

MEDITATIONS IN UNION WITH CHRIST

by the reverend PAUL SMOLIKOWSKI, CR

Translated from the Polish
by The Resurrection Sisters



Servant of God Fr. Paul Smolikowski, C.R.

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Forward

Reflection or meditation has a greater meaning to pious souls than the terms indicate. A person can meditate on a spiritual topic at his desk, but his occupation with the topic will not be reflection or meditation as understood by these pious souls. Meditation is prayer and prayer is the turning of oneself to God. For to whom do we pray? To whom do we speak in prayer? Do we pray if we are not conscious of the presence of God? The most important factor in meditation is the placing of ourselves in the presence of God. This is a most difficult task. The very effort to reflect draws us away from the thought of God. If we consider the truths of faith, it is difficult for us to concentrate upon God's presence, for it is impossible to think of one and the other at the same time. It may be said by way of objection that the student, for example, as he works on an assignment under the watchful eye of the teacher, bears in mind constantly that he is under the surveillance of the teacher and yet is not distracted from his task. On the contrary, he is more diligent and is more devoted to the assignment: he may perhaps instantaneously concentrate far more on the assignment. This is true. The student then, however, does not bear in mind so much the presence of the teacher but rather feels his presence. If he were to concentrate upon the presence of the teacher, it would not be so easy for him to think at the same time of the topic he is to develop. So likewise, he who has his mind on the subject of meditation, forgets the presence of God, for he does not sense the presence of God. However, does not the very subject of meditation bring the thought of God? Yes, it does arouse the thought of God, but not the thought of the presence of God. He, for example, who studies theology thinks of God continually, but he does not have in mind the presence of God.

There is still another difficulty. If I know the topic of meditation well, it is tedious to consider it again. From what aspect can I consider it again? We therefore ask ourselves, "Can I find anything new in it?"

All these difficulties will vanish, if in meditation we will unite ourselves with God, with Christ, and, having been begun through Christ, should be completed through Christ, as is expressed in the prayer: *Ut omnis nostra oratio et operatio a te semper incipiat et per te coepta finiatur* – that all our prayer and activity may always be begun with thee and, having been begun, may be completed through thee. We should therefore refer the subject of our meditation to Christ and consider it together with Him. Then, indeed, our meditation will be a prayer,

because by considering the given topic together with Christ and always referring ourselves to Christ we remain continually in His presence. Such meditation likewise leads us to act together with Christ, for we are meditating in union with Christ. Convinced of this, we will not say, “I know the topic well. What more can I learn about it? I cannot throw any new light upon it.” That was not our purpose in meditation. By presenting the topic to Jesus and meditating along with Him we obtained His view. Thus we have gained much. (Prayer is always efficacious.) WE HAVE BEEN UNITED with Jesus and that is much. And, having been united with Him, it is impossible not to have made certain resolutions, even if these resolutions were not clearly expressed. We can also at each point ask:

Jesus, what further thought can I give to this point?

Jesus, what practical conclusions should I deduce?

Jesus, what motives do I have and what motives ought I have?

Jesus, how have I understood this until now and how did I put it into practice?

Jesus, how ought I desire to understand it and how put it into practice?

Jesus, what difficulties will I encounter and how will I, together with Thee, overcome them?

Jesus, what means should I choose?

Let us for example take a point of meditation from Avancina.

We select this one:

For us Jesus became poor. (2 Cor 8:9)

Who? The absolute and almighty Lord, in whose house there are riches and glory. He, Who supplies all with plenty, for Himself chose poverty. Consider the poor stable, be astonished and give praise, love poverty, which God so esteems that, coming upon earth, made it His own. And you perhaps seek what is superfluous?

We alter it thus:

Jesus, for us You became poor! So speaks St. Paul of You. You, the absolute and almighty Lord, in whose house there are riches and glory. You, who supplies all with plenty, chose poverty for Yourself. I look at the poor stable, I am astonished

and give praise. I want to love poverty, which You so esteemed that, having come to earth, You made it your own. And I perhaps am seeking what is superfluous? I do, that is certain, but You, Jesus, give me the grace to love poverty, give me your love for poverty, let me look at the things of this world with Your eyes and let me not evaluate them in a worldly light.

INTRODUCTION

MEDITATION

II

Preparation

Jesus, I wish to learn more about the way I should meditate. Teach me, or rather, permit me to meditate in union with You. During your life upon earth, Jesus, though You had no need of meditation, though You were in a state of continual and highest contemplation, for Your humanity was endowed with the beatific vision, You nevertheless wanted to meditate. St. Luke says of You, “He passed the whole night in prayer to God” (Lk 6:12). You wanted to meditate, not for Your own sake, but for ours, so that we, making our meditation, would be able to unite ourselves with You.

First Point

As the God-man living here on earth, Jesus, You were always in the presence of God. Teach me to place myself in the presence of God when I meditate. In Your humanity, You alone knew perfectly what God is. Left to myself, I cannot give God the honor that is due to Him nor am I sufficiently impressed with the fact that God loves me, so please grant me Your human knowledge which would enable me to have a profound realization of Your presence and would help me concentrate properly during meditation. Thus united with You, Jesus, I will benefit from my meditation and give due honor to God.

Second Point

Jesus, I do not have a sufficient knowledge of the misery and weakness of my human nature which is so necessary for a profitable meditation and which would enable me to stand before God as a dependent creature who can do nothing of himself and must expect all things from God alone. My love of self blinds me and prevents me from having this knowledge of myself. You knew this misery, this malice and this weakness of mine when You took upon Yourself our entire wretchedness and all our sins in the Garden of Olives. Let me share in that human knowledge of Yours, Jesus, so that I may unite myself with You in Your humility and realize more and more my wretchedness, my malice and my weakness during my meditation. Then also during the day when it will be difficult for me to detect my wretchedness and malice, when it will be difficult for me to look at my weakness, I will turn to You and uniting myself with You, I will look upon myself with Your eyes.

Third Point

Jesus, in the Garden of Olives You reflected on Your duty, on the Will of Your Father

which You were to fulfill. You made Your decision in prayer. Each of our meditations likewise are to lead to a resolution and in that resolution we are to fulfill the will of God in our regard. Hence now I wish to consider beforehand the events of the day and plan them together with You. I wish to foresee the difficulties, the temptations which may arise, and, uniting myself with You, Jesus, I wish to repeat after You: "Not my will but Thy Will be done." Then during the course of the day I will also turn to You and unite myself with You in fulfilling my duties, that is, the Will of God.

III

Preparation

Jesus, I desire to consider further the method of meditating with You so that this exercise may be for me a true prayer. Teach me yourself, Jesus, that I may not upset Your design and plans with my own theories and practices.

First Point

Jesus, while on earth You had human thoughts about all vital matters. These thoughts were correct and true, not tainted by error. When I begin to reflect upon a topic, put in my mind the thoughts You had about it, so that I will make the same judgment, and have the same conviction You had. Of myself I will never accomplish this because in me there is so much self-love, so much evaluating things for my own benefit, for my own pleasure. Jesus, grant that I may be mindful of this and so unite myself with You that, together with You, I may think of all the things in the same way as You do.

Second Point

Jesus, events arouse many emotions in me, but what kind of emotions are they? There is in me much antipathy, sympathy, prejudice, dislike, displeasure, and jealousy! I also lack interior peace. I become too enthusiastic and this fiery enthusiasm influences my convictions, my judgment, my actions so that I cannot think and evaluate calmly and correctly. I am powerless to rid myself of them, because they flow from my defect of character. And even if I were to succeed

in eliminating these clashing emotions, what would it profit me if the void will not be filled with well-balanced emotions? Therefore, fill my heart with Your saving dispositions. You, O Jesus, can change my heart, as you changed the hearts of so many Saints by giving them Your Heart. “And I will give you a new heart” said Ezechiel to the Jews, “and put a new spirit within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I WILL GIVE YOU A HEART of flesh” (36, 26). Grant, O Jesus, that I may bear this in mind and unite myself with You in my meditations, so that my feelings concerning each event in life will be similar to Your feelings just as You exhort us through St. Paul: “For let this kind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 2:5)

Third Point

My will is weak and fickle, Jesus! How many times have I resolved what I thought was Your will and later did not fulfill it, claiming that I am not certain that such is Your will! Not because of uncertainty did I act thus, but because I am weak and loath to carry out my resolution. Only when things please me and are for my own good I show strength of will. You alone, Jesus, can give me a strong will, for You give, as St. Paul says, “to will and to do,” “*velle et percipere*”. By giving me the desire to will and the strength to execute it, you shall change my willing into Your willing, so that I shall want what You want and reject what You do not will. Then my resolution will persist. Grant, then, O Jesus, that I may keep this in mind during my meditations and not depending on my own will and my own resolutions, unite myself with You in willing and doing.

IV

Preparation

I beg You, Jesus, to grant me the grace not only to be ever mindful of my union with You in my meditations, but also that I ought not forget to commit to Your Most Blessed Mother what I consider and resolved together with You. You desire that all divine graces should be distributed by her, and it pleases You, the best son of the best Mother, when together with You we honor and praise Her by placing ourselves in her care.

First Point

O Jesus, something always weighs down upon my heart, something disturbs me, makes me sad. I have certain fears, I desire, therefore, to find peace through my meditations. You, Jesus, must have felt the same way as You proceeded to the Garden of Olives to pray. “He grew sorrowful and heavy with fear.” You are going to pray, so that You may reflect on these sorrows and fears with God. Grant that I also, uniting myself with You, Jesus, in Your prayers in the Garden of Olives, may reflect together with You upon the sorrows, fears and difficulties which come upon me. Show me what they mean and what I should do to gain peace and at the same to uncover the misery and malice that hides beneath these sorrows and fears. It will be revealed that there is question of fulfilling the will of God and that fulfilling the will of God requires the bearing of a cross. Grant, O Jesus, that I may be one with You in bravely accepting the Will of God and the cross given me, repeating continually with You: “Not as I will but as You will, O Lord.”

Second Point

I often have distractions, Jesus! Why? From where do they come? Probing, I shall find that they are due to some attachment, to some self-action, to offended self-love, to some vain dream of raising myself above others. Show me, O Jesus, when distractions come, their cause and reveal the misery hidden in them. May I look upon them with Your Eyes. Knowing my affliction, I shall cry out as did the unfortunate leper: “Lord, if Thou will, Thou can make me whole!”

Third Point

I recommend to You, Most Blessed Virgin, the resolutions I have made. Grant me the grace to fulfill them. Jesus has entrusted You with the distribution of graces.

O Jesus, as You placed the distribution of Your graces in the hands of Your Mother, so also place me under Her care. I beg Her not to let me out of Her care and to support me by Her intercession in my resolution to make sincere meditations. If You request it and entrust me to Her motherly protection, she will accept me, because You are always the Son of Mary.

GOD

I

Preparation

You taught, O Jesus, “that there is one God, no other besides Him.” (Mk 12:29-34; Jn 12:3). There is then only one God, infinite in existence and perfection, a being of infinite happiness. Something, however, puzzles me in the knowledge I have of God. God is an infinitely perfect being, but He is alone, one alone throughout eternity! This solitude of God dismays me. “Could He be happy?” I ask, for as human beings we must share our happiness with someone, we must have someone in our thoughts, we must love someone. I am told that God is all good – infinitely good – therefore He must diffuse this goodness. But, Jesus, teaching us that there is one God, You likewise tell us that He is one in three Persons. There are, then, Three Persons in God, and each of these Three persons has the fullness of divine life. The complete happiness of God is realized in the mutual association of the Divine Persons. Grant, O Jesus, that I may understand this mystery to the best of my ability.

First Point

We can understand in a small degree what the Divine Persons are from Your words, Jesus. You have said that God is a spirit (Jn 4:24). In us when our spirit thinks, it begets an idea, a mental word. That idea, that mental word, is a reflection of ourselves, a likeness of us. If another person could penetrate our thought, he would discover in it all our prejudices, our desires, our dislikes, ourselves. Similarly, God begets the mental word, and that word is like unto its source. The production of the mental word is called “begetting” because it is the production of a thing like unto its source. The word is called the Son. The Father loves His word, His idea, as we love our idea, our mental word. On the other hand, love is an act of the will, it is not a similitude but a movement toward a thing. That which, therefore, is produced in God as love is not another begetting, another son, but a spiration, and is called the Holy Ghost. You gave us then, Jesus, an idea of the Holy Trinity, but how imperfect is our conception of It. For our ideas and our love are not persons. For this reason, we seek happiness outside of ourselves. We seek someone upon whom we can place our love and our ideals. And even though our ideals please us, give us incomparable happiness, and at times we are ready to die for our ideals, they cannot give us perfect happiness. Our ideas and our love are always imperfect. For this reason we cannot comprehend the happiness of God. We do, however, understand that His is a happiness

above all happiness, for we find some faint reflection of it in ourselves. Grant, O Jesus, that I may penetrate this deeper.

Second Point

You have said, Jesus, that “the Father is in me and I am in the Father”(Jn 10: 38). To explain this by way of example the Fathers of the Church say that the spring is in the river, light is in brightness, so the brightness is in the light, and the river in the spring. You and the Holy Spirit have the same nature, the same being as the Father. “All things whatsoever the Father has, are mine.” You, Jesus, he said. And since You are the Word, the thought, the likeness of the Father, the Father reveals Himself through You, creates through You, rules through You. That is why St. Paul says that these words of Holy Writ: “In the beginning, O Lord, thou foundest the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hand.” (Ps 101:26; Heb 1:10) refer to You and the Father. Through the centuries the Fathers of the Church refer to You also the revelations of God in the Old Testament. As God the Father, begetting You renders to You His entire divine nature, and, with You spiriting the Holy Ghost, renders the divine nature to the Holy Ghost, so also God communicates Himself to us through You. We also turn to the Father, give ourselves to the Father through You. What, then, is said of God in the Old Testament refers to You also, and what we say of God, we also say of You, Jesus.

