

10 October 1884

On meditation (continued)

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

...Today, following the method of St. Ignatius, one of the most approved by the Church, I should tell you that, after putting yourself in the presence of God, you should make what Ignatius calls the two preludes.... They are very simple. The first is to bring to mind what you are going to meditate. You already do that. The second, is to ask God for the grace to profit of your prayer, to draw from it what is most necessary for you.

If you take your prayer seriously, you will think of it ahead of time. You will go to sleep thinking of the subject of the next day's prayer. And, on waking, you will ask: "What was I going to meditate on?" When you get to the chapel, you will place yourself in the presence of God and recall the subject of your meditation and you will ask God to get the most from it.

Of course, you won't get the same fruit from each meditation. If you meditate on terrible themes, you will receive compunction, contrition, the desire to sin no more. If you meditate on God's goodness, you will receive love, the desire to be loving in return. You don't need a book or to break your head for that. We go to prayer with great simplicity, as a child who totally trusts her father, but also with respect for the divine majesty. We do not treat our prayer lightly.

I think that the best subjects for meditation are from the Gospel: the actions of Our Lord Jesus Christ, his words, his teachings, all that concerns the Incarnate Word... Take the Infancy of Our Lord, for instance. If you are going to meditate on it, it is impossible that you not make the first prelude: you imagine Our Lord in the crib, see him so little, obedient, simple, docile, not speaking but hiding his human and divine perfections, full of love. For it is love that has made him do this. [You see him] in poverty and suffering. It is impossible that you not bring this to mind, that you fail to consider all these circumstances of his divine infancy. You adore, you admire, you wonder at all God has done for you. This is what we call entering into the subject.

Then we should seek affections. St. Francis de Sales, the great master of prayer, says this is the most important [point]. Begin right away, if you want, to make affectionate acts of love, of admiration, surprise, tenderness, of desire to imitate Our Lord. Pray, ask him for the grace to love and serve him. In this way, you will have well spent the hour. And you don't need to take up a book.

Then distractions come; there's the problem. There are two remedies: the first is to pay no attention to them, especially when they just go through the imagination and do not take your heart from being attentive. That's St. Teresa's advice. The imagination is a fool running through the house; it flies, it brings other things to mind. Don't follow it, don't worry, remain at the feet of that dear Child, object of all your love and devotion. Say: "I want to be attentive to you; I want to love you, to imitate you."

There is another remedy which is to bring your attention back with a formal act of faith. Contemplation is a time of making acts of faith, hope and love. If you find yourself too distracted, make these acts, seek thoughts that bring your attention back to Our Lord.

There is another difficulty: we speak to Our Lord but he doesn't answer. He doesn't speak to

us from the crucifix as he did for some saints. But he will speak to you in prayer if you are recollected and attentive. Sometimes, you have to be quiet and listen to hear what he will tell you. He will tell you: “See how poor I am; do you want to be poor also?” He will speak in the depths of your heart. Our Lord will tell you something that leads you to imitate what you admire in him. For his infancy, perhaps it will often be silence. “I, the Word of God, came to convert the world, to bring salvation. I am silent. Do you know how to stay silent?”

Of course, you have to realize that all you imagine that you hear is not necessarily Gospel truth. If what you hear encourages you to do what Our Lord asks of you, if the words speak of God’s love and mercy, if they ask more attention to God’s presence, don’t have any doubt, the message comes from God. If you think you are called to do great things, or extraordinary things like putting a statue of the Blessed Virgin on the column in the Place Vendôme, or if a voice tells you that you will be a great saint, you can fear that it is the demon speaking. St. Ignatius says that it is astonishing how the devil can appear as an angel of light. You can recognize him by a couple of traits: He does not put the soul in peace or humility; he does not dilate the heart and make you happy with your life and your responsibilities, more simple and tender with Our Lord. His beautiful discourse can make you self-important or act bizarrely. But remember what St. Teresa says about not letting such experiences put you off from prayer. Pay no attention and continue on your way. The devil would be very happy to make you abandon prayer.

When you pray with the Gospel, you are less apt to fall into illusions. But keep your liberty. I know people who easily meditate on the Trinity, this hidden and incomprehensible mystery. It’s not the usual way, but I don’t object.

The great men and women of prayer like St. Teresa of Avila and St. Francis of Assisi followed the words, example and teachings of the Lord, followed him step by step. St. Teresa tells us: “Never let yourself be separated from the sacred Humanity of Christ; try to do as he did, to accomplish what he did, have him always before your eyes.” I cannot give you any better counsel than St. Teresa, the great teacher of prayer.