



DAY #50

CONTEMPLATION TO ATTAIN LOVE [230-237]

Dear retreatants, we have arrived at the final meditation of the Spiritual Exercises which St. Ignatius proposes on this path of conversion toward union with God. It is a contemplation, entitled "Contemplation to Attain Love." It is found beginning at number 230 of the book of the Spiritual Exercises. As always, let us begin with prayer:

Our Father...Hail Mary...Glory be...St. Ignatius, pray for us.

The *Contemplation to Attain Love* is a most sublime considerations of God's love, the **love God has for each one of us**, so that we may be awakened in **love toward Him**.

St. Ignatius knew, as St. Thomas Aquinas taught, that nothing moves a man to love as much as discovering himself to be loved by someone. Here, it is about discovering with the eyes of faith, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the mystery of the infinite love God has for us, so that we may be moved to love Him with our whole being.

An originality of this contemplation of St. Ignatius is that he places, before the preludes, two notes—two very, very important truths that are the key to understanding the dynamic of the exercise, the dynamic of the contemplation. They serve as the foundation of the contemplation.

[230] Note: *Before presenting this exercise it will be good to call attention to two points:*
1- *The first is that love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than in words.*

The first of these notes is that the saint says "love," we must note this, take note that **love** is shown more in **deeds** than in **words**. In other words, authentic love, the love that actually counts, consists not so much in *saying* words of love, but in *performing* deeds.

If we pay attention throughout the Exercises, St. Ignatius has been having us practice this principle, because until now he has said few words about love; in fact he has said little about love itself. It is as if he saved the contemplation of love for this moment in which the soul is presumably more purified from disordered attachments and more filled with the spirit of God, so that by contemplating and speaking of God's love, we do not devalue it in some way. It is that the word *love*, nowadays—and apparently from what the saint says, something proper to all times—is rather devalued. So many things are called love, that are often **selfishness**, rather than **true love**. It is as if now, after having us perform many *acts of love* (for example, mourning our sins is an act of love, it is the love that grieves for having offended someone who loves us so much as God does) now he speaks to us of what love is. He has had us, notice, **contemplate Christ to fall more in love with Him** and be encouraged to follow Him. He has asked me to progressively surrender my whole being to Christ—a gift of my being, an oblation, the oblation of the Kingdom. He has been asking me to love Him with a will of the **third degree** (*tercer binario; third class of man*), that is, with a will truly effective in realizing His will in my life. He has encouraged me to follow Him with the *third kind of humility*, which is that which is capable of suffering with Christ solely for the sake of being with Him, of imitating Him more, of uniting ourselves

more to Him. He made us perform many acts of love, and only now does He speak to us of what love is. And He tells us that love must be shown more in deeds than in words.

As St. John said in his first letter: "*My little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth*" (1 Jn 3:18).

However, there is one more thing to say about this first note, so profound and fruitful for our soul, which St. Ignatius gives us: we must not be confused. The intention with which he places this warning is not only for us to decide to love God not just with purposes that remain in words, **but with true holiness**, which is put into practice. That is also part of the goal. But we would remain halfway if we only saw it that way. It is about us learning this principle that love is shown more in deeds than in words, because it is a principle that will serve us to discover how much God loves us, the infinite love God has for us. For while it is true that God—though many may not believe it—has spoken to us many, most beautiful words of love, if we read and meditated more on the Word of God, Sacred Scripture, we would encounter the multitude of most beautiful words of love God has spoken to us men—the most beautiful of the most beautiful pages ever written. Think of the parable of the Prodigal Son, or of all that God says to His people through the prophets. So many words of love.

Nevertheless, the infinite love God has for us we discover above all in the **deeds** He has done for us. By contemplating the **works of love** He has done for us, St. Ignatius wants us to discover, to realize, for the veil to fall from our eyes and we discover that truth so transforming of our soul, which fills us with such joy, which so overwhelms us: to realize that we have a God who loves us in a personal and infinite way. That is the first note.

2 - [231] *The **second** is that love consists in a **mutual sharing of goods**, for example, the lover gives and shares with the beloved what he possesses, or something of that which he has or is able to give; and vice versa, the beloved shares with the lover. Hence, if one has knowledge, he shares it with the one who does not possess it; and so also if one has honors, or riches. Thus, one always **gives** to the other.*

This is true love—**love of benevolence**.

On the contrary, if I want a thing, a person, selfishly only for the pleasure they give me, and I am not willing to sacrifice for them, then that love is only **concupiscent love** (i.e. a “selfish love”) These two notes about what true love is are **very important** to help us realize that God’s love toward us is **true love**—and therefore, our love for Him must be the same.

