

December 24

An Exercise in Contemplating Jesus with Mary and Joseph in the Manger Scene

★ Why an exercise in «contemplation»?

Contemplation is a way of praying that is a bit different from meditation. It is not so much a matter of thinking or of reflecting on a passage of Scripture, as much as it is a matter of allowing the Holy Spirit to wake up our “spiritual senses,” or our interior sensibilities which the Father has given us so that we might “taste and see how good the Lord is.” (Ps. 33:9) In fact, He created us so that we might enter into full communion with Him; therefore, we can believe that we have within ourselves the ability to know Him and to love Him, not in words, but in facts and in truth.

Not only that, but precisely thanks to the Incarnation, the love of God came in Jesus to touch us in our flesh and to allow Himself to be touched by us. The experience that His contemporaries had of Him is still accessible to us today, each time we approach the altar to receive His Glorified Body in the Eucharist, every time we ask His pardon in Confession, and every time that we take in His Word, made living by the Spirit. So then, if we truly open our heart to Him, Jesus becomes *light* for us to see, in truth, the face of our Father, of our sisters and our brothers, and of our true selves; *voice*, who consoles us, corrects us gently, and instructs us; *good bread* which satiates our hunger; *medicinal oil* that soothes our wounds and softens what us in our rigidities; and *Heaven’s perfume* that invites us to follow Him fearlessly wherever He goes.

Before all else, in order to enter into contemplation, one must desire it. Secondly, one must ask the grace from God, courageously. Third, one must allow oneself to be aided by the imagination. The ability to imagine what is recounted in the Gospel, is, in fact, a gift which God Himself gave us so as to help us perceive His closeness and the care He takes of us. In his *Philothea or An Introduction to the Devout Life*, St. Francis de Sales recommends this type of prayer since “it produces pious motions in the will, or affective part of our soul,” – such as the love of God and confidence in His Goodness, zeal for the salvation of souls; and compassion towards one’s neighbor – which Help us sustain the commitment of our will, giving us wings to advance quickly, both for our educational mission and the entire Church. Try it so as to believe it.

★ Iter for the Contemplation Exercise (Lk. 2:4-7):

1. In Jesus’ Name, I ask the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit.
Repeat slowly the following prayer which was inspired by the fourth strophe of the *Veni Creator*:
*Come, Creator Spirit, come...
Reawaken in me my spiritual senses,
enkindle in me the fire of Your Love,
heal and strengthen my body and my heart!*
2. I ask God the Father, through the intercession of Joseph and Mary, the grace to be able to enter into the Stable of Bethlehem so as to:
 - meet Joseph (Lk. 2:4-5) and to listen to him as he recounts the story of his journey: the fear, the uneasiness... and then the great joy...
 - meet Mary (Lk. 2:6) who has given birth in a difficult place... perhaps She needs my help? How can I help her?
 - adore the Baby placed in the manger (Lk. 2:7) and allow myself to be touched by Him: He is the Bread come down from Heaven... He doesn’t yet know how to speak but already a power flows out from Him that heals everyone
3. I conclude my prayer with a heart-to-heart conversation with Mary: I thank her, entrust my life, my dreams, and everything that I hold dear in my heart to her...
4. Once the prayer has been brought to an end, it is important to preserve in faith and in love all that the Holy Spirit has sown in us... in time, it will bear fruit!