Third Point

You have said, O Jesus, that the Holy Ghost takes of You and gives to us (Jn 16:14; Jn 16:15), and because You send us the Holy Spirit from the Father (Jn 15: 26). Since the Holy Spirit, as love, is a person, He is therefore the author of love. Jesus, when You sent the Holy Spirit to descend upon the Apostles, His descent was not the inception of his activity, but an extension of his operation, for, Jesus, You also sent the Holy Spirit to the prophets and saints of the Old Testament. “And the Spirit of the Lord shall come upon thee,” said Samuel to Saul, anointing him king, “and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be changed into another man” (1Kings 10:6). And in the New Testament St. Paul says, “But we all, with faces unveiled, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and being transformed into his very image from glory to glory, as though the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18). And for this reason, Jesus, You bid us to pray: “Send forth thy Spirit, and they shall be created, and Thou shalt renew the face of the

earth.” God is love and we are to become love.

II

Preparation

You have said, O Jesus, “No one knows the Father except the Son, and him to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (Mt 11:27). And what kind of God did You reveal to us, Jesus? You revealed through Your disciples that God is love (J 4:8), and You yourself declared, “I have made known to them Thy name and will make in known” (J 17:26). Your name, therefore, in the biblical language means that what you are. And what precisely have You made known, Jesus? “That the love with which thou hast loved me, may be in them” (J 17:26). And how God loves us You have told us, saying, “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son” (J 3:16). St. Paul says the same of You: “Who loved me and delivered himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Because God is love. He who unites the Father and the Son, namely, the Holy Spirit, is love as a person, is the inspiration of love. I wish, therefore, O Jesus, to meditate on that divine being which is love, and hence on divine love. For “in this is charity,” says St. John (1 Jn 4:10) “Not that we have loved God, but that He has first loved us.”

First Point

You are love, Jesus, for God is love. “God first loved us.” And You, Jesus, so loved me that You gave Yourself to be a propitiation for my sins. And You say, “Greater love than this no man has, that one lay down his life for his friends” (J 15:14). Hence it was because God loves me that He has created me, and You redeemed me because You love me. But did not God say through Isaias (43:7) “I have created him for my glory?” God, then created us for His glory. You redeemed us, Jesus, so that “the Father may be glorified in all things; and we were created for the glory of God. The glory of God, however, did not increase when we were created. If, then, we were created for the glory of God, it was not because our existence was needed for the glory of God, but because we need the glory of God. For man is formed according to his model, according to that which he admires, praises, loves. Consequently, to be like unto God and thereby participate in the happiness and perfection of God, we must seek the glory of God. We, therefore, were created for the glory of God, and it is Your wish, Jesus, that by praising God we

shall attain our happiness.

Second Point

Through Your entire life, words, Passion and Death, Jesus, You showed how much God wants glory from us, wants our love. Since God does not need this glory and love for Himself, He wants it, because giving glory to Him and loving Him will bring us happiness. He desires, then, that we give Him glory and love Him for our benefit. God saw from all eternity that beings can exist who could participate in His perfections, and thereby could be happy with boundless happiness. Therefore, He created such beings. Grant, O Jesus, that I may understand well that we have been created primarily out of love, because God did not need us. Not needing us, He did create us not for His benefit, but for our benefit. He created us also for His glory, because His glory is necessary for us, for without it we would not be able to be like unto Him. And You, Jesus, love us for our benefit, since You do not need us, nor do you need glory or love from us. That is why St. John says: “In this is charity: not as though we have loved God, but that He has first loved us.... Let us therefore love God, because He has first loved us.” (1 Jn 4:10; 1 Jn 4:19).

Third Point

Not only do You love us, Jesus, so disinterestedly, but Your divine love of us is disinterested to such a degree that there is none similar to it. For this reason we cannot comprehend it. No human love, no matter how perfect, can equal divine love. No mother loves her child with such a great love as God loves us. The mother, loving her child, finds delight in that love, finds her happiness in it. A friend loving a friend likewise finds happiness in that love: it elevates him, makes him more noble. Nothing, however, can be added to the pleasure, the happiness of God. Grant, O Jesus, that I may understand well this love, so that it may move me to have a greater love of God than I have had thus far.

III

Preparation

When Your Father speaks to us in the Old Testament and when You speak to us in the New Testament, You chose expressions which seem to indicate that God needs our love to be

happy. You show each person such tremendous love as if You loved him exclusively. St. Augustine says, “as if you forgot all creation – heaven and earth – and thought only of this individual.” Grant, O Jesus, that I may understand this and may this understanding increase my love of God.

First Point

Jesus, since You have no need of me, why are You so concerned about me? You love me, is it not true? You love us with an incomprehensible, extraordinary love as no one else can love me. You then desire our happiness. Since we cannot be happy without loving God, You desire my love; You are concerned that I love God. And since You love me dearly and desire my happiness sincerely, You are not only most concerned that I should love You but earnestly demand that I love You. For this reason, Jesus, You often show Yourself to chosen souls as hurt and sad when people do not reciprocate Your love. Your great love for me prompts You to complain that You are not loved, because our love for You is your important concern.

Second Point

You so love each of us, Jesus, that each can say after St. Paul, “He who loved me, and delivered Himself for me” (Gal 2:20) as if You died for him alone. And you revealed to St. Carp that if it were necessary, You are ready to die once more for each of us and to suffer again what You have already suffered. Your Person, Jesus, is divine. If then You love us, You love us with a divine love. And the love of God for all men is not like that of the love a human being has for his fellow men. In loving mankind we love all people in general, but we do not love each person individually, and perhaps we do not love even one individual in the mass of humanity. You, Jesus, as God see all men as one, but at the same time You see individually each individual person who makes up the whole of mankind. You, therefore, do not love me because You love all mankind, but You love all men because You love me and every person individually.

Third Point

How many persons, Jesus, think that You do not love others as You love them! Because they see that You love them so, it seems impossible that You would still love someone else. The divine love for us is so completely individual and so great that it has no equal. We cannot detect

Your divine love for others as we can detect it in our own lives. Because Your love for me is so immense and so personal, it is difficult for me to admit that You love each person with the same intense, personal love. “Oh infinite good,” exclaims St. Augustine, “which has such concern for each man as if You cared for him only, and Your concern for all is like that for each.”

IV

Preparation

I wish, O Jesus, to know what effect the great, incomprehensible love of God for me should have upon me. Grant me the grace to understand fully the consequences Your love produces in me. May I FEEL its effects in my soul and profit from them.

First Point

Jesus, You have said to St. Catherine of Siena: “Enlightened by faith, you shall discover that I understand better than you what is good for you, that I desire this good more than you do, that I can bring it about better than you, and that without my grace you can neither know what is good for you, nor desire or gain what is good for yourself. Since this is so, you should strive most energetically to surrender your will completely to mine.” Knowing that You love me, Jesus, I am certain that all that You ask of me, all that You bestow upon me is good for me. Therefore, I should accept all things from You, Jesus, with gratitude, put myself entirely in Your hands, and give myself to You with the utmost confidence in Your care.

Second Point

You want us, O Jesus, to be convinced that You love us so that this conviction would make us love You, Our God, and urge us to fulfill Your will. You want us to love You. There is no better way to arouse love for You in our souls than to have the conviction that You love us. St. John presents this motive, saying: “Let us therefore love God, because God first loved us” (Jn 1:4-19). No one of us knows how much we love God, how much we love You, Jesus, but our love for Him and You is as great as is our conviction that the Father and You love us personally. Grant then, O Jesus, that I may be deeply impressed with the truth that You love me, that the Father loves me.

Third Point

Jesus, should I apply the fact that God loves me to myself alone? Ought I not apply it also to others, as I work among them? The task of those who work among others is to induce all to surrender their will to God, to You, Jesus, since what is good for us is good also for others. I desire, therefore, to arouse in all men love for You, Jesus, love for the Father. To arouse that love, I will strive to show them that You love them, that the Father loves them, that God first loved them. I will announce to the world that You, God, are the God of love, that the salvation of the world depends upon the introduction of the rule of God's love into the souls, and through souls into society, that we cannot attain true liberty, which we so desire today, except if God rules in us through love. For Your love, O Jesus, - its reign in us - frees us from the slavery of our passions and it alone unites us in love. It alone, by firmly uniting our will with the will of God makes us powerful as St. Paul declares: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13), and thereby makes us perfectly free. Grant, O Jesus, that I may understand this well, so that I may explain it to others.

V

Preparation

I desire to experience within myself, O Jesus, Your love for me. If this happens, then there will surely be aroused in me - cold and indifferent as I am - a friendship, a greater and more ardent love for You and for Your Father. Hence, I wish to reflect upon myself. I want to seek in myself the evidence of the divine love for me. But will I discover that evidence, will I understand its significance without You, Jesus? I beg You fervently to help me.

First Point

To be convinced, O Jesus, that You love me, should it not be enough to know that You created me, that You destined me to such happiness of which I am not aware nor am able to comprehend? St. Paul called out in ecstasy, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for them that love him? (1 Cor 2:9). But I often wonder, Jesus, of what benefit is this to me since I find it so difficult to save myself.

And of what good is it that I am destined for such happiness, if I can so easily condemn myself to everlasting unhappiness? O Jesus, after death, those who condemned themselves will see clearly that it was not so difficult to save themselves, to sanctify themselves. For have You not done everything necessary to redeem and sanctify us? If You had not, You would not love us as You do – more than a mother, more than a dearest friend.

Second Point

If I would clearly see, O Jesus, how many times You have forgiven me, I would have the positive evidence that You do love me. Alas, it is so difficult for me to perceive this because self-love blinds me. I easily see the evil and the transgressions of others but fail to see the same in myself. Grant, O Jesus, that I may perceive fully what You must have forgiven me. Grant that I may enter into myself and make an account before You. Show me how much You have forgiven me in the past and are still ready to forgive in the future instead of justly turning away from me and leaving me to my misery and malice.

Third Point

If I would think of the many misfortunes from which You preserved me, Jesus, I would perhaps love You more. If I would think what I should do if I were exposed to this or that temptation, what would I do if I found myself in these or those circumstances; if I had to confront such or such difficulties, if I would have to bear this or that kind of sickness! Now my spiritual vision is becoming clearer. Now I am beginning to realize how much more I should love You, Jesus, because You have preserved me from so many evils. Is it possible that I should not acknowledge the great love of God for me in view of all this? I, however, am so cold, so indifferent! Inflammé me with love for You, O Jesus!

MAN

Sin – I

Preparation

Oh Jesus, I have seen how God loves man. Now I want to consider how man repaid this love in the past and how he loves God today. This meditation will give me a deeper insight of the sins God has forgiven mankind and all that He has forgiven me. Sin draws us away from God, from You, Jesus. Sin is opposed to Love. Hence, I wish to meditate upon sin to see what sin is in itself. Grant, O Jesus, that I may understand well what sin is, so that I may more readily despise it and avoid it.

First Point

First I wish, O Jesus, to consider why sin is an offense against God. I can understand this by considering original sin, the sin of our first progenitor. Adam believed Satan who falsely claimed that the evils foretold by God would not happen, namely, “For in what day soever you shall eat of the tree of knowledge, you shall die” (Gen 2:17). Satan declared, “No, You shall not die the death” (Gen 3:5). In this way Satan deceived man into believing that God is not the source of truth. The first man, then, instead of giving honor and praise to God, offended Him. Am I not guilty of a similar offense when I recognize what you have revealed, but I refuse to believe it, to accept it as true?

Second Point

I desire now, O Jesus, to see what were the consequences of this offense against God. In the state of innocence Adam possessed all wisdom so that he knew well who God is. How then could he accept the charge that God was not truth? By his action Adam showed that he wanted to judge God as Satan suggested. He did what Satan prompted him to do. It is possible for man to believe a truth, to profess it, but not to act according to it, to deny it in practice. Jesus, You have said, “Not every one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that does the will of my Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 7:21). You have also said that he does not fulfill the will of Your Father who declares his willingness to do it but who refuses to do what the Father commands; on the contrary, he who first refuses, but upon

reflection carries it out, indeed, does the will of God (Mt 21:28-31). St. Paul says that sinners “profess that they know God, but in their works deny Him” (Titus 1:16). By sinning, then, man introduced falsehood into his life, converting himself into falsehood; for he believed one thing and did another. He did not act according to his convictions, according to the principles which he professed. Oh Jesus, do I not act in this manner?

Third Point

Jesus, when I sin, I judge how much You are worth as truth, how much God is worth as truth. And choosing some foolish thing in preference to God’s law, I decide that You, that God, is of less value than the thing I set above You; I decide that not You but something else is the truth for me. At times I live and act as if what You have revealed was not the truth, but as if the things of this earth – worldly pleasures, worldly honor, dominion over things – had greater essential value, as if they were my salvation, as if I were to remain on earth forever, as if an eternity of good or evil did not await me. By my life, by my actions, by my entire behavior I have often rejected what I believe. “He who says that he knows God and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him,” says St. John (1 J 2:4). I then live a lie. My life becomes a lie. How many times, O Jesus, have I acted thus!

Sin – II

Preparation

I have seen how by sinning I offend You, Jesus, how I offend my God. I wish to gain more knowledge of this by penetrating deeper into the essence of sin. Let me learn that by sinning I reject You, my Creator and Lord, and choose some transitory pleasure of insignificant value.

