds:

“*We never finish knowing ourselves if we do not seek to know God. Looking at His greatness, we see our lowliness; looking at His purity, we see our filth.*”

This comparison gives rise to a holy astonishment.

5. Admiration for God’s Mercy – [60]

“The fifth point: an admiring exclamation with deep affection, considering how all creatures have left me in life and preserved me...”

Angels, instruments of divine justice, have endured and protected me.

The saints have interceded for me.

The heavens, earth, animals, and all creation have not swallowed me, nor opened new hells for me—though justice might have demanded it.

All of this reveals **God’s infinite mercy**. The last word of these meditations is **never sin**, but **mercy**.

Colloquy – [61]

Saint Ignatius directs us to end with a **colloquy of mercy**:

“**Reasoning and giving thanks to God our Lord, who has given me life until now, proposing amendment with His grace for the future. And then the Our Father.**”

Speak with the Lord as a friend speaks with a friend:

Lay before the Crucified all your sins with humility, confusion, and tears—but with boundless trust in His mercy. Ask Him to cleanse you in His redeeming Blood.

Let your lips, mind, memory, and heart—each wounded by sin—sing forever the mercy of the Lord.

Ignatius then proposes the **triple colloquy**:



1st Colloquy – to Our Lady

To obtain from her Son:

1. an inner knowledge of my sins and hatred for them;
2. a sense of the disorder of my actions, that I may detest and correct them;
3. knowledge of the world, that I may reject its vanities.

Conclude with a **Hail Mary**.

2nd Colloquy – to the Son

To obtain these graces from the Father.

Conclude with the **Anima Christi**.

3rd Colloquy – to the Father

To ask that the Eternal Lord Himself grant these graces.

Conclude with the **Our Father**.