*Having loved his own who were in the world, he **loved them to the end*** (Jn 13:1b)

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us (Rm 5:8)

*We **love** because **he first loved us*** (1 Jn 4:19)

*For the **love of Christ** urges us on* (2 Cor 5:14)

*How can I **repay** the Lord
for all the great good done for me?*



¹³ I will **raise the cup of salvation**
and call on the name of the Lord.

¹⁴ I will **pay my vows** to the Lord
in the presence of all his people. (Ps 116:12-14)

(cf. JP2, the “law of the gift”; cf. **Jn 12:24-25** (*Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.* ²⁵ *Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*))

PRELUDES

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.*

[232] **FIRST PRELUDE** - *This is the representation of the place, which here is to behold myself standing in the presence of God our Lord and of His angels and saints, who intercede for me.*

[233] **SECOND PRELUDE: The petition:** *This is to ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for an intimate **knowledge** of the many blessings received, that filled with **gratitude** for all, I may in **all things love and serve** the Divine Majesty. –*

In other words, I ask for **knowledge**, to obtain **gratitude**, and thus be moved to **love** (internal sentiments of will) and **serve** (the love expressed in action).

In this exercise, Saint Ignatius will have us review God’s benevolence towards man under **four aspects**, each offering a new insight into the divine goodness and calling forth a corresponding love in me.

POINTS

[234] **FIRST POINT** - *This is to recall to mind the blessings of **creation and redemption**, and the **special favors** I have received. I will ponder with great affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much He has given me of what He possesses, and finally, how much, as far as He can, the same Lord desires to give Himself to me according to His divine decrees.*

*Then I will **reflect upon myself**, and consider, according to all **reason and justice**, what I **ought to offer the Divine Majesty**, that is, all I possess and myself with it. Thus, as one would do who is moved by great feeling, I will make this offering of myself:*

TAKE, LORD, AND RECEIVE

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To You, O Lord, I return it. All is Yours, dispose of it wholly according to Your will. Give me Your love and Your grace, for this is sufficient for me.

This is one of the most beautiful prayers of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The **total gift of self**. The ultimate vocation of man. We are not made to “not break rules”. But to live totally for the Other. For God.

St. Anthony Mary Claret, when giving this meditation on one occasion, added an exercise within it that may be useful to you. I will read it to you. He said: consider a little, seeing that the love of God is creative, gratuitous, therefore something that springs from Him and He is eternal... Trying to represent to ourselves *the eternity of the love with which God loves us*. And so he says the following in this first point of considering how God has loved me with the goods He has given me. He says:

Just as God has never had a beginning, but has always existed in Himself, so His goodness and love for you, my soul, has had no beginning and is as ancient as God Himself. This is eternal. Go with your thought to times past, two thousand years ago, and tell me, what were you then, my soul, what were you? A nothing, a mere nothing. And what was God doing then? He loved you, and with that same ardor that afterward led Him to shed His blood for you. Conceive now a time before the creation of the world, when only the Most Holy Trinity was. And tell me again, my soul, what was there then? Nothing, absolutely nothing: no heaven, no earth, no angels, no men, nothing, pure nothing. And then God, what was He occupied with? He was occupied in loving you, and He loved you so much that for your love He created heaven and earth. This one (earth) to serve as your dwelling in this brief life, that one (heaven) so you might reign eternally in the other. Go even further back, my soul, with your thought, and plunge into the preceding eternity as much as you can. And tell me, what was there then? Nothing, except God alone, infinitely glorious and infinitely blessed in and by Himself. And what was His occupation in that immense eternity? It was, if you do not know, loving you. And there was not a moment when He did not think of you and was determined to will to die for you and to will to make you a participant in all His goods, all His riches, and all His happiness forever and eternally. What a prodigy of goodness and love this is!

Well, and so then, just as it was negatively in the consideration of our own sins, here in this first point, positively, seeing how much God has given us—which often only God knows and we only in part, often others do not know—it is we who have to provide the material for this first point of the exercise.

EXAMPLE OF GRATITUDE

Saint Bernadette viewed her life in simple thanksgiving for everything. Her **will** is an extraordinary thanksgiving. In her words:

Thank you Lord...

For the poverty in which my mother and father lived, for the failure of the mill, all the hard times, for the terrible sheep, for constant fatigue, thank you, my God!

For lips, which I fed too much, for the dirty noses of the children, for the guarded sheep, thank you!

Thank You, my God, [after the apparition] for the prosecutor and the police commissioner, for the policemen and for the harsh words of Father Peyramale!

For the days You came, Mary, for the days when You did not come - I will never be able to thank You ... only in paradise.

For the slap in the face, for the ridicule, the insults, and for those who suspected me of trying to extract a merit, thank You, OLV.

For my spelling, which I never learned, for the memory I never had, for my ignorance and for my stupidity, thank You.