First Point

You reveal to me, O Jesus, that in committing the original sin man agreed with Satan that God lied because He did not want man to become like God. “For God doth know in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). God, then, was jealous. Satan claimed that God did not want man to have

the greatest good, and therefore He is not a good God! And do I not behave in a similar manner when I accept this deception that You, O God, are not my true good, that You are not my only good? When I deliberately offend You instead of giving You honor and praise, can I claim freedom from guilt?

Second Point

What was the consequence, Jesus, of this offence against God? Could man offend God with impunity and disregard the debt of gratitude he owed to God? Certainly not. But his action proved that he preferred to follow the temptation of the devil rather than remember God's munificence. His heart became depraved because he was willing to repay good with evil. Oh Jesus, am I not inclined to act in the same perverse manner?

Third Point

When I sin, when I choose my own pleasure and reject Your will, Jesus, do I not decide that You are of less value to me than something else that I prefer in place of You? At times I live and act with disturbing haste, exercising too much concern or fear of the future, complaining as if You, Jesus, did not bear loving care over me, as if You did not provide me with all that I need both as to body and as to my soul: in one word, as if You were not the sole good for me. Thus I twist my heart as Adam did. I pay You evil for good, continually hurl insults in Your face. And I KNOW, O Jesus, that nothing hurts You more than the ingratitude of men. How many times, O Jesus, have I acted thus!

Sin - III

Preparation

I have already learned, O Jesus, that when I sin I do not recognize You as truth, as my good. Though I believe that You are the Truth and Goodness, I deny it at all times by my actions. Now I want to know how by sin I reject You as my Lord. Although I do not oppose You with full knowledge and out of malice, but nevertheless by my actions, though not fully deliberate, I can reject You as my Lord.

First Point

You have shown me, O Jesus, how man through original sin accepted what Satan claimed, namely, that man is HIS OWN MASTER, that God had no right to command or forbid anything, for man of himself could know what is good or evil, what is for his benefit and what is not. Therefore man, knowing good and evil, did not need God, because God was not the law. Instead of serving You, Jesus, at times do I not consider myself my own master, and thereby reject God as my Lord? Do I not offend You by this?

Second Point

Jesus, I desire now to see, what was the consequence of this new offence against God. Could a man so enlightened as Adam was admit that he was sufficient without God, that what he would establish would be law for him, that he need not take into account the will of God? Certainly not. His deed, however, manifested that he did make such an admission, that he desired to regard himself as an independent master, for in the end he did what the Devil tempted him to do and thereby accepted the reasoning of the Devil. Through this, man perverted his will. He became an impostor. Do I not do the same?

Third Point

Jesus, in sinning do I not judge in my will what is Your worth, as the law and as the will? And acting according to my will and not Your will, do I not decide that You, i.e. my God, are worth less than that which I place above You, that You are not the law tome, not the Lord, but some other object is which I choose? I live, I act at times as if I did not need God, did not need You, Jesus, as if You were not my Lord, and did not have the right to demand of me whatever You desired. I live as if I could accomplish something of myself, as if it was necessary only to call upon You, Jesus, for help in doing what I already decided and choose to do without asking You or without considering whether such is Your will. And in this way my will is like Adam's – perverted. I make myself an impostor before God. How many times, O Jesus, have I acted thus! But You, Jesus, are so good that You take into account my foolishness, You take into account the fact that I do not act deliberately as Adam did, nor do I regard it even as a sin. Nevertheless evil is evil, and it has a detrimental effect on my relationship with You. O Jesus, save me from my waywardness.

Sin - IV

Preparation

Sin is not only an offense against God but it is also self-activity. I want to consider this point to learn the full malice of sin. Although it may not be difficult to understand the full malice of sin, it is difficult to deduce the consequences from this knowledge and to apply this knowledge to myself. Grant, then, O Jesus, that I may not only have this knowledge but that I may also apply it to myself.

First Point

You have revealed and taught, O Jesus, that the end of man is to strive to be like unto God. “Be perfect,” You say, “as your Father in heaven is perfect; Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful.” Adam wanted to be like God, not by means of divine grace, not in the manner indicated by God, but by his personal effort and according to his own way. He wanted to depend upon himself. Why? Because he wanted to act of himself. And do not I also, O Jesus, depend upon myself? Do I not undertake projects of myself and according to my way? In a word, do I not sin by self-activity? And perhaps my self-activity manifests itself also in this that I am doing nothing; that I do not follow the prompting of grace.

Second Point

Jesus, I desire to ponder well what self-activity is, so that I may understand better how hostile it is to You. When Adam was confronted with the question: “Whom do you choose, God or man? Which do you select, the law of God or the law of man? The will of God or the will of man? Do you want God or yourself?” Adam’s reply was, “I, not God.” And am I not also continually confronted with the question, God or I? And do I always answer: Not I but God? “Not God but I” expresses the essence of self-activity. Now I understand, O Jesus, what a terrible blasphemy and crime it is.

Third Point

Adam chose himself, confirmed his ego, and rejected God, because he said, “Not God but

I.” And I, O Jesus, when I commit the smallest sin, the slightest unfaithfulness, do I not say to you, my God, as if to Your face – for you are present everywhere – “I know that You command this, that you want this of me, but I will not do it,” or “I know that You forbid this, that you want me to forego this, but I refuse to obey.” I, therefore, confirm my ego, my self-activity, and set myself against You, Jesus. In this way I defiantly hurl in Your face the words: “Not God but I.”

Sin – V

Preparation

When we sin, Jesus, we repay Your immense love with the lack of love. We ought to praise God, serve him, love Him; but by sin we offend and rejected Him as our Lord, and ultimately love only ourselves, no God. Grant, oh Jesus, that I may not only understand this but also that I may be sorry for the sins and infidelities I commit by my lack of love and ingratitude.

First Point

Jesus, would man offend God, would he confirm his self-activity if self-love were absent from his heart? Do not self-activity and offence of God arise from the confirmation in man of self-love and thereby from the lack of the love of God? In its essence original sin was self-love. We inherited that sin. Hence in me, Jesus, does not all evil come from self-love and from lack of love of You? I should, then, primarily be concerned with the love of God. Jesus, am I truly concerned with it? Do I always bear it in mind? Do I beg You to grab me that love? Do I humbly acknowledge you You that I have so little of that love?

Second Point

Why should I do away with self-love? Ought I not love myself, Jesus? When You command me to love my neighbor, You imply that I should love myself. If I did not love myself, would that not be unnatural, contrary to nature, unreasonable? Why then, Jesus, do You condemn self-love, that love by which one loves himself? What is the answer? Yes, You bid me to love myself, but You do condemn that love of self by which a person loves himself above all; You condemn a love which places the ego first and foremost. Such love is contrary to the nature of things, because God alone, is the supreme and perfect Being, can and must be preferred to everyone else. You condemn self-love so vehemently because by it we love ourselves above all,

and self-love contains in itself that treacherous declaration: “Not God, but I.”

Third Point

Now I understand, oh Jesus, that only a true love of You, my God - love of God above all - is able to move me to say, “Not I, but God.” If I can truthfully make such a declaration, then I know that I have a true love for God. But if such love is absent, I naturally turn to myself and I love myself above all, and thereby declare: “Not God, but I.” For this reason, self-love is evil, and You, Jesus, command us to hate ourselves when we place ourselves above God. In himself Adam confirmed such a self-love and passed it on to us. We are born with it. You, oh Jesus, condemn it as reprehensible, because it places itself foremost and thereby rejects God. You condemn it because it is a lack of the true love for God.

Our nothingness - VI

Preparation

Your Apostle, Jesus, said: “If any man thinks himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceives himself” (Gal 6:3). You yourself, Jesus, have said: “Without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). “Nothing.” You did not say, oh Jesus, that without You we can do little, but that we can do nothing. This nothingness I wish to consider well. Grant, oh Jesus, that I may both comprehend it and arrive at some practical conclusions. Since it is true that we are nothing and can do nothing, we must judge all things in the lights of this truth and act according to it.

First Point

If I sufficiently reflect upon myself, Jesus, I can realize that of myself I am nothing and can do nothing. For example, I would like to have more love for you, oh Jesus, but I discovered that I am cold and indifferent. Toward You no feeling is aroused in me. What difficulties thus causes me in prayer. The dryness I experience in prayer, is it not an indication of my nothingness? Is it not due to the fact that I am nothing and can do nothing? Can I fill up this void by seeking or giving myself to some created object? If I do give myself to any created object, I soon discover that it becomes distasteful, boring. I become empty. In the end, I do not find what I was seeking. Oh Jesus, what does this mean? “My heart is restless, Lord, until it will rest in

You”. I must exclaim with St. Augustin. My heart cannot find peace. It would like to rest in You, Jesus, but does not succeed. It seeks continually, but does not find You, does not possess You, because it craves something instead of You. You said, “Without me you can do nothing.” Therefore, in my heart there is a void.

Second Point

Can I at least think anything of myself, Jesus? Does my mind find satisfaction? My answer comes from St. Paul who said, ”Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God”(2 Cor 3:5). How true this is! I want to think of you, Jesus, but distractions constantly deter me. Why? Because the thought of You does not interest me; has no appeal for me. What a pity! I would like to think of You. I cannot. Thoughts of creatures fill my mind and I cannot dismiss them... How true, oh Jesus, are Your words: “Without me you can do nothing!”.

Third point

Can I, oh Jesus, will anything of myself? Do I possess what I want and can I do what I want? “To will is present to me,” says St. Paul, “but to accomplish that which is good, I find not” (Rm 7:18). This I have experienced: I strongly desire something, but I fail to carry out my wish. In addition to this I discover that even the power to will is not of me. When I make an act of the will, Jesus, do I really act independently? Again, the apostle answers me, “It is God who works in you, both to will and to accomplish” (Phil 2:13). Hence, I cannot even will of myself. St. Augustin says that in imploring You to grant him the virtue of chastity he was fearful lest should hear him. “Wanting,” he said, “I went there where I did not want to go, shackled by my iron self-will.” He had the desire, but did not fulfill it because he did not truly will. I act similarly with regard to my resolutions. I make them but do not keep them. Therefore, I do not have the ability to truly will. Oh how right You are, Jesus, when You say, “Without me you can do nothing.”

Our Nothingness - VII

Preparation

It is so difficult for me, Jesus, to be convinced of the words of St. Augustine: “All

wisdom consists in this that man should realize that he is nothing.” Therefore, I wish to consider further that I am nothing and can do nothing, for at times it still seems to me that I can do something and that I have something.

First Point

When You, Jesus, favor me with Your grace, I have the right sentiments, good thoughts, and a strong will, and for this reason I do not sufficiently understand that I can do nothing of myself and have nothing of myself. What I have, I have because of Your grace, but I do not take Your words seriously, “Without me you can do nothing.” But You, Jesus, have a remedy for this. Since the realization of our nothingness is of utmost importance, You, my Jesus, having in mind our greater good, at times remove Your grace, in order that we may become conscious of our nothingness. Only then do we realize and experience what we really are - nothingness, dependent creatures. Oh how beneficial this is for our salvation, though it is so rumpled and often very humiliating. Henceforth I will not complain and worry, oh Jesus, when it will be difficult for me to pray and to practice virtue. I will strive to reconcile myself with the fact that I am nothing of myself and can do nothing of myself. Of this I can be convinced, for, You, Jesus, want me to be convinced. The understanding of this truth, expressed in Your words: “Without me you can do nothing,” will come to mean more to me than the joy and the comfort that I seek in spiritual exercises.

Second Point

Even the Saints had to penetrate ever deeper into the realization of their nothingness, because, oh Jesus, You manifested it to them so fully. To realize this fact they had to pass through severe trials - more severe than those that we are given. Since they were given greater graces by You, Jesus, they were also placed in greater danger of failing into pride. This is what St. Theresa writes about herself: “At times it seems to me that I am torn away from all things, that I have fearless courage for God, that I disregard all calumny and the judgment of people... and in reality, I have been so.” This, however, do not come from herself; it came from Jesus, for she adds: “Then there are times when I am so little detached that the least triviality, which yesterday I would have dismissed with a smile, absorbs my attention to such a degree that I cannot recognize myself... At other times I feel weak and fearful lest I meet with some

obstacle... There are days indicate what she was of herself; how she had nothing good of herself. You, my Jesus, have taught her this by removing Your graces from time to time and leaving her on her own.

Third Point

Oh Jesus, You taught St. Theresa that we do not have anything of ourselves. "Even though I should spend months and years in striving to realize how great an evil sin is, would it be enough," she asks, "to arouse in me a feeling of compassionate regard for the souls of others? It would not be enough. God gives this grace to stamp His seal upon the soul. Of myself I would not be able to engrave upon myself the mark of God, namely, the love of neighbor." By reflecting upon some good thing or upon some good deed I can become impressed by it, but if You, Jesus do not stimulate me by Your grace, my reflection will bear no fruit. So many times, oh Jesus, I have experienced the truth of Your words: "Without me you can do nothing."

Our Nothingness - VIII

Preparation

What can we do Jesus? Certainly, we are obliged to do good and we ought to cooperate with Your grace. "The soul," says St. Theresa, "does nothing, just as wax does nothing, when a seal is impressed on it." The soul ought to be ready for everything and in this readiness, this becoming pliable like wax, will make it capable of accepting what God wishes to accomplish in it. Acting thus, it will surrender itself without opposition. Wax, however, does not have a free will. If our soul is to be like wax, what shall happen to our free will? Oh Jesus, how shall it freely cooperate with Your grace? I desire to consider this point, in order to know what part I am to play in this phase of my spiritual development.

