



## DAY 30: Meditation

### THREE WAYS OF HUMILITY [164]

In the book of the Spiritual Exercises, in number 164, Saint Ignatius says that before entering into elections, in order that a person may be rightly affected—that is, disposed to choose, desire, and will rightly, and not to cling to a false doctrine—it is very helpful to consider and reflect upon the following three ways of humility. And by considering them at intervals throughout the day, and likewise by making other colloquies, as will be explained later, this meditation on the Three Ways of Humility, as Saint Ignatius calls it, is the third test aimed at completing our disposition for discernment, which leads to elections and to everything that concerns our reform of life, or the choice of what we must do in order to fulfill the divine will.

The meditation on the Two Standards was the first examination: we examined the authenticity of our faith, or of reason elevated by faith, by considering the intention of Christ our Lord and, on the contrary, that of the enemy of our human nature. We truly tested that lucidity in order to realize who is speaking to us, who is suggesting, who is moving us—whether it is the demon or the true Captain, who is Christ.

In the meditation on the Three Classes of Men, the second examination, we discovered how free our will is from disordered attachments, so as to be able to seek rightly and sincerely the path that the Lord places in our heart, and thus to attain that indifference with which the Exercises of Saint Ignatius begin.

Now, in this meditation on the Three Ways of Humility, the third and final examination, we will measure the temperature of the heart and ask for the grace to increase our affection, our love for the person of Jesus, for his program of life, for his arduous path: poverty, hunger, thirst, insults, humiliations, even unto death on the cross, as Saint Ignatius tells us in number 116 of his Exercises, in which we made the contemplation of the Nativity. There it is said: not to die on the cross, but to die with us.

Love, then, will impel us to desire to imitate him, follow him, and serve him in crucifying and crucified submission. The love of Christ urges us, presses us—says Saint Paul in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 14—to identify ourselves in this way with Jesus. It is not enough to have an intellect enlightened by evangelical values, which is what we saw in the Two Standards, nor a will free from disordered affections, as in the Three Classes of Men; there is needed such an attraction that it draws the purpose and determination to make ourselves conformed to Christ. As the First Letter of Saint John says, chapter 2: “Whoever claims to abide in God must live as Christ lived.”

### PREPARATORY ACTS

To place oneself in the presence of God

To offer Him all my thoughts, my affections, volitions, acts, my dryness, and struggles, so as to give the greatest glory to God and to be converted and save my soul.

**Preparatory Prayer:**

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

**1st Prelude: Composition of Place**

It may be the same as that which we saw in the meditation on the Three Classes of Men: to see myself before God and all the Saints, in order there to inquire what God wants, in this case to see how much I love God and to aspire to the third way of humility, which in reality would be the third way of loving God, the third way of holiness.

**2nd Prelude: Petition**

[168] Thus, for one who desires to attain this third humility, it is very helpful to make the three colloquies of the aforesaid Three Classes of Men, asking that the Lord our God may be pleased to choose him in this third, greater and better humility, in order more to imitate and serve Him, provided that equal or greater service and praise are rendered to His Divine Majesty.

What is asked for here is the desire of the heart to be another Christ. Even if I were to see that I would give Him the same glory by doing other lesser things, I would choose the way that makes me resemble Christ more.

“Grant me the grace to desire to imitate You in the most perfect way.”

**BODY OF THE MEDITATION****1. THREE WAYS OF HUMILITY**

The word humility is generally used by us solely in reference to the moral virtue of humility, but here it means holiness; it means love of God. Three ways of humility, as Saint Ignatius himself has expressed on other occasions, means three degrees of authentic will, of true love of God. This meditation is like a specification of the Third Class of Men. They are three degrees of love that the authentic will of the Third Class can attain: three attitudes toward sin and grace, toward the will of God and toward holiness.

