



30 December 1881

**On Contemplation Of The Mysteries Of Our Lord
According To The Method Of St Ignatius Of Loyola**

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

There is no question that I come back to more often than that of prayer. Indeed it is what concerns each sister who desires to advance [in the spiritual life.] I was saying to one of you the other day, and I repeat it for all, that when you have difficulty praying, it is good to use one or the other method of prayer that Saint Ignatius recommends. And there is one method of which I have never spoken to you: contemplation of the a mystery. Contemplation is a gift from God by which the soul, already used to living in heavenly light, keeps its gaze continually fixed on God. But when the soul does not have this gift of God, St Ignatius recommends that we bring to mind a mystery to be honored, enter into the place where it is accomplished, apply each of the senses successively to see what is happening and listen to what is said.

At Christmastime, for instance, we honor the Nativity of Our Lord, his holy Infancy, his condition in the manger, the Presentation, the flight into Egypt. Well, St Ignatius advises us to imagine that we are let into that blessed stable, to consider each person there, to listen to what is said, to contemplate Christ who is poor, gentle, lovable and so good. Look at this holy Child: in him are the treasures of the divinity. Throughout the ages, will come from him many saints and an abundance of graces. He will be the object of the passionate love of virgins and religious. His Mother is beside him. Look at what she does, her care, her poverty. Look at St. Joseph, the shepherds, the Wise Men who come to adore the Infant God.

Remain there, attentive and loving. Say: “ I shall never love my God as much as God has loved me. If I am poor, looked down on and abandoned, I should contemplate Jesus lying there on a bit of straw: he has gone before me, for me and far more than I.”

Father d’Alzon says that in the oriental inns, there is a shed, a place open for everyone; and behind it, a kind of cave for the animals so that the people won’t be bothered by them. That is

where Our Lady withdrew. Homes had refused to receive her; in the shed there is no room for her and, with humility and perfect modesty, love of silence and solitude, she withdrew to this kind of cave which was reserved for beasts of burden. And it is there that she brought her First-born into the world, the only Son of God.

Which creatures on earth care about Our Lord? Take note that there was a family. Saint Joseph had relatives among the priests; the Blessed Virgin had uncles and aunts: Saint Zachary, Saint Elizabeth were relatives. She is going to the place of her origin [her home town]. But she brings her child into this world in complete poverty and no one takes care of her. Mary went to take care of Elizabeth when she was going to have John the Baptist, but Our Lady is left all alone at the very time when women are usually accompanied, need care and sollicitude. Of course, people didn't know that this birth was divine. Look at the poverty Jesus chose for his mother and himself!

When you have looked, take time to listen. Jesus was silent in his infancy but he cried. He must have cried with the knife at the Circumcision; he shed tears, he suffered from the cold to which his delicate body was exposed. If he doesn't speak outwardly, he speaks inwardly. His first word is: "Here I am, Oh my God, I come to do your will; your law is deep in my heart," (Ps. 39: 8-9). You see the result of these words: Jesus Christ offered himself in sacrifice by obedience and according to the law of God. All the victims of the Old Testament did not please you, so I said: "Here I am, ". (Ibid., 8). Here is the one who, as God, will give an infinite price to the smallest sufferings and later to the sacrifice of his life: "I did not turn my ear away, your law is deep in my heart," . (Ibid., 7-9). Jesus offers the sacrifice of his will, the sacrifice of obedience.

Listen to the exterior and interior words; listen to the silence. Then apply your other senses. Touch the straw, so hard and so cold, on which the Lord lies. Approach to kiss Jesus' feet, kneel and kiss the ground of the grotto that so many pilgrims come to venerate.

This is quite different from your ordinary prayer and it can be a help because, sometimes we find it hard to take a prayer and stay with it, to make great [mental] discourses on a subject. And, in this way, you can follow the mysteries of the [liturgical] time... If it is the time of the Nativity, you see how the simplest of people can come and, as I have already said, come to look at Our Lord and to be gazed on by him. You don't need to go to the crib; go to the depths of your heart. Our Lord is gazing on you. Poor, humble, abandoned, he sees the measure of the love, generosity, poverty and fidelity that you bring him.

It is an important activity to look at Our Lord and have him look on you, to look at our Lady and have her look on you –as her daughter. You are her daughters by state and by protection. [patronage]. She will really consider you her daughter if she can say of you: "She enters into my life and humility and she accepts it; she wills my poverty; she lives my obedience that was so absolute from the first day to the last."

Then we can pass to St Joseph who is so humble, so simple, so loving, so sollicitous. Saint Joseph is the special model for those who take care of souls. He was the only caring one; he was alone to protect the Blessed Virgin and the Child Jesus, to keep them from harm, to lead them according to the Angel's word, to feed them. But what care, so full of calm, peace and prayer!

We, too, should be sollicitous to keep Jesus in the heart of our students. A holy man said that

St. Joseph went around the stable stuffing up the cracks and holes to avoid anything happening to Jesus and Mary in that cold and humid cave. We, likewise, have to take care of the souls entrusted to us, protect them from the winds of sin, the evils that could befall them. It is said in the Scripture that the demon goes around “like a roaring lion looking for souls to devour.” You want to go around in spirit to see what scandal might come, what danger or sin. Unlike the demon who goes around to devour, you go around to shield and protect.

These are some of the thoughts you might have concerning the Holy Family. Later, if you meditate on our Lord’s Public Life, after having reflected on the words of the Gospel, you can, as it were, enter into the Gospel scene that you can recall. [You can do this] for the Last Supper and for Calvary. Many people have spent their life like this, their gaze fixed on Jesus Christ and the Blessed Mother, the disciples and the holy women, looking, listening, contemplating with love.

I open this door to you. Perhaps you had already found it, but it is good to be reminded of these things for, in the end, prayer is the heart of religious life. Pray the most possible, pray with the most recollection and love possible, so that prayer may become the rule of your life.

Saint Teresa says that prayer is wasted if, at the end, you don’t take some resolution. So, let prayer become the rule of your life, let each meditation lead to a transformation, a change in your way of thinking, in your relationships, your habits and ways. Each day will not bring great change; but if you raise your minds a little bit more each day, if you esteem poverty a little more, if you are more attentive to Jesus during the course of the day, you will make progress. It will then be translated into a change of conduct because you will have become more patient, less self-centered, simpler in your obedience.

This is the foundation of the religious life, and I think we have to come back to it often. Because, if you pray well, you will become holy. If you pray badly, all will be more difficult and burdensome for you. Do not imagine that when you pray with difficulty you don’t pray well. But when prayer is hard, it is good to have some means of taking good resolutions that help to bring the fruit of our prayer into our life.