First Point

Well do we understand, oh Jesus, that we can do nothing because we are creatures, not God. We are able to live a full life, namely feel, think, will, because you have given us the gift of life. But to actually feel, we must feel something; to actually will, we must will something; to actually live, we must have in ourselves an object of life. We must have not only

the ability to live life itself. I know, oh Jesus, the this'll think is not in us or of us, but comes to us from without. If it were not so, we would be the same as you, Jesus, divine. Of Yourself you said, "As the father has life in Himself, even so He has given to the Son also to have life in Himself" (Jn 5:26).

I have learned, oh Jesus, that in our natural life the object of life presents itself. Moved by some object, the feelings, the thoughts, and the desires arise of themselves. Though these are in us, because they are in our faculties, they are not ours until we as persons agreed to have them, agreed to accept them as our own. You inspire us with feelings, thoughts, desires, which likewise, though in us, are not ours until we accept them as our own. Hence, we are not able to do anything of ourselves, and yet, we still can do much, for we can accept or refuse, resist or accept Your action in us, oh Jesus. "You want nothing more of us," I can say, borrowing the words of St. Thomas and St. Theresa, "than that our soul, like soft wax, will not oppose You." It is ever true what You have said: "Without me you can do nothing."

Second Point

St. Theresa says that You demand only one thing of us, Jesus, namely, that we should not oppose You. It is not for us, then, to plunge ourselves into some action, but for you to move as to act and for us not to oppose You. In accepting Your grace and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we likewise act, because, as the Council of Trent declares, we can reject and we can refuse to accept the inspiration. St. Thomas says that although we act under the influence of Your action in us, we still can refuse to act. When we finally do accept Your grace and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, when we do act under Your influence, then indeed, we are actually doing something. You, Jesus, I like a teacher who guides the hand of a child while he is writing. The child can resist, can tear its hand away, or can try to write by himself only to discover he is scribbling. When you Act in me, Jesus, You oblige me not to rush headlong into action of myself, in order to avoid spoiling Your activity in me by my self-activity. You oblige me not only to do what You want, but also as You want it. If I act of myself and not in cooperation with You, my action has no merit, no meaning for eternal life. This is the teaching of Your Church. You have said, Jesus, "Without me you can do nothing" - nothing which would merit eternal life, nothing which would be pleasing to God.

Third Point

Jesus, it is possible for me to deceive myself when, acting in good faith, I perform actions under the supposition that they have been induced by Your grace, but in reality, it is not so? Will such actions be without merit? This must surely be so, for otherwise You would be acting at my summons, at my command. Then I would be doing, not what You will, but You would be doing what I will. Does this mean that I must be deprived of Your grace merit because I have erred in good faith? You, oh Jesus, will not let this happen. You will not refuse to reward me for such a well-intended in action. If I sincerely seek Your will and desire to fulfill it, even though I should be in error, the good intention that I had in Your grace, for You, Jesus, desire that I should always have a good intention and therefore You give me the grace to have it. Uniting myself with You in this intention, I will gain merit from it, though not from the act itself. Oh Jesus, You particularly look for the good intention and bestow the reward accordingly.

Our Nothingness - IX

Preparation

Now I desire, oh Jesus, to draw some practical conclusions from my meditations on our nothingness. Grand that I may apply this knowledge to my life.

First Point

I have learned that I should not act of myself by self-action. Does this mean, oh Jesus, that I should be inactive and wait until You move me to act? Should I do nothing, have no feelings, have no thoughts, no desires? Is my whole life, then, to be spent in doing nothing? It cannot be otherwise, for I hear Your answer: "Without me you can do nothing. Up up" ... Whether I spend my entire life doing nothing depends upon me. As I have on my beck and call the objects for a natural life, or rather, as these objects trust themselves upon me, so also my supernatural life does not remain without its objects. Jesus, You always provides me with these, because You act in me continually. You said:" My father works until now, and I work" (J 5:17). This means that you assist me with Your grace every moment of my life. I need only to cooperate with it. If I should spend my life doing nothing, You, Jesus, cannot be blamed for neglecting to inspire me to action. The fault would be mine, because I have failed to heed the

promptings of Your grace or neglected to cooperate with it.

Second Point

Oh Jesus, how can I detect that You are acting in me? I ought to know this, because if I should waste Your grace, I shall be judged for it as You indicated this in the parables of the talents. Since I have a responsibility, I must know how to fulfill it. I wish to consider this by taking into account the ordinary actions of my daily life.

It is Your wish, Jesus, that I should fulfill my duty even in the smallest matters. To accomplish this You give me the necessary grace at every moment. Hence, upon awaking in the morning, I most assuredly have the grace to rise without hesitation. Open I am lazy, but You do not want me to be lazy. Upon awaking I ought to turn my thoughts to God, to You, Jesus, but I forget to do so. Forget? I forget because I do not listen to your voice. I do not listen to it because perhaps to the present I have been unfaithful to Your grace and therefore I lack the will power to fulfill Your divine will even in small matters. Since you are always present with Your grace, I need only to ask for it, humble myself, and confess my weakness, because the grace of petition is associated with the grace of prayer, which You always give me.

Next, I wash myself and dress. I will not tarry doing so, but do it well, for it is my duty.

Then, I say my prayers with attention and devotion. You give me the grace to do this, Jesus, because You want me to pray attentively and piously.

In making my **meditation** I often find it difficult to concentrate. Again, I must humble myself and beg for Your grace, because it is a known fact that I always have the grace to humble myself and to beg for grace. And even though throughout the time of meditation if I SHOULD DO NOTHING, for evidently, Jesus, You do not then require more of me than this. On the other hand I can consider all my duties, both of obligation and of the circumstances of my life. These duties are the will of God, and therefore, oh Jesus, You give me the grace to fulfill them. I shall FULFILL THEM WELL only on the condition that I cooperate with Your grace. To fulfill them well I must prepare for them in prayer and beg you for the grace to do so.

Third Point

Oh Jesus, during the course of the day many temptations arise. There are, for example, different associations with people which are outside the call of duty, various incidents, and

unexpected contradiction. At such times can I also be certain of Your grace? “god is faithful,” St. Paul assures us (1 Cor 10:13), “who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue (i.e. give abundant grace) that you will be able to bear it.” Temptation, then, will come. With them I must struggle, knowing that You, Jesus, always give me Your grace to overcome them. Temptations themselves, therefore, bring me Your graces, and for this reason are often called “black graces.”

As a social being I must associate with other people. To them I ought to be courteous, hopeful, charitable, considerate, etc. To practice these virtues You likewise always give me Your grace, for You want me to practice true Christian charity. Various incidents arise, even though which occur by accident, are always according to Your will, Jesus. An accidental incident, it is said, is unknown Divine Providence. Whenever such cases arise, You always provide me with sufficient grace to perform the proper action.

Our Misery - X

Preparation

I desire, oh Jesus, to reflect upon my misery, because as a creature not only do I have nothing and can do nothing of myself, but also, due to original sin, my nature is wounded and inclined to evil. Grant me the grace to recognize this misery, for of myself I view it with displeasure. It is humiliating to discover so much misery in myself, and for this reason I try not to recognize it. Confronted with his misery, St. Augustine declared, “Lord, when I did not wish to look at myself, You forced me to look and to see how ugly, how impure, how abominable, and wretched I was. I saw and I was horrified, and there was no place to where I could flee from myself. And when I TRIED to turn my eyes away from myself, You again pointed at me, so that I would see my malice and despise it. So clearly did You manifest it that my eyes could not turn away from myself. I perceived it - this malice of mine - but I did not want to admit it. “Oh Jesus, when You reveal my misery to me, is not my reaction the same?”

First Point

How great must be my misery, Jesus, since even to the most holy souls You revealed what misery was in them. Only under the beacon of Your grace did they understand the state of

their soul. St Catharine of Genoa thanked You, Jesus, for revealing slowly and gradually the evil within her, because she said that if she saw it all at once, she would have died of fright. And Gemma Galgani told her confessor, "If you could only see, father, how ugly was my soul!" Then she added that You, Jesus, revealed this condition to her. St. Francis of Assisi declared that he was the greatest sinner, and St. Michael de Sanctis had the impression that the devils in hell could not be worse than he. And these were elect souls, oh Jesus! In his morning prayers St. Philip Neri prayed thus: "Lord, hold Philip firmly today, for otherwise he will certainly betray You." These holy souls, enlightened by Your grace, said what they understood and felt. They did not exaggerate but spoke the truth. I, oh Jesus, I'm astonished to hear the Saints speak in this way of themselves, because I do not regard myself to be so miserable. Indeed, how profound must be my misery! This proves that I do not know myself thoroughly. Oh Jesus, grant me the grace to know myself well.

Second Point

Jesus, you reveal our great misery to us not only through the Saints but also through people of the world - even unbelievers - who, through study and experience, have discovered the weaknesses of man. The deeper their insight into the soul, the more vividly do they describe the misery of our nature. One of them, Demaistre, known as a profound thinker, believing in You and devoted to You, Jesus, said that each of us has in himself the makings of a Nero. He said to himself: "I do not have knowledge of the conscience of a criminal, I know only the conscience of an upright man, but that conscience is a terrible thing." Another, Taine, a famous historian and philosopher, but an unbeliever, admits that man "is a hidden outlaw and a madman, unconscious - it is true - but living ever in the cave of his heart." And I, oh Jesus, do I see and admit that all this indescribable misery is also in me?

The Good is Us – XI

Preparation

Jesus, is there nothing good in us? We notice that people have noble and disinterested ambitions, they accomplish many great deeds, they show unselfish devotion for people and for worthy causes. In ourselves you permit us to discover many good thoughts, fine sentiments,

courageous resolutions, and delicate considerations for others. The fact that, though full of misery, so inclined toward every evil, we did not fall completely, and have not mired in material things, proves that in spite of the evil there is also much good in us. I desire to consider this point, Jesus, so that I may know the whole truth about myself. Give me your light, oh Jesus.

First Point

Is it safe for me to consider how much good there is in me? Being so prone to pride, perhaps there is danger that I will focus my attention on the good in me, and overlook the evil in me, and so become conceited. One fact assures me to proceed without fear. You, Jesus, revealed to your Saints the good that was in them and they acknowledged this good without fearing that such knowledge would harm them. This good in them was much greater than it is in us. St Francis of Assisi was very humble, yet on one occasion he said to one of his religious brothers, "If you were to see the blessings God has given me, you would realize that people do not give me enough honour." The Saints attributed the good in them to You, Jesus, the giver of all good. In recognizing the good in themselves they were not inflated with pride, but were moved to humility. For the more they discovered good in themselves, the more they became humble. The holiness that St. Francis had was given him by You, Jesus. In all sincerity he thought himself the greatest of sinners, for he said of himself, "I think that if the greatest scoundrel received as man graces as I have, he would serve God better than I." St. Michael Sanctis considered himself of worse than satan, because he thought that if the most miserable person were to receive so many, and such great graces from You, Jesus, as he received, that man would be a saint.

Second Point

Oh Jesus, in the parable of the talents You indicated that each person receives some talent from You. This talent may be a certain dexterity or a certain ability. Such dexterity or ability is not of ourselves, for it was given to us by You, Jesus, and no one can produce such an intimate talent by personal effort. But should exceptional talents make one proud? It is a known fact that men do become proud of their abilities. Am I proud of the talents which are mine? How can I forestall pride? Should I convince myself that I do not have a given talent and deny before people that I have it? Jesus, it is clear to me that You do not want me to deny reality. To the

Saints You revealed how you solve this dilemma. They saw the good in themselves and acknowledged its existence, but they recognized that this good in them comes from You and is not due to their own merit. Give me the grace, Jesus, to do likewise. Then the talents I possess will make me humble, just as the talents that the Saints had made them humble.

Third Point

Oh Jesus, I want to observe more closely the good that is in me and to consider what use I make of my talents. Do I employ them for the glory of God and the benefit of mankind, or do I use them only for my own glory, for my own benefit? Is the praise of men my chief interest? Have I used my talents, intended by You to serve God and my neighbour, to show myself off to the best advantage? Am I motivated by the desire to please You, Jesus, or is it to gain praise and popularity for myself? Do I rejoice because I am praised, and am I sad because I am not praised? Am I sad because others do not notice my talents? Am I disturbed when I fail to please you? Do I need the encouragement of men to induce me to use my talents well, so that I may fulfill Your will? Do I need the praise of men to stimulate in me to act, because Your holy will and commandments are not sufficient for me?

The Good in Us - XII

Preparation

Oh, Jesus, I have reflected upon the good in me, namely, the talents You have given me. Now I wish to learn whether we have certain merit which we can gain by our efforts. Without Your grace, Jesus, we would not have any merit. Truly, if we did not cooperate with You, Your grace would cease its operation in us. Hence our cooperation is some good that is in us. This wish to study more closely. Oh Jesus, enlighten me.

First Point

The more I realize how much evil there is in me, oh Jesus, the more I discover how much good there is in me. For, notwithstanding my strong inclination to evil, I have not fallen completely, but still adhere to that which is good. This I must attribute to Your grace and also to my cooperation with that grace. Handicapped as I am by a wounded nature and still preserved

from complete moral collapse is proof that, in cooperating with Your grace, I have gained many victories over evil. But oh, how strange. I am not conscious of these victories. I do not recall them and do not know of them. Why, my Jesus? Surely, it must be because they humble rather than exalt me, for I realize that my cooperation with You, Jesus, is generally very feeble, very meager.

Second Point

I have been saved from my evils, because by Your grace, Jesus, you have preserved me from them. You have drawn me away from evil, and I allowed myself to be thus persuaded, and by this I have gained merit. I must admit, however, that in this turning away from evil there still remained in me a great inclination to evil. In this victory over evil how much sorrow and how much looking back there still was on my part. It was so difficult for me to part and relinquish forever the evil from which you have withdrawn from me. When I consider all my victories and the measure of my cooperation with Your grace, I find no reason for self-exaltation.