For the fact that my mother died so far away from me, for the pain I felt when my father, instead of hugging his little Bernadette, called me "Sister Marie-Bernard," thank You, Jesus.

I thank You for the heart You gave me, so soft and sensitive, and which You filled with bitterness.

For the Mother Superior's proclamation that I was good for nothing, thank You. For the Mother Superior's sarcasm: her harsh voice, the injustice she did me, her irony and for the bread of humiliation, thank You.

Thank You that I was the privileged one when the time came to be rebuked so that my fellow sisters said, "How lucky I am not Bernadette."

Thank You for the fact that it was I who was threatened with imprisonment for seeing You, Blessed Virgin; considered by people to be a rare animal; that Bernadette who was so miserable that at the sight of her it was said, "Is that it? Is that all?"

For this wretched body You have given me, for this burning and suffocating disease, for my rotting tissues, for my decalcified bones, for my sweat, for my fever, for my drowsiness and for my acute pains, thank You, my God.

And for this soul You have given me, for the desert of inner dryness, for Your night and the lightning, for Your silences and Your thunders, for everything.

For You - the times You were present and when You were not - thank You, Jesus

[235] SECOND POINT: *This is to reflect how God dwells in creatures: in the elements giving them existence, in the plants giving them life, in the animals conferring upon them sensation, in man bestowing understanding. So, He dwells in me and gives me being, life, sensation, intelligence; and makes a temple of me, since I am created in the likeness and image of the Divine Majesty.*

Then I will reflect upon myself again in the manner stated in the first point, or in some other way that may seem better. The same should be observed with regard to each of the points given below.

This is a "higher plane". God not only gives me so many **gifts**, but He "**dwells** in the creatures" (giving existence, being, etc.) → A **corresponding** desire should be **educated** in me → to " **dwell**" so to say in all that I have and do; the idea of "giving myself" along with my acts, to "put my heart into it" so to say. This is an intensification of generosity, to give **more** (recall yesterday we said to give what we can).

236. THIRD POINT: *This is to consider how God works and labors for me in all creatures upon the face of the earth, that is, He conducts Himself as one who labors. Thus, in the heavens, the elements, the plants, the fruits, the cattle, etc., He gives being, conserves them, confers life and sensation, etc.*

Then I will reflect on myself.

Ven. John Hardon notes this seems to be a "deeper" movement; this he says corresponds to the spirit of the **third kind of humility**, now a *mode of love*, because it involves **labor** and **work**, i.e. sacrifice (if need be, suffering and pain).

*And on the seventh day God **finished the work** that he had done, and he **rested** on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God **rested** from all the work that he had done in creation. (cf. Gen 2:2-3).*

We are children of a culture that is very “deist”, that is tempted to see God as ‘faraway, a clockmaker’, who simply creates the world and watches. But He is working now, seeking to help each of us now - *But Jesus answered them, “My Father is **still working**, and I **also am working**.” (Jn 5:17)*

237. **FOURTH POINT:** *This is to **consider all blessings and gifts as descending from above**. Thus, my limited power comes from the supreme and infinite power above, and so, too, justice, goodness, mercy, etc., descend from above as the rays of light descend from the sun, and as the waters flow from their fountains, etc. Then I will reflect on myself, as has been said.*

This is the **highest level**. That **all** I have descends from above, freely from God’s love. *What do you have that you did not receive?* (1 Cor 4:7b)

It is very easy for us to think of salvation, of our spiritual life, as more of ‘us chasing God’, as ‘myself striving for holiness.’ What this meditation shows us in a special way is the **love of God**, who loved us first, who has been working for us. He created me. He redeemed me. He thought of me for all eternity. Right here and now, He seeks to draw me close to Him by His love.

In this meditation, I see that everything I encounter is meant to help bring me closer to God. Through all the events of life, God is working to invite me to share in His life. This will of course involve sacrifice, as I must give up my disordered attachments and follow the will of God. We can conclude with some verses from Sacred Scripture that express this idea:

We know that all things work together for good^d for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose (Rm 8:28)

*Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat **falls into the earth and dies**, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who **love their life lose it**, and those who **hate their life** in this world will keep it for eternal life. (Jn 12:24-25)*

The Lord, Shepherd and Host

¹ *A psalm of David.*

*The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I lack.*

² *In green pastures he makes me lie down;
to still waters he leads me;*

³ *he restores my soul.*

*He guides me along right paths
for the sake of his name.*

⁴ *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*

*I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff comfort me.*

⁵ *You set a table before me
in front of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

⁶ *Indeed, goodness and mercy will pursue me
all the days of my life;*

*I will dwell in the house of the Lord
for endless days. (Ps 23)*

Conclude with a **Colloquy**, speaking with Our Lord.