

## **“Contemplation - 4 Points”**

**1. Recall to mind the blessings of creation and redemption, and the special favors I have received.** I will ponder with great affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much He has given me of what He possesses, and finally, how much, as far as He can, the same Lord desires to give Himself to me according to his divine decrees. Then I will reflect upon myself, and consider, according to all reason and justice, what I ought to offer the Divine Majesty, that is, all I possess and myself with it. Thus as one would do who is moved by great feeling, I will make this offering of myself: Take, Lord, and Receive ...

**2. Reflect how God dwells in creatures:** in the plants giving them life, in the animals conferring upon them sensation, in human beings, giving understanding. So He dwells in me and gives me being, life, sensation, intelligence; and makes a temple of me, since I am created in the likeness and image of the Divine Majesty.

**3. Consider how God works and labors for me in all creatures** upon the face of the earth, that is, He conducts Himself as one who labors. Thus in the heavens, the elements, the fruits, the cattle, etc., He gives being, conserves them, confers life and sensation, etc.

**4. Consider all blessings and gifts as descending from above.** Thus, my limited power comes from the supreme and infinite power above, and so too, justice, goodness, mercy, etc., descend from above as the rays of light descend from the sun, and as the waters flow from their fountains, etc. Conclude with a colloquy (The colloquy is made by speaking exactly as one friend speaks to another, or as a servant speaks to a master...) and an Our Father.

The Contemplation to Attain the Love of God is the final exercise of the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius intended it to be the climax of the process of deepening the relationship with God that takes place during a retreat. The love of God which is referred to here is not God's love for us, which is always given, but our love for God. This prayer should take between 30 and 60 minutes.

For Ignatius, prayer is mainly of the heart, not of the mind. This prayer is not meant to be a process of conceptual reasoning, but of reflection engaging memory, understanding and imagination, leading to a new and deeper appreciation of reality. Contemplation is coming to a clarity of vision by which we can see things as they really are.

Ignatius' detailed directions and points are for guidance. In this, as in any

prayer, do not follow the directions as if they are a recipe, but use them to lead into a deeper interior conversation with God.

**Concluding Comments:** Before the actual prayer, Ignatius makes a note to remind us of the true nature of love. He wants to warn the person praying against the easy confusion of love with feeling. Love is expressed in deeds and in giving. Words and sentiments are cheap. He also reminds the person praying that we know God's love by God's actions and self-giving. We know God's love by experience, not by theory, and this prayer seeks to make us conscious of the experience.

The 1st prelude serves to put us in the space and mood for prayer. Here we picture God in his transcendence, as absolutely other, and ourselves before God as dependent creatures. This image of the transcendent God is the traditional image that most people grow up with and internalize. When we praise, petition, and give thanks to God, it is to the God who is outside of and beyond us.

It is always important to be explicit about what we are seeking in prayer. We are often unaware that everything we are and have is a gift. In the 2nd Prelude, we ask for the awareness or "interior knowledge" of this truth.

The body of the prayer, consisting of four points, presents to us different aspects of God's immanence, God as joined to and active in all of creation, including ourselves. This image of the immanent God has often been neglected because of one-sided religious teaching. God is not only a one-time Creator, but sustains, provides and cares for this creation. God is not only a one-time Redeemer, but is a living presence making all things holy.

Concepts of the immanence and transcendence of God are only concepts, and God is beyond any concepts we can form. In this prayer, we are not seeking an understanding or concept of God, but an experience of God. We seek an awareness of the experience of God giving, dwelling, laboring and emanating in ourselves and in all creation. These are the four aspects of God's immanence that Ignatius asks us to contemplate.

This experience and interior knowledge of love, shown by the dynamics of God active in the world and in ourselves, leads us to a response of love, which is expressed in an offering of ourselves to God. The beautiful prayer, "Take, Lord, Receive" expresses the totality of this offering. The completeness of God's self-giving we have experienced elicits an equally complete self-offering.