Third Point

Oh, Jesus, when I consider the good that I have attained, I realize that I must give credit only to Your grace, because my cooperation was insignificant. You drew me to good, and I allowed myself to be drawn, and thus I gained merit; but on my part how much hesitation, aversion, negligence, wavering, uncertain intention, and even ill will there was. To induce myself to follow You, Jesus, often I had to find my own interest, my own pleasure. I had, in a word, to deceive myself by presenting godless motives, for divine motives did not suffice, were not sufficiently effective. Hence in considering my spiritual triumphs I cannot praise myself but I must humble myself. For this reason, I do not think of my victories, but wish to remain ignorant of them.

The Good in Us - XIII

Preparation

The good that I detect in myself, Jesus, inclines me to thank and praise You for it and at the same time to humble myself profoundly. Oh Jesus, You mercifully receive and bountifully

reward the little good that we offer You. The good that I see in myself moves me to humble myself more, since my cooperation with You, my misery becomes more apparent. I wish once more to reflect upon this.

First Point

You, Jesus, know our misery and our weakness better than we do. In Your mercy you accept our cooperation, however poor and weak it may be. Here You regard Your activity and in it You sanctify mine. You regard the result, and that result is wonderful, beautiful, and magnificent because it is Your activity.

Second Point

People praise and admire me, Jesus, because they see the result. In Your infinite mercy, You accept my little good and consider it worthy of You. Men praise and admire, because they do not know and cannot see within me. Since they cannot distinguish Your action from my cooperation, they do not detect my misery, so they admire and praise me.

Third Point

Since I know how feeble was my cooperation with Your grace and since I know how much I am obliged to You, Jesus, and how much I can attribute to myself, at least within myself and before You ought to humble myself and say with St. Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am." (1 Cor. 15:10) And if your grace, Jesus, "has not been fruitless in me", as the same Apostle says of himself, then indeed I did act, and therefore I will say from St. Paul, "not I, but the grace of God with me." Do I have a truthful and humble disposition or do I at times attribute all the good results to myself? Toward this goal, I should strive, so that men seeing some good in me would, "glorify Your Father, Who is in heaven." (Matt. 5:16), as you have instructed us to do.

Our Self- Love - XIV

Preparation

I desire now, Jesus, to reflect on the evil consequences of self-love which is the source of

all our misery. These consequences notify me of its malice, but this malice is hard to detect. Oh Jesus, grant that I may understand the nature of self-love and realize that it is strongly rooted in me.

First Point

Oh Jesus, You said, “Why dost thou see the speck in thy brother’s eye, and yet does not consider the beam in thy own eye.” (Mt 7:3) This means that we notice the smallest evil in others, but fail to see the great evil in ourselves. This is surprising, because it would seem that nothing should be easier than to know ourselves, for we, as it were, read within ourselves and see what is happening to us. Jesus, You gave us the faculty continually to know our thoughts, feelings, desires, and intentions. And again it would seem impossible to know others well, because You did not give us the ability to read their mind, heart, and will. Of others, we can know only that which they wish to reveal, because everyone is adept in concealing his feeling and intentions. Nevertheless, Jesus, You said, “Why dost thou see the speck in thy brother’s eye, and yet dose not consider the beam in thy own eye?” And our daily experience confirms that we usually do not know ourselves but know others very well. Why? Is it not because we love ourselves too much and this love of self-binds us and prevents us from noticing the evil in ourselves? Is it not for this reason that You said, “Why dost thou seek the speck in thy brother’s eye, and yet does not consider the beam in thy own?”

Second Point

Jesus, in teaching us to practice brotherly love You insist that we should not strive to prove the guilt of our neighbor, that we should not dispute with him as to who was at fault, but that we should forgive those who offended us. You instruct us to say, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” By nature, we are inclined to judge that others not we, are always at fault. Rightly or not, such is our spontaneous reaction. Peace, however, can sooner be established by forgiving than by disputing. You tell us, Jesus, to leave our gift at the altar and first become reconciled with our brother. You instruct us to do this not only when we are at fault, but when we are innocent, when we remember, “That thy brother has anything against thee.” (Mt 5:23) Strongly You recommend this, because it is so difficult to admit that we are at fault and even more difficult to forgive. Oh Jesus, is this not also true of me? Am I not also blind to myself and thereby ignorant of the self-love strangling my soul?

Third Point

You have said, “Jesus, that there are persons who, “bind heavy and oppressive burdens, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but not with one finger of their own do they choose to move them.” (Mt 23:4) Do such people feel that they are not obliged to do what they demand of others? Have they a right to do what they demand of others? Have they a right to do what is forbidden to others? Have they no obligations? Oh Jesus, without being aware of it, how often do we behave in a similar manner? It seems so natural. Why? We decide what others must do, but we resent when someone reminds us of our obligations, because we are convinced that we alone, “know good and evil.” For this reason, we do not see the evil in us. We are blind to it, because we have created it and feel that whatever we do is good simply because it is ours. And it frequently happens that a similar deed, performed by another person but contrary to our wishes, is considered by us as evil. Oh Jesus, such behavior reveals the abyss of misery that is in us. Falsely we believe that our ego sanctifies and justifies us and all our actions. For this reason, we condemn in others what we do ourselves, and again, we fail to perform that which we oblige others to do. Jesus, is such duplicity possible? It must be, because of the Pharisee You said, “They bind heavy and oppressive burdens, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but not with one finger of their own do they choose to move them.” How many Pharisees are there! Since I permit my ego to justify many of my deeds, am I not guilty of such pharisaic duplicity?

Our Self-Love - XV

Preparation

With your help, Jesus, I wish to consider further the consequences of the love of self in me, and in particular, how self-love breeds hatred, hatred even of God. Is such hatred of God possible, Jesus? Yes, because self-love declares: “Not God, but I.” In spite of this defiant declaration, You, Jesus, remain; God remains is God. Since self-love recognizes this and feels frustrated in its defiance, it exclaims, “Away with God.” Self-love hates You, hates God. And this hatred also extends to our neighbor, for it excludes You, Jesus, excludes God, so much easier does it exclude our neighbor especially when he stands in the way. Then it exclaims: “Not he, but I. Away with him.”

First Point

It is understandable that Satan thrives on hatred which is his only pleasure, his chief passion. But is it possible that I can be like Satan, oh Jesus? Sometimes I behave like him. When I am driven by passion to hate someone, though I know this offends You because it is contrary to Your commandment of love and also harms me because it places me in opposition to You, I seek to injure and destroy him. Jesus, at times there arises in me this base antagonism toward someone who stands in my way so that my soul cries out, "Would that I could do away with him." And I know that if You did not restrain Your grace, if religion, fear, and a certain abhorrence of crime did not deter me, I would find the means to destroy this person.

Second Point

Jesus, why do people often hate those who never harm them, never stand in their way; hate even those who do them good or whom they themselves have wronged? Is it because hatred has its nest within us that it can be aroused by the slightest provocation? O Jesus, why do feelings of resentment arise in me when I am obligated to someone? When I have reasons to be grateful to someone, why do I often feel hatred of that person? When I need help, and must depend upon someone, why do I become angry? When I wrong someone, why do I excuse myself by saying that he deserves such ill treatment and that my action is justified? To vindicate my behavior, I am even willing to confirm myself in evil. Will not my resentment and unjust notions lead me to a deeper hatred of my victim? O Jesus, save me, save me, because I perish.

Third Point

Jesus, is it possible for man to hate God? To the Apostles You said, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (J 15:18-19). Hence it is true that people do hate You, Jesus, they do hate God, and they hate Your disciples because they hate You. Upon earth, You established Your Church, Jesus, and You told the rulers of Your Church, "He who hears you, hears me; he who rejects you, rejects me" (Lk 10:16). In spite of this, do not men out of hatred persecute Your Church, and thereby do they not hate You, God, in Your Church? You are hated not only by unbelievers who despise Your Church, Jesus, but also by believers who have turned away from You. Up to the present You have preserved me from such

treachery, Jesus, but since I have a similar weak nature as your enemies, there is always danger that I can betray you. Of this danger, Your Apostle warns me, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12).

Our Self-Love - XVI

Preparation

It is a dreadful thing, oh Jesus, to hate You, to hate God. That such hatred can touch everyone is evident from the fall of priests and religious and from the temptations which assail very holy souls. At times persons dedicated entirely to You, Jesus, are troubled by heretical thoughts, by an impulse to curse You and Your Most Holy Mother; they are troubled thus even at the sacred time of receiving Holy Communion. Since many of these people have spent long years in serving You faithfully, Jesus, such temptations of antipathy and aversion are a source of profound suffering for them. Their confusion is intensified when they feel satisfaction upon learning that Your enemies offend and disregard You, Jesus; when they feel despondent upon hearing that your faithful servants are making acts of adoration, reparation and love. They find it very difficult to overcome this condition. They are in torment and dread lest they allow these passions to overwhelm them, lest they consent to them. Whence is this, Jesus? Does something similar threaten me?

First Point

Can such feelings of hatred toward You, Jesus, be inspired by You to test us? That is impossible. How can You arouse hate in man? St. James says, “God is no tempter of evil, and he Himself tempts no one. (Jm 1:13). With your permission, does Satan test us by putting such hatred into our hearts? Satan has the power to stir up only that which is in us or tempt us from without. “Everyone is tempted by being drawn away and enticed by his own passion” (Jm 1:14). Because of original sin there is in us an inclination to hate You, Jesus, and Satan, in tempting us, takes advantage of this inclination. Give me the grace, Jesus, to understand this, so that I may hold myself in salutary fear and thus avoid depending upon my own strength.

Second Point

Jesus, let me always “watch and pray” lest I permit thoughts, desires, and feelings of hatred toward You to take possession of my soul. Were there times in which I tried to wrest

certain graces from You, and not having received them, did I make claims upon You? Precisely such pretenses can give rise to hatred toward God Himself, because the blame is placed on You, on God. “God had no regard for me,” we say. “God is too severe with me; He treats me too harshly and shows no mercy.” Such remarks are often heard. Save me from such pretentiousness, Jesus, because in my nature, defiled by original sin, there is self-love which may induce hatred toward You.

Third Point

Jesus, You have commanded us to love our neighbor out of love for God. If we do not love our neighbor, we show that we likewise do not love God, for St. John says, "If anyone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, whom he sees, love God, whom he does not see?" (J 4:19-20). Hence the hatred of God, the hatred of You, Jesus, can begin in the dislike of our neighbor. If I foster such a dislike, I may gradually fall into a hatred of God Himself. You command us, Jesus, to forgive our enemies, and in the “Our Father” You teach us that we shall gain forgiveness only if we forgive others. Here You warn us that the hatred of our neighbor develops into hatred of God, for as children of God we ought to do what You recommend. We do not love because we do not obey You, Jesus.

Our Self-Love - XVII

Preparation

Jesus, I wish to meditate on scrupulosity which so often torments devoted souls, pious souls, whose delicate conscience vehemently despises sin. If You, Jesus, permit these souls to pass through these trials, Your purpose is surely to purify them completely, perfectly. Evidently in them is something of which they must be purified. What is it? This I want to consider. Jesus, enlighten me that I may know well the causes of scruples and that I may be healed of them, if I have them; and if I do not have them, that I may rid myself of any defects that could lead me into scrupulosity.

First Point

It is said that the scrupulous seek sinlessness and the certainty of salvation in themselves,

in their own sufficiency, not in Your mercy. They do not seek their support in You, Jesus, but in themselves, whereas St. Paul assures us, “Our sufficiency is from God” (2 Cor 3:5). Although they deny it, scrupulous people do not put their trust in You, Jesus, but trust in themselves. They erroneously believe that they can so order their life and so faithfully fulfill their spiritual obligations that they will obtain peace and assure their salvation. When they finally learn, that this is impossible, they become discouraged and depressed. You do not permit them to obtain this peace, because if they did, they would put greater trust in themselves. To rid the and of this false self-sufficiency, inspired by self-love and self-activity, You permit them to be afflicted with fear and doubt. Through this suffering, You want them to learn not to rely upon themselves. The trials and mistakes of pious souls teach me the need I have of learning to depend, not upon myself, but upon You, Jesus. Give me Your wisdom and strength.

Second Point

Oh Jesus, it would seem that the scrupulous are concerned with You, because they do not want to sin but, in reality their self-love induces them to be occupied with themselves. Is self-love really the cause of scruples? Why do the scrupulous often fret and torment themselves, not because they may offend You, but because they fear they will lose peace, fear that they will have no qualms of conscience, that they will suffer? Hence, they are not concerned with God, with You, Jesus, but always with themselves and their scrupulous condition. O Jesus, deliver me from such selfish interest and grant me the grace always to seek You, serve You, and fulfill Your will.

Third Point

From the natural order, You teach me, Jesus, that a person who is engrossed in himself, too concerned about his health, can easily persuade himself that he has every illness about which he hears or reads. In time, becomes a hypochondriac. If such a person took genuine interest in some task or the needs of his neighbor, he would not fall into this morbid state. Such a person, however, is so self-centered that nothing interests him but his health. The same is true of scrupulous people, because instead of thinking of You, Jesus, instead of fulfilling Your will and laboring for You, they only think of themselves and thus fall into scruples. In spiritual matters, therefore, I ought to be very diligent in suppressing self-love, because I know what disorder and evil consequences are caused by self-interest.