One commentator attempts to explain this theme by saying the following:

“Saint Ignatius uses this term humility in the more medieval sense given by Saint Thomas and Saint Bernard, as subjection and subordination to God, without rising above what is determined by the divine rule. It is the perfect renunciation of all self-determination,” says Father La Palma; “it is indifference in its fullest sense, seen in the light of love. It is an interior attitude of the soul. Saint Ignatius seeks to show the soul what the interior dispositions must be before entering into the elections, and what must be the signs that the love of God, which has been kindled in the Exercises,

is a true love—one that reaches not only the person, but everything that refers to the Lord, even if it is displeasing to nature. These considerations tend toward the ordering of the heart, so that the exercitant does not draw back at the decisive moment if he finds himself compelled to choose something that repels him. It is a matter of planting in the heart such an attraction toward Jesus Christ that it is capable of counterbalancing the force of repugnances,” that is, the rejections of the flesh toward the cross, toward difficulty. Such a degree of love for Jesus Christ that it becomes possible to resist those difficulties posed by our horror of suffering.

They are therefore three degrees or ways of loving God, which are put to the test through freely accepted humiliations, or at least through the disposition to accept them. Viewing things from this perspective helps us examine the quality of love that we in fact have for God at this moment, and to improve it as much as we can.

The key question, therefore, is the following, and this meditation will answer it: With what quality of love do I love God?

#### ***First Kind of Humility***

**[165]** *“The first way of humility is necessary for eternal salvation; It consists in this, that as far as possible I so subject and humble myself as to obey the law of God our Lord in all things, so that not even were I made lord of all creation, or to save my life here on earth, would I consent to violate a commandment, whether divine or human, that binds me under pain of mortal sin.”*

This is the minimum humility, the one necessary in order to be saved. If I do not have this degree of humility, I cannot even be saved. It consists in total obedience to the law of God—that is, in keeping all the commandments in such a way that, even if I were made owner of all the created things in the world, or even if I were threatened with the loss of my life, I would not even consider the possibility of breaking a commandment, whether divine or human, that would lead me to mortal sin. Therefore, this first degree consists in two things: first, seeking holiness; second, not deliberating—not even beginning to think—about committing a mortal sin.

One author has called this first way fundamental love. What we are saying is that it consists in the fulfillment of all the commandments of God. One would have to say, “How striking! The majority of Christians do not even have the first degree of humility...” How many people go to confession? How many sins there are in the world! How much hatred, resentment, lack of restraint, revenge, pornography, lies...! And how many confessions does one see? How little God is loved... “Love is not loved,” Saint Francis would cry out in the streets. Not even the first degree of humility...

In the Gospel (Mt 22:39–40), when they ask Jesus Christ, “Lord, what is the most important thing to do?” He tells them: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” That is, your salvation depends on this. If you do not fulfill this, you cannot be saved.

This love of God is very important, but it only closes the mouth of hell and opens the gates of purgatory. Therefore, the essence of this first degree of humility is fidelity to God. It is the minimum that is asked.

### ***Second Kind of Humility***

**[166]** *“This is more perfect than the first. I possess it if my attitude of mind is such that I neither desire nor am I inclined to have riches rather than poverty, to seek honor rather than dishonor, to desire a long life rather than a short life, provided only in either alternative I would promote equally the service of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul. Besides this indifference, this second kind of humility supposes that not for all creation, nor to save my life, would I consent to commit a venial sin.”*

This is the humility of one who neither desires nor inclines more toward riches than poverty, honor than dishonor, long life than short life, as long as God is served. First, there is this indifference; and at the same time, the decision not even to consider the possibility of committing a venial sin, even if I were made king of all creation, or even if I were threatened with the loss of my life.

Therefore, this second degree has two aspects. The first is this affective indifference toward all temporal things. The second is the firm disposition not even to deliberate about committing any venial sin. This degree evidently implies a much deeper love. In fact, it corresponds to a delicate and free love, which always chooses what pleases God most and which truly loves one’s neighbor. What is proper to this degree is the indifference or interior freedom proper to the Third Class of Men. This degree far surpasses the previous one. It avoids venial sin, and if the first closed the mouth of hell, this one opens the gate of Heaven. This degree is not absolutely necessary for salvation, but without it there is no true aspiration to holiness.

To want to be holy, it is not enough to say, “I am willing not to commit any mortal sin.” That is simply not wanting to be condemned. In order to be holy, one must be able to say sincerely, “I am striving not to commit any deliberate venial sin.” This is the degree necessary to be holy, but it is also the degree necessary to avoid living a mediocre life, because with the previous degree one can still be mediocre. And that is a dangerous life, where the boundary of mortal sin is very close. In this second degree, holiness begins.