Our Self-Love - XVIII

Preparation

I wish to consider, oh Jesus, what are the best means of freeing myself from scruples if I have them, or if I do not have them, of guarding against them. We can be purified by scruples because they indicate that something exists in us that should be purified. If this is so, then it is prudent and necessary to forestall them by purifying ourselves of the evil which causes them. Jesus, You certainly want us to cleanse ourselves of the smallest evil, of the least vestige of self-love. Grant me the grace to recognize well this evil in me and to cleanse myself of it before it causes me to be scrupulous.

First Point

St. Philip Neri says that the remedy for scruples is humility. Humility does not seek the first place, does not love itself above all, does not depend upon self, but seeks You in all things, Jesus, seeks support in You, depends upon You. Humility also induces one to heed the advice given him by his spiritual director and the confessor. The humble man does not think of himself but strives to serve You, Jesus. In all things and above all, the Saints, too, when in doubt, turned to You, Jesus, served You more faithfully and loved You more ardently, for their primary interest was not themselves but God. They loved, not themselves, but God, loved You, Jesus. The source, the cause of scruples, therefore, is pride, i.e., self-love. Hence the remedy for scruples is humility. We must purify ourselves of self-love. And who will purify us, if not You, Jesus?

Second Point

Since scrupulous persons fear sin, desire to serve You, Jesus, and strive to observe the commandments strictly, ought they not be confident that You love them? This knowledge of Your love for them should inspire them with the conviction that You will not permit them to fall. This conviction should dispel their fears and strengthen their trust in You. It would also be to their advantage if they would forget themselves and concentrate on doing good to their neighbor, for Your Vicar, St. Peter says, “Brethren, strive even more by good works to make your calling and election sure. For if you do this, you will not fall into sin at any time” (2Peter 1:10).

Third Point

If the scrupulous tell themselves beforehand that they did not sin, are they not prone to be lax in their judgement? This uncertainty of being guilty of laxity usually inspires them with fear. But, Jesus, would You not prevent them from falling into this error, if they confidently had recourse to You and begged You to enlighten them? Your infinite mercy ought to inspire them to do this, Jesus, for You promised that our prayers will always be answered. It undoubtedly pleases You that no one should trust exclusively in himself, depend upon himself, for so it should be. If one trusts and depends upon You, Jesus, can you forsake him?

The Misery in Our Faculties - XIX

Preparation

Jesus, I desire to know more about the misery in me, to penetrate it deeper and to consider it in all its aspects. To know this misery well is a great grace. St. Catherine of Sienna says that You, Jesus, revealed her misery to her by gradually showing her shortcomings, and then she understood how much she was remiss even in those things which seemed blameless and worthy of praise. And it was fortunate she said that You revealed this misery gradually and not in its entirety, because its enormity was so great that she confessed that she was too weak to endure the sight of it at one time. Hence this is proof that the misery of human nature is great even in the Saints. I beg You, Jesus, to show me my misery and to enlighten my mind to understand it, but at the same time strengthen me lest this knowledge should discourage and overwhelm me.

First Point

Oh Jesus, I have already seen how self-love took root in us as one of the consequences of original sin. In addition to this, however, the control of our faculties was also impaired. Even with Your grace, Jesus, I find it difficult to control my imagination, my feelings and my desires. To live virtuously I must do violence to myself continually. Am I really master of myself? Am I not too sensitive, too moody, quickly fluctuating between sadness and joy? Am I not too dejected by failure and adversity? Does success cause me to be excessively elated and does the lack of success cast me into discouragement and despondency? When some suffering afflicts

me, I fret and complain to such a degree that I inconvenience my neighbors. This selfish behavior reveals my lack of self control and proves that I do not know my own weakness. I will never truly know this misery unless You will reveal it to me, Jesus. Oh Master, enlighten and strengthen me.

Second Point

Original sin not only weakened our control over our faculties but also impaired the faculties. St. Thomas declares that when man said, “Not God, but I”, his will turned away from God and remained averted- “*aversa a Deo*”. Thus, our will no longer wants the will of God, Your will, Jesus; it does not want truth and goodness from You, but seeks only to fulfill its own desires. Man, set himself up as the truth, the good, and the law unto himself and unto others. If he sometimes desires what You want, Jesus, he does so only in so far as it is agreeable to his will and humors his self-love. Is this not so in me, Jesus? Did I not often indulge my self-will? Did I not follow its desires instead of fulfilling Your wishes?

Third Point

When man turned away from the will of God, disorder entered his will and intellect. St. Thomas says that the heart of man, instead of seeking Your pleasure, Jesus, seeks its own pleasure in everything and seeks this pleasure as its end. It forms such strong attachments to creatures which give it pleasure that it finds it difficult and painful to separate itself from them. Our intellect, turned away from truth, instead of seeking Your glory, the glory of God, seeks its own glory, its own importance and greatness in falsehood, namely, in that which is not reality. Hence it is turned away from You, Jesus, Who are Truth. In indifferent matters, in things in which our greatness, our importance plays no part, we do seek and accept the truth; but when there is question of gaining honor and recognition, if Your truth interferes with personal interests, we are inclined to seek and accept falsehood, because this falsehood exalts and flatters us. Thus, in establishing its own importance, our intellect rejects true greatness and is satisfied with a pleasant falsehood. O Jesus, do I not yield to this inclination to seek pleasure and greatness as an end in itself with no regard for true goodness and reality?

The Misery in Our Will - XX

Preparation

I have seen how man's will through original sin is turned away from God to such a degree that he resents the rule of the divine will and the divine truth. But he strives to establish himself as the supreme judge of what constitutes truth, goodness and law for himself and for others. In a word, man wants to rule. Now, Jesus, I wish to consider this misery in my will, for I have the capacity to know human nature well, know what man is, but only Your grace will enable me to understand the defects of this fallen nature. O Master, give me this grace of understanding.

First Point

Instead of laboring to win all hearts to You, Jesus, man usually strives to attract them only to himself. He desires and strives to make everyone love only him. By offering himself to them as their only good, he seeks to rule over them. Instead of loving his neighbor as You, Jesus, have commanded, selfish man thinks only of himself and his interests. He does not care for others, he has no genuine interest in their welfare, because he is under the impression that he deserves chief recognition. For this reason, he makes others wait for him, makes others suffer discomfort, but he demands to be served and considered at all times. He does not spare anyone. He makes no effort to help others, because he cares only for himself. Where is that love of neighbor, that service to neighbor upon which You, Jesus, insist as fundamental? It is replaced by the desire to rule over others. Jesus, You said, "The kings of the gentiles lord it over them, and they who exercise authority over them are called Benefactors. But not so with you. On the contrary, let him who is greater among you become as the youngest, and him who is the chief as the servant" (Lk 22:25-26). Hence, Jesus, You do not want to place ourselves above others, not to rule over others. Even when we are placed in a position of authority, You want us to perform this office as one who serves, not as a tyrannical ruler. To see these defects and abuses in others is easy, but do I see them in myself? Give me your light, Jesus.

Second Point

Jesus, You punish us already on earth for seeking to dominate others. When a person

fails to attain his ambition to rule over others, he feels hurt and disappointed. Many have labored all their life to gain recognition, to gain the love of others, but their labors were in vain. Added to this failure is the disappointment and frustration when such a person meets with ingratitude. He labored much for people, not to gain them for You, Jesus, but for himself, and they rejected him. This hurts him because he has failed in his expectations, but he has failed precisely because he sought himself and not You, Jesus. Does not this misery exist in me? Show me, O Jesus.

Third Point

Jesus, You said, “Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin, is the servant of sin” (J 8:34). He, then, who desires to dominate over others – and such domination is sinful – encroaches upon Your right, Jesus, and falls into slavery. In giving himself to others as their only good, a person really seeks and strives to gain recognition, gratitude, and love because his happiness depends on these. This giving of himself to others as a good makes me understand that man is thereby seeking himself in others. It also shows that man is insufficient unto himself, and, instead of being king over others, he becomes dependent upon them. I detect this behavior in many people. Am I free from it? Show me, O Jesus.

The Misery in Our Will - XXI

Preparation

Jesus, I wish to consider further the misery in me and to consider it together with You, because only with Your help I can understand it correctly. I have seen how the misery in the will of man inclines him to seek to rule over the hearts of others. Now I wish to consider how it similarly seeks to rule over the intellects of others. This misery induces man to offer himself as the only truth for others. Jesus, give your grace that in this meditation I may learn how much of this misery is in me.

First Point

Is it possible for someone to present himself to others as the only truth? Yes, for there are those who of themselves want to decide what is good and what is evil for themselves and for others in accord with the words of the tempter, “You shall be like gods, knowing good and evil.”

By disregarding Your teaching, Jesus, they easily fall into the error of thinking that whatever they claim to be the truth, is the truth. For this reason, they want others to think as they do and to have the same convictions as they have. Arguments and dissension arise among people because they hold different opinions. Each endeavor to convince the other, but neither side will yield. Even by violence each strives to change the other into the image and likeness of himself. They ignore the fact that man has been created in the image and likeness of God. Such domineering people do not permit others to have any rights, do not permit them to hold different opinions. Do I act in this manner? Show me, O Jesus.

Second Point

O Jesus, give me the grace to see whether I try to enforce my conviction upon others in different matters. At a social gathering, do I want to dominate the conversation because I am convinced that only what I have to say is important and has value. Perhaps I listen only out of courtesy, but pay no attention to what is being said and wait impatiently for others to finish, so that I may have my say. I may have the habit of answering with a “No”, although inwardly I agree with what is being said. I do this to belittle and dismiss what others say. Similarly, do I not criticize the efforts and accomplishments of others for the sole reason that what is not done by me cannot be good? Show me, O Jesus.

Third Point

Jesus, does not man, desiring to dominate over others, fall into slavery? Is he not enslaved by what he wants to be true? What a betrayal it would be on his part if he were to forsake the truth to uphold his own opinion. When his opinion is proved to be false, does he not continue to support and defend it, or at least, does he not become sad and dejected? Surely this shows that he is not concerned with the truth, for if he were, he would rejoice that the truth has been revealed. In constantly defending what he says, does he not fall into the bondage of others? To make others agree with him, he must labor to convince them, to accommodate himself to them, to gain their respect, to serve them. Is this not slavery? Jesus, is this misery in me?

The Misery in Our Will - XXII

Preparation

Jesus, I wish, in fine, to reflect upon the misery in my will in as far as I am inclined to impose my will as the only law for others in order to dominate them. Grant me the grace, Jesus, not only to detect this misery with all its stratagems in myself, but also give me the foresight to guard against being deceived into committing unjust acts against my neighbor.

First Point

Jesus, do I not impose my will upon others without reason? Do I insist that others do my bidding not because my wish is the best course of action and serves their welfare, but simply because such is my command? Do I not belittle and snub those who oppose me, those who refuse to speak, look, and walk as I instruct them to do? When they refuse me, do I not criticize them, reveal their faults, and get angry? O Jesus, is not such behavior a form of moral homicide?

Second Point

In loving others, do I only love them for myself, so that through it I might force them to fulfill my will? You command us to love each other, Jesus, but how? It ought to be a love of union, for in praying for us to Your Father You said, "That they also may be one of us" (J 17:21). Love resides principally in the will and tends to union with the one loved through the will. The ancient sages were wont to say, "To will the same thing, and not to will the same thing, that is true love." As our Master, Teacher, and God You alone, Jesus, have the right to our will, a right to demand that we fulfill what You command and counsel. And since what You wish, Jesus, is always the truth, designed to obtain Your glory and our welfare, only with You can we safely unite our wills with Yours. This established, we can unite ourselves with others who fulfill Your will. Acting thus, we please You and act in union with our neighbor. United with God, with You, Jesus, we are to win others for You. Hence, we must not offer ourselves to others, but offer them God, offer them You, Jesus, and strive to unite ourselves with them to You. In this way, Your prayer, "That they also may be one in us," will be fulfilled. Do I act thus, or on the contrary, do I base the bond of union upon making others fulfill my will? Show me, O Jesus.

Third Point

O Jesus, when a person desires to impose his will upon others and dominate their will, does he not fall into bondage? He wants his will to be fulfilled always and in all things, but this is not possible. Ignoring this truth, he strives to induce others to fulfill his desires by means of gifts, flattery, and bribes. His efforts, however, have a reverse effect, because instead of them serving him, he is serving them by accommodating himself to them. He wants to rule, but in reality, others rule him. Am I in such bondage? Show me, O Jesus, and draw me to Yourself.

The Misery in Our Heart - XXIII

Preparation

Jesus, what is the misery in our heart? And in particular, what is the misery in my heart? This misery consists in seeking pleasure for the sake of pleasure, seeking it as an end in itself. Pleasure is man's chief occupation; he is submerged in it. Now I beg You, Jesus, to show me how potent this misery is in me, because I do not know to what extent my heart is afflicted by it.

First Point

Do I belong to that group of people whom St. Paul says, "Their god is the belly" (Phil 3:19). Such people do not serve You, Jesus, "but their own belly" (Rm 16:18). Although we have a strong desire to taste and seek pleasure in eating and drinking, we manage to control and restrain ourselves because we realize the ignominy attached to a life devoted to excessive eating and drinking. We do not want to be known as gluttons. But in my thoughts and desires do I not yearn for choice and tasty foods? Do I seek pleasure in eating and drinking but in such a way as not to be detected? O Jesus, help me to know myself.

Second Point

Do I seek pleasure in base matters, in sensual things? If I do not, I have You to thank, Jesus, for Sacred Scripture declares that no one could be, "content, except God gave it" (Wisdom 8:21). Nevertheless, in me there is sensuality. Although it is dormant, it is still there. Proof of this are the temptations which assail me. And what is worse, there is in me – though not deliberate- the desire for sensuality. When I look at objects which later disturb me or deliberately expose myself to impure thoughts and desires, what pretexts do I want to employ to

pacify my conscience? You, Jesus, know better than I. And do I sincerely and seriously guard my eyes? Why does an evil thing attract my eyes even from a great distance? How this humbles me, for though I immediately avert my eyes, my imagination supplies what they did not see. Do I honestly lament my evil inclinations or do I talk and read about these tendencies on the pretext of finding a remedy for them? Help me know myself, Jesus.

Third Point

Jesus, you said, “That of every idle word men shall speak, they shall give an account of it on the day of judgement” (Mt 12:36) – “every idle word”, namely, every word spoken unnecessarily. If You, Jesus, forbid even one idle word, you also demand the same and more in regard to our actions. Ought I not apply this to my recreation and play? I know that the world does not consider recreation even as the least kind of evil, but should not my concern be Your will, Jesus, rather than the opinion of the world? Therefore, I wish to consider whether I seek play and recreation only for the pleasure they give me or because I need the relaxation. In the past, did I devote myself to them wholeheartedly, did any sport drive me into a frenzy? Am I one of those talkative persons who waste time but cannot tear themselves away from useless conversations? Unlike the ancient Romans, we today do not relish the bloody circuses of old, because Your religion, Jesus, has silenced the savage instinct in us; but do not thoughts come to me of taking delight in watching people suffer when those sufferings are associated with sensual passions and when such thoughts serve to arouse each passion? Do I experience something similar? Show me, O Jesus.

The Misery in Our Heart - XXIV

Preparation

Jesus, I have seen how we seek pleasure in material things. Now I wish to learn how we seek pleasure in immaterial and spiritual things – in ideals. Since it is difficult to detect the misery on this level, I beg You, Jesus, to reveal it to me, so that I may efficaciously avoid this evil.

First Point

O Jesus, is it wrong to seek pleasure one gets from admiring nature as it is portrayed and expressed in art, poetry, music and song? Through them may I not seek culture, relaxation, and contentment? These are worthy motives, and You, Jesus, do not forbid them. If a pleasure is a means and not an end, it does not merit reproof. At the same time, however, You warn me, Jesus, that often, very often, man does not admire, does not praise God, nor does he seek culture, knowledge and relaxation; yet he devotes himself completely to such things, is intoxicated by them, and seeks them only for the pleasure they give him. Is this how I behave? Show me, O Jesus.

Second Point

Do I, Jesus, devote myself to seeking pleasure in inanimate things, namely, in day dreams? This is a dangerous pastime, because it tears me away from reality and at times makes me incapable of thinking properly. Do I build imaginary castles in my imagination to enjoy them and become intoxicated by them? Is such day dreaming permissible, Jesus? It is forbidding, because it is clear that here I seek pleasure for the sake of pleasure. In addition to losing touch with reality I live a life of make-believe which hinders me from performing serious work and recollecting prayer. My imagination soars, I know not where. Is this not sinful, Jesus? Often, I make harmful and sinful accusations by attributing motives to others which they never had, and in this way, I become guilty of such harmful flights of fancy? Where is my self-control to check these unnecessary thoughts? Jesus, You said, "Of every idle word men speak, they shall give an account of it on the day of judgement" (Mt 12:36). Now the spoken word is the expression of a thought, so when we speak we think aloud. Hence a time will come when I shall be obliged to render an account of every idle thought. In the future, shall I permit my thoughts to roam freely to my own detriment or shall I control and check them to make serve for my welfare? Jesus, help me.

Third Point

Jesus, am I allowed to seek pleasure in holy things, particularly in prayer? This also is not permissible, because the general principle states that it is wrong to seek pleasure for the sake of pleasure. Am I guilty in this respect? When You sweeten my prayer with joy, Jesus, You do it to draw me to Yourself and to inspire me with courage, because my soul, still weak, needs encouragement and consolation even as a child. Do I receive this joy in the right spirit or do I

seek this pleasure for its own sake? It is Your wish, Jesus, that we give ourselves to You and not to the pleasures, no matter how holy or spiritual they may be. You desire us to seek the Giver, not the gift. And what do I seek? Teach me, dear Master.

The Misery in Our Heart - XXV

Preparation

Jesus, now I shall consider the last misery in my heart, namely, seeking pleasure in people and the attachment which develops from it. Grant me Your grace, Jesus, that I may judge myself in this matter with complete impartiality.

First Point

Jesus, is it possible for a friendship which You Yourself established between two persons to become dishonorable? If this friendship is fostered solely because You desire it, because it is according to Your will, it certainly is not dishonorable. In such a friendship, one loves You above all and loves his friend for Your sake. He loves this person in You, Jesus. However, is it not dangerous, and thereby disreputable, to devote oneself to the pleasure which comes from such a friendship? The pleasure arising from such a sincere, deep friendship is not entirely sensual, for it even stifles the sensual, base feelings and is stronger than any other precisely because it is profound and noble. Once a person dedicates himself to it, he discovers that it is very difficult to break this bond. Herein lies the danger, because a love of this kind can be turned into an inordinate attachment which expels the love of God, the love of You, Jesus. Do I strive to preserve my heart from inordinate attachments? Does such a danger threaten me now?

Second Point

Jesus, Your Apostle said that true love, "is not self-seeking" (1 Cor. 13:5), but seeks the good of the beloved. Love gives and does not take. In my relationship with others, Jesus, do I give or take? Do I seek my own pleasure in the person loved? Do I LOVE MYSELF INSTEAD OF THE PERSON whom I love? If I do, then I seek myself; I take and do not give, for I do not seek the welfare of that person. Of this I have proof if I feel the need of seeing that person, of conversing and corresponding with him, of bestowing gifts upon him so that through these

means I may induce him to reciprocate. If the loved person does not reciprocate or I cannot be with him, I become sad. Jesus, let me understand this matter because it strongly influences my behavior. Such love blinds me.

Third Point

That I may know whether my love for others is proper, Jesus, through Your servants, You give me these criteria: Look and probe. Is your mind filled with anxious thoughts about your relationship with others? Do you feverishly strive to foster it? In seeking opportunities to do so, do you neglect your duties? Do you perform your duties hastily, carelessly in order to spend more time with your friends? If so, it is clear that in this relationship you are seeking yourself.

Look further. Do you excessively rejoice that this relationship exists and thrives? Do you fret and lose peace of mind when it begins to wane? Do you grieve when you discover obstacles that will certainly cause this relationship to be broken? Is so, that is more proof that you are seeking yourself.

Look again. Do you grieve when your friend disappoints you? Are you disconsolate when this relationship is broken? These are most clear signs that you are seeking yourself. O Jesus, I am grateful to You for these instructions.

The Misery in Our Intellect - XXVI

Preparation

I come now, Jesus, to the last misery whose characteristic trait is seeking glory. Would that I sought true glory, eternal glory. Glory is necessary for me, because I have been created for it – but a true glory that comes from God and by which I reflect the image of God. Man, however, having lost God, is incapable of finding this true glory, so he seeks one that is false. Jesus, do I seek false glory? Lacking in myself that which would give me glory, do I not seek it in false and imaginary things? O Jesus, give me the grace to understand this and the strength to resist the tendency to seek false glory.

First Point

O Jesus, am I so content with false glory that I seek it, exult in it, and become blinded by

it that I believe that it is the only real glory for me? Does this falsehood, then, become the truth for me? What a terrible tragedy. Deceived by praise, is it any wonder that I love myself more and more? To gain praise and glory do I not praise myself? At times, I realize that I have no reason for exalting myself, but to deceive others I falsely present for their admiration talents and achievements which I do not possess. I behave thus to present myself always before people to my best advantage. Even to my own mind I try to present myself as a virtuous person, whereas in reality I am not such. O Jesus, what falsehood is in me.

Second Point

Can I truthfully say, Jesus, that I do not praise myself? Perhaps I do it unintentionally, subconsciously, or out of force of habit. It is even possible for me to praise myself not by words but by my behavior. Jesus, can I say that I am indifferent to what people think or say about me? Do I always act from personal conviction and not to curry favor of others? Am I indifferent to praise and flattery; indifferent to criticism even though it be unjust? Do I not praise myself whenever an opportunity presents itself, but do it in such a way that others would not detect my motives? Is it also for this reason that I speak humbly of myself? O Jesus, if I act in this manner, what falsehood this reveals.

Third Point

O Jesus, in others I can easily detect simulation. Their deception and falsehood strike me forcefully, but I am slow to detect the same faults in myself. Rightly You have said, Jesus, "You see the moat in your brother's eye, but do not see the beam in your own." From what corruption and decay in me must this kind of falsehood proceed. To remedy this, I resolve to question my motives and actions by asking myself: Why am I doing this particular thing? Why did I make this statement? Do I say one thing and mean something else? Do I act thus to appear better than I am? But You, Jesus, show me in all truth how I behave and live, for even in questioning and probing my motives I can miss the truth by closing my eyes to it.

The Misery in Our Intellect - XXVII

Preparation

To know myself better, Jesus, I wish to consider the misery in my intellect in greater detail. Without You, however, I shall accomplish nothing, because I do not want to condemn myself nor to despise the falsehood in me; I will rather be inclined to justify myself. Jesus, come, therefore, to assist me in this self-examination.

First Point

I wish to begin this self-examination, Jesus, by considering the material things which may serve as a motive for my self-conceit. Is my body, with its qualities of attractiveness, health, strength, dexterity, gratefulness, a reason for seeking praise? Do I boast because I possess certain talents? Perhaps I sing well, play an instrument, or paint, and these accomplishments induce me to praise myself? I appear reluctant to display these talents, but, if no one requests that I perform, I am hurt and become sullen. O Jesus, what falsehood this is. And when I am being photographed, do I not endeavor to assume the most flattering pose? I want to appear as I imagine myself to be: as a deep thinker or sophisticated or perhaps I try to be nonchalant to give the impression that I am indifferent about the outcome of the picture. What a falsehood, O Jesus. And is not my appearance one of my chief interests? Often, I look into a mirror, but not in the presence of others, because I want people to think that I am indifferent about my appearance. O Jesus, what falsehood.

Second Point

Jesus, now I desire to consider whether my intellect, with its qualities of wisdom, knowledge, wit, serves as a reason for seeking praise. Am I embarrassed and confused when it is shown that I do not know something? This embarrassment is caused by the fact that I want to be regarded as one who knows everything. When I am asked something which I do not know, I try to conceal my ignorance by giving ambiguous answers, by avoiding the issue, or by offering excuses for not knowing this particular fact. It would be below my dignity to admit that there is something which I do not know. And when I make a mistake, do I admit it or do I turn and twist the facts so that it would appear that I have not been mistaken? Oh, what falsehood, what deceit. I want to be known as infallible. O Jesus, if You do not purge me, I shall always continue in this

sham, especially before people in authority whose opinion and favor are of great concern to me. O Jesus, how much falsehood there must be in me and I do not realize it. Reveal it to me, Jesus, and cleanse me of it.

Third Point

O Jesus, do I seek praise in spiritual things, in virtue, respectability, sanctity? Do I seek praise because I am a good teacher, leader, confessor, preacher? Inspired by this exulted opinion of myself, do I assume the role of such a character by portraying him in my speech, motions, and carriage? With this in mind, do I constantly behave as if I were posing for a portrait? Am I preoccupied with the thought of what kind of an impression I have made or am making? And do I perhaps desire sanctity for the sake of sanctity, so that I would mean something, be someone? Do I practice extraordinary mortification or make special effort in prayer in order to experience some unusual feelings or to be different from others?

I have observed that when someone assumes a new office, even as a servant or cook, he begins with great zeal by condemning and correcting what his predecessor did, but after a time his work is the same as his predecessors or even worse. Why does this happen? Arrogantly he wanted to show what he can do, but after the initial zeal passed he had no further motive to continue his work. Do I behave in a similar manner? I can avoid this error. If I sincerely undertake a task out of a sense of duty and obligation, my zeal will not diminish. Jesus, give me Your light and strength to be honest in my behavior and sincere in my work.

The Final Word on Misery - XXVIII

Preparation

Having considered the misery of the human nature in all its aspects, I want to consider now, Jesus, what conclusions I should deduce from this knowledge and what practical applications I should make. Enlighten me, Jesus, that in doing so I may not err, but that with Your grace I may profitably apply them to my life.

First Point

Spiritual writers tell us that we must abhor ourselves, hold ourselves in contempt, hate

ourselves. Jesus, is this possible? Do You demand this of us? Our nature has been fashioned by the wisdom of God, and each person is to play a part in the divine plan, a part which cannot be filled by any one else. Since our calling and destiny are so great, it seems logical that we should cherish and love ourselves. Furthermore, Jesus, You Yourself love us. Therefore we, destined for greatness according to the mind of God, are not allowed to abhor ourselves, to hold ourselves in contempt, to hate ourselves.

When spiritual writers instruct us to despise ourselves, they must mean that we should do so when we regard ourselves as the sole end of our intellect, will, and heart; when we seek ourselves and our pleasure and glory in all things; when we love ourselves above all. Jesus, grant me the grace to love God's divine plan for me, love the destiny He has set for me, for then I shall have a true perspective and shall be willing to reject whatever opposes Your design.

Second Point

Are the knowledge and contempt of self-motivated by love for You, love for God? Perhaps they spring from my appreciation of truth and not from love of You, Jesus, love for God. But it is your wish, Jesus, that we be reconciled with the reality of the great misery in us solely for You, for God. Indeed, You want us to rejoice because of our misery as St. Paul did, "Gladly therefore I will glory in my infirmities" (2 Cor 12:9).