### ***Third Kind of Humility***

This is the most perfect humility, says Saint Ignatius. It is attained when, including the first and the second, the person—being clear that in no way does he want to commit a mortal sin, and being clear that in no way does he want to commit any venial sin, and being indifferent—goes further. In this way of humility, even when the glory given to God would be the same, the person wants to choose that which makes him more like Jesus Christ. For this reason, Saint Ignatius says:

**[167]** *“This is the most perfect kind of humility. It consists in this. If we suppose the first and second kind attained, then whenever the praise and glory of the Divine Majesty would be equally served, in order to imitate and be in reality more like Christ our Lord, I desire and choose poverty with Christ poor, rather than*

*riches; insults with Christ loaded with them, rather than honors; I desire to be accounted as worthless and a fool for Christ, rather than to be esteemed as wise and prudent in this world. So Christ was treated before me.”*

Thus, the essence of this third degree is the love of identification. It is proper to the saints whom the Church has canonized. It is the folly of the Cross. It is radical love. Jesus Christ invited us to this: “If anyone serves me, let him follow me; and where I am, there my servant will be also. If anyone serves me, my Father will honor him.” He will be where I am—and He is on the Cross.

If the first degree closed the mouth of hell, and if the second, so to speak, closed the mouth of purgatory and opened the gate of Heaven, this third degree looks neither at hell, nor at purgatory, nor at Heaven. It looks only at Jesus Christ crucified.

This is the humility—or holiness—of a Saint Paul, when he tells us: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself over to death for me” (Gal 2:20).

This is the choice that Saint Ignatius already hinted at when he tells us to “choose poverty with Christ poor rather than riches; reproaches with Christ full of them rather than honors; to desire more to be regarded as foolish and insane for Christ, who was first held to be such, than to be considered wise or prudent in this world.” This petition can only be the result of a passionate love for the Lord.

It is not possible to be a companion of Jesus without sharing in his madness. His “madness” is to think about things as he thought about them; it is an overturning of the world’s criteria. That is why the personality of Christ in this world is madness. The Beatitudes (Mt 5:1–8) are complete madness for the world. The issue here is not “being regarded” as such, but having that same vision, even if that vision does not fit into this world.

This kind of humility is nothing other than embracing the Gospel without reductions or dilution. This scandalizes the world to such an extent that we are even persecuted for being “dangerous” to humanity. A person who today preaches marital fidelity and purity is considered someone who is “endangering” the development of the personality, because the world is convinced that in order to develop personally one must wallow in sex. For that reason (according to them), such preaching is something dangerous, something that “castrates people,” makes them hysterical, and gives them complexes. Many people are very afraid of being told this, and so they give in and keep silent. Some live these truths quietly. The “madmen” do not; the madmen do not keep silent. Christ did not keep silent; Christ spoke. That is why the madman is a companion of Christ also when he is preaching. This is why what Saint Ignatius proposes is so strong: it is not merely “being considered a madman”; here it is almost “being mad”—[mad for Christ]. He was considered mad; the Gospel says it several times.

We should therefore examine ourselves in love. Let us ask some questions about our past. Can I say that I have made sincere efforts in my life to know and love Jesus Christ? Can I say that I have had



true enthusiasm—that is, not merely a feeling, but an enthusiasm that led me to do something? Have I ever done anything in my life to become more like Jesus Christ? Have I renounced something truly valuable that cost me something, for Jesus Christ? Have I ever really risked myself for something that implied madness in the eyes of this world?

And in the present? Am I truly convinced of the need to be mad for Jesus Christ? Am I convinced and determined to do some madness for Jesus Christ? Am I willing to lose what I have for Jesus Christ? Am I willing to give my life to Jesus Christ? For love of Jesus Christ, and given that I could give Him the same glory, am I willing to choose what makes me more like Jesus Christ, even if it brings me humiliations and demands detachment? The answers to these questions—and to many others that each of us may ask—can be very revealing of where we stand in the spiritual life.

## **CONCLUDING ACTS**

### *Colloquy*

This meditation may again be concluded with the three colloquies of the meditations on the Two Standards and the Three Classes of Men. The first is addressed to Our Lady, asking her for the grace (which no one deserves), and ending with a Hail Mary. Then one asks Jesus Christ Himself to obtain this grace for us from His Father, ending with the Anima Christi. Finally, a colloquy with God the Father, asking Him directly to grant us this grace, and ending with the Our Father.