For the following reasons, Jesus, you want us to accept and to rejoice in our misery: 1) It is Your will that we struggle with our misery until our death, 2) Our misery induces us to turn to You, Jesus, and thus it unites us with You. 3) Our misery shows us Your goodness, Jesus, because in spite of it You tolerate us and communicate Yourself to us. 4) Through this misery, we give glory to God by revealing what God can accomplish even with such weak beings. Jesus, let it then be revealed what I am – nothingness and misery. I accept this fact not only because it is true, but because such as I am I give You glory. Jesus, I want to rejoice in my nothingness and misery so that God may be my all. I am reconciled to have nothing and to be considered as incapable of doing anything in order to be indebted to God for everything.

Third Point

Jesus, it seems logical that I ought to apply the knowledge I have of the misery of human nature to my relationship with my neighbor. Does knowing this misery make me patient and

understanding of others? When the matter concerns me, I distinguish between the misery and the sin in me, but do I make the same distinction in the case of others? No matter how forcefully my misery manifests itself, I do not give up hope for myself, but do I lose hope for others and refuse to forgive them when I discover that they have done wrong? I should be confident that God helps others, and in spite of their misery His grace operates in them. This I ought to do because “God is charity” and I ought to become charitable.

Prayer - XXIX

Preparation

Jesus, now I wish to reflect upon the good that is in us. My aim, however, is not to consider how sanctifying grace gives us the power and inclination of doing good and the ability of counteracting the misery in us. Nor do I want to consider how actual grace enables us to put this power into action, but I wish to meditate on the infallible means You have given us by which we can use this power. This infallible means is prayer. Jesus, grant me the grace not only to understand the importance of prayer but also induce me to make profitable use of prayer.

First Point

Jesus, You said, “Ask and you shall receive” (Lk 11:9), “and all things whatever you ask for in prayer, believing, you shall receive” (Mt 21:22). From this we can learn that all our strength, all our good is to be found in prayer. Jesus, let me understand this well. Although the good in us comes from Your grace, Jesus, grace itself comes through prayer. True, Your grace is always present, but You want us to ask for it. You tell us to pray, because our prayer shows our readiness to cooperate with Your grace and our willingness to receive what we ask. You have also said, “They must always pray and not lose heart” (Lk 18:1), because we are always in need of Your grace. Am I mindful of this, Jesus? Do I always pray?

Second Point

After You have so emphatically and solemnly promised that we shall receive whatever we ask, Jesus, can we doubt that our prayer will not be efficacious? And yet there are some who doubt, because they do not always receive what they ask. Jesus, in explaining Your words, “Ask

and you shall receive,” You said, “What man is there among you, who, if his son asks for a loaf, will hand him a stone? Therefore, if you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father give good things to them that ask him” (Mt 7: 7-11). Hence acting as a good father, Jesus, You give your children what they ask, but give only that which is beneficial, which is good for them. When, therefore, we pray for something which seems to be good for us but, in reality is not, You will not grant our request. If You were to give us what is evil, You would not be answering our prayers, for surely, when we pray, we are under the impression that we are asking what is for our good; consequently, if we knew that what we ask is not good, we would not ask for it. But even when we are mistaken, You do not hear us, Jesus, because, having regard for our plea, You give us something that is for our good.

Third Point

It sometimes happens, Jesus, that when we ask for something good, for example some virtue, which undoubtedly is good, You do not grant it. Is it possible, Jesus, that in reality I did not receive the virtue for which I prayed? In such circumstances, I ought to believe that I have received it and that immediately, because You have promised to grant all the good for which we pray. I do not realize that You have heard my prayer, because this virtue must first take root in me, it must grow, it must eradicate the elements opposed to its growth, it must foster and cultivate certain dispositions in me which will enable it to become a living part of me. It is for this reason that, after I have prayed for a virtue and have begun to acquire it, it seems to me that I possess it in a lesser degree. For on the one hand the virtue makes greater demands upon me, because, enlightened by You, Jesus, I understand its nature more and more, and on the other hand the inclinations contrary to that virtue resist being dislodged. For this reason, it seems to me, Jesus, that my prayer was not heard. Jesus, You can say to me as You said to Peter, “Oh thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?” (Mt 14:31).

Prayer - XXX

Preparation

Jesus, You said to your Apostles, “Amen, Amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you. Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name.

Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full” (J 16:23-24). Our prayer, therefore, is always answered, unless we ask in the wrong way. And when do we ask in the wrong way? This is what I want to consider, Jesus. Please enlighten me.

First Point

Jesus, You assured us that our prayer will be heard if it truly is prayer, for You have clearly told Your Apostles that up to that time they have not asked for anything and for this reason they did not receive. Our prayer, then, must be a true prayer. For how can we be heard, Jesus, if we show ourselves indifferent to what we ask, if we show no concern or interest about being heard. Such an attitude proves we do not pray. Similarly, we err when we ask for something, but later place obstacles in the way of obtaining it or no longer want it or do not take advantage of circumstances that would help us obtain it. By this we show that we did not truly ask, that our prayer was not sincere, that it was not a true request. We would act differently if we really wanted what we asked. In the past, how did I pray, Jesus? Was I sincere and truthful in my prayer?

Second Point

In the parable about the Pharisee and Publican, Jesus, You taught us what little value there is in a prayer made by a person who sees only good and no evil in himself, and the great value there is in a prayer made by one who knows his misery and is ever mindful of it. Hence, if You have given us prayer as our only strength and our only remedy, then, similarly, our realization of the misery and the nothingness in us becomes a source of strength and remedy. Our entire interior life, then, and our entire spiritual growth are based upon two realities: first, on the realization of our misery and our nothingness, and second, on prayer. Jesus, when I pray, am I aware of this truth?

Third Point

You said, Jesus, that You have not come for the just and the spiritually strong, but for those who are sinners, for those enduring spiritual malady (Mt 9:12). Hence when I turn to You, Jesus, when I present myself before You, I must present myself as a sinner, as one spiritually ill, as one in desperate need of help because I cannot help myself. For how can one pray for something, ask for help, if he is convinced that he is self-sufficient? When a person prays with

such a disposition of superiority, his prayer is not sincere, it is not a true prayer but a repetition of formulas induced by habit. This, indeed, shows the necessity of knowing our misery and lowliness. For if our will is to be convinced of what it needs, what it should seek, what it should pray for, our prayer must be based upon the clear understanding of our nothingness, namely, that of ourselves we can do nothing. The more I become convinced of my misery and nothingness, the more efficacious will my prayer become and the more will You, Jesus, be inclined to hear my prayer.

Prayer - XXXI

Preparation

Since prayer is so necessary and since You, Jesus, do not hear, as St. Alphonsus Ligouri says, “the prayer of the proud, who rely upon their own strength, but leave them to their own misery.” How should I pray to avoid being left by You to my own misery? Jesus, I wish to consider this, so that, having obtained your grace, I may put into practice what I have learned.

First Point

Your Church, Jesus, teaches how we must labour to gain salvation. “God does not command the impossible,” the Council of Trent says, “but having commanded something He exhorts you to do what you can and to pray for what you cannot do, and He comes to your assistance that you may succeed.” When I find it easy to fulfill my duty, to bear crosses, to overcome temptations, it is a sign that You, Jesus, have given me Your grace, for without it I would not be able to accomplish this. Therefore, I should do what I can, i.e., cooperate with Your grace in prayer. If this cooperation is difficult for me, I ought to beg for grace, but with confidence and a firm belief that Your grace is always present. Indeed, I ought to believe that You have already given me this grace, so all that remains is for me to cooperate with it in prayer.

Second Point

Jesus, You said, “Watch and pray” (Mt 26:41), and again, “Watch, then, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to be, and to stand before the Son of man” (Lk 21:36). From this I can learn that spiritual life consists in watching

over our misery and lowliness and upon realizing the good in us by continually having recourse to You, Jesus, in prayer. Our labour, therefore, consists in this: keeping vigil, in immediately humbling ourselves whenever we detect our misery asserting itself, and in begging You, Jesus, for help and strength. We should work with grace when it is present, beg for it when it is absent, and cooperate with grace, trusting that it will always be given to us. Prayer, then, constitutes our principal activity, and the recognition of our misery and lowliness is an essential requisite for a true and good prayer. Jesus, make me conscious of these realities.

Third Point

Your most Blessed Mother, Jesus, teaches how we should ask for graces. In Cana of Galilee, though it seemed that You did not want to grant Her request, She was so certain that You would that She told the servants to obey whatever You commanded. And not only does She teach us but also obtains for us the grace that we may have similar confidence. Hence, in all our needs we ought also to turn to Your Mother, because You, Jesus, have ordained that all graces should be distributed through Her.

God-Man

The End of Man - I

Preparation

In a general way, I have already considered the end of man. Now, Jesus, I wish to consider how this end has its realization and fulfillment in You. This is a mystery of mysteries. Jesus, give me the power to penetrate this mystery.

First Point

It has been Your wish, Jesus, that Your Church should make known the sublime destiny which You have assigned to the human race. The Fourth Lateran Council declared (and the same has been repeated by the Vatican Council): “In His Omnipotence, God in the beginning of time created out of nothing both kind of creatures, the spiritual and the material, i.e., the angelic and the mundane, and then the human species composed of spirit and body.” Thus, man was, as it were, the crown of creation, because in him both the spiritual and the material are united. He can be likened to a link between the spiritual and the material world. O Jesus, how great, then, is the dignity of man.

Second Point

Man’s dignity, however, does not end here. Created beings, the spiritual and the material, were to attain their glory in a special union with God through the hypostatic union. You, the Word of God, were to assume a human nature and thus become man. Hence, Jesus, as man You became the head and lord of all creatures. For this reason, Your humanity, Jesus, and the motherhood of Your Mother, the Most Blessed Virgin, which according to St. Thomas have a certain infinite dignity (I q. 25, a6, ad 4) make You the King and Your Mother the Queen of all creation. Therefore, in You, Jesus, how sublime is the dignity of man.

Third Point

In his Epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul in citing these words of Psalm VIII, “What is man that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that though visitest him? Thou hast made him a little less than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honor; and hast set him over the works of thy hands. Thou hast subjected all things under his feet,” adds his own words, “For God hath not subjected unto the angels the world to come for in that he hath subjected all things to him, he left nothing not subject to him.... we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels being made so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels hath he said at any time: Thou art my son, today I have begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he said, “And let all the angels of God adore him.”

In this dignity of Yours, Jesus, in the dignity of the God-man, we all share, for St. Paul goes on to say, “For which cause he is not ashamed to call them (i.e. us) brethren, saying: I will declare my name to my brethren Behold I and my children, whom God hath given me. Therefore, because the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner hath been partaker of the same.” And St. Paul remarks, “Nowhere does he take hold of the angels, but of the seed of Abraham he takes hold.” (Chaps. 1 and 2 passim). Jesus, You did not become an angel, but a man, and thus You have united Yourself with us. Our added greatness, importance, and dignity rest upon the fact that we are united to You.

Union with God - II

Preparation

Jesus, You prayed for us to the Father saying, “That all may be one even as though, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us I in them and thou in me; that they may be perfected in unity” (J 17:21,23). It is your desire Jesus, that we should be united in God and thereby united with God. We are to be, as St. Peter says, “partakers of the divine nature” (2 P 1:4). Desiring to make us partakers of Your divinity, Jesus, You assumed our nature, so that You would become man and make men gods (Lectio IV in Festo Corporis

Domini). Jesus, grant me the grace to penetrate the secrets of this mystery of my destiny.

First Point

I realize, Jesus, that our union with You cannot be such that we would be absorbed by God, merged into one being with God. Through Your Church, Jesus, You condemned such a pantheistic notion. It is in our activity that we unite ourselves with God, but ours is a human activity, so completely different from the activity of God. Through Your, incarnation, Jesus, You made it possible for us to be united with God. Your Person is divine, but in addition to Your divine nature You have a human nature. Thus, as a Divine Person You are able to perform human acts through human nature. Your activity, therefore, was both divine and human. In You, Jesus, the human activity was united with the divine activity, because it proceeded from Your Divine Person and was performed in Your human nature. Now, Jesus, as our Mediator and the Head of the Mystical Body, by uniting Your human activity with ours through a moral union, You unite us with God. In this way, our human activity becomes divine-like, because it is united with You, and therefore united with God.

Second Point

In our daily life, it is easy for us to unite ourselves with You, Jesus, because Your actions were like ours – human. As God, You can produce in us thoughts, feelings, and desires that will be in a certain degree similar to Your human thoughts, feelings and desires. Our actions will be ours, but inspired by You. Therefore, when we act in union with You, Jesus, You live in us and we live in You. Our life becomes a reflection of Your life. With St. Paul, we can also say, “It is no longer that I live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Jesus, let me understand what a great fortune it is to be united with God in this life.

Third Point

Jesus, since You no longer live on earth, Your acts are no longer the same human acts like ours. How, then, can You live in us with a human life? At present Your human acts are not the same as our acts on earth, but they are similar to the acts which we will perform when we will be in heaven. If, then, in spite of this difference You still live in us, it means that You refresh, renew Your former activity to us. Not only have You merited grace for us, but at the present moment Your grace gives efficacy to our actions. Jesus, was I aware of this reality that I

can unite myself with You in this activity which merits eternal life for me? I realize that my union with You does not depend upon my knowledge and consciousness of it, nevertheless, this knowledge ought to flood my heart with profound love and gratitude for You, Jesus. It should make me confident and induce me to become intimate with You.

Knowing how You act in me, Jesus, I can take as spoken to me these words You addressed to the Apostles, “No longer do I call you servants, because the servant does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends You are my friends” (J 15:14,15).

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