

# SPIRITUAL EXERCISES TO BRING ABOUT AWARENESS OF SIN

## Two Standards (Ignatian Spiritual Exercise)

**Note:** This meditation could easily last for the entire holy hour. It is a meditation unique to Saint Ignatius which he inserts here at the end of the meditations on Jesus' infancy and hidden life, along with the next reflection on "The Three Classes of Men." After these two reflections, you will begin to contemplate the public ministry of Jesus.

**Standard of Lucifer:** First, try to use your imagination to see the horrible and terrifying kingdom of the evil one. Imagine the place to be the vast and wide plain of Babylon (hell). Satan, in his pride, is seated on a high throne of fire and smoke to intimidate and impose his power. Using symbolic imagery, how does this place look, sound, smell and feel? (Silent Reflection)

Imagine the evil one calling his numerous demons to his throne and sending them forth, throughout the whole world, to every person and place. Imagine this vast army of diabolical creatures going forth on their mission of death and destruction. (Brief silent reflection)

What is their mission? To set up snares for God's people and to imprison them in their sins. These diabolical spirits are well organized and fully committed to the deception of the human race. They plan, plot, prepare, strategize and execute their plan. Saint Ignatius says that satan instructs his demons to tempt God's people in three initial ways:

To first desire riches in their heart.

To seek vainglory, honors and worldly recognition.

To puff up their pride.

Ponder those three temptations in your life for a while. Have you bought into these lies? (Silent Reflection)

Once the evil one has drawn a person into a love of riches, vainglory and self-centered pride, the person is disposed to be drawn into every other kind of evil deception. From those three initial temptations all other evils flow. Again, ponder these struggles in your own life.

**The Standard of Christ:** In contrast to the evil one, Christ is found in a humble and low plain near Jerusalem. He is standing there with crowds around Him. It is a beautiful and peaceful place. Imagine the scene of Him with a crowd of faithful followers around Him. (Silent Reflection)

One by one, Jesus chooses person after person to share in His divine mission. He calls them to Himself with gentleness, interior strength and authority. And then He sends them forth on a mission. Each one of them has discovered the call of Christ, discovered the interior riches of His grace, and with hearts set ablaze with love they eagerly go forth to joyfully spread His mercy and truth. They go forth to every corner of the Earth to draw others to Christ.

As Jesus sends them forth, He spends much time teaching them and preparing them. He delivers His most heartfelt and powerful sermons, teaches parables and wins their hearts and minds. He then instructs them to go forth and to preach. They are to draw people by attracting them to the simplicity and power of His message. This is what they are to preach and to encounter. Ponder the scene and each of the following messages:

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES TO BRING ABOUT AWARENESS OF SIN

- They are to preach about poverty. Interior spiritual poverty and even the value of leaving all for Christ.
- If they are rejected by some, then they must rejoice and not lose heart, even if people hold them and their message in contempt.
- They are to be humble and receive any humiliation in love.

By sending them forth this way, they are prepared to combat the lies of the evil one. They preach poverty to combat the love of money; they endure rejection to combat the desire for worldly status; and they preach and live humility so as to combat the evil of self-righteous pride.

**Reflection:** Which message is more attractive to you? Which kingdom do you desire to be a part of? This is a difficult question because many, if they are honest, will discover that they prefer the message of the evil one and his demons over the message of Christ the King. Jesus preaches poverty, rejection and humility. Satan preaches riches, honors and pride. Sit with this powerful contrast. Honestly evaluate which draws you more. Surrender yourself to the riches of poverty, rejection and even humiliation for the sake of Christ.

Spend a substantial amount of time pondering the following contrast as you consider your own life, desires, choices and actions.

### Three Classes of Men (Ignatian Spiritual Exercise)

In the previous meditation, you pondered which kingdom you wish to be a part of. Hopefully the answer is the Kingdom of Christ. But how deep is that commitment? How far are you willing to go in order to enter Christ's Kingdom?

Some people desire to be members of Christ's Kingdom, but "desire" is about as far as they are willing to go. Others desire and also take some definite actions, but these actions are conditioned and limited. Finally, there are some who hold nothing back. They are ready and willing to do anything and everything necessary in order to give the greatest glory to God and to save their souls by fully embracing all that is involved in being a member of Christ's Kingdom.

Ponder how far you are willing to go.

Do you desire only but fail to act?

Do you desire and act, but only so far?

Or are you ready and willing to do all and give all for Christ? Ponder these questions seriously. (Silent Reflection)

Using your imagination, consider some excessive attachment you have. Maybe it's sinful, maybe it's not. But try to pick something that occupies much of your time, thinking, affections, desires, energy, etc. What is it? What attachment do you have to an excessive degree?

- First, say a prayer that God will help you to call this attachment to mind. (Pray now)

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES TO BRING ABOUT AWARENESS OF SIN

- Then, pray for the grace to see this attachment in the way God sees it. (Again, pray for this grace now)
- Lastly, say a prayer that God will give you the grace to understand what His will is and to choose only that which will give Him the most glory.

After sufficient prayer and time, consider now three different approaches a person can take. Do so, objectively, by imagining a person who received a very large amount of money. The money is enough to suffice for the rest of their life and to enable a luxurious lifestyle. But this person deeply loves God and wants to do what God wants. So what should they do with this money? Money itself is not sinful. But having money can result in an unhealthy attachment to it and can cause a person to rely more on the money than on God.

*Person One:* This person decides that it is best to surrender the money to God and to seek His will for its use. They know in their heart that it is what is right, and they desire to do so. But they begin to mindlessly use the money. And they put off making a decision about what God wants. They keep thinking about it, but do nothing concrete to either discern what God wants done with it or how to use it as He wants. They desire God's will, but they do little or nothing to choose it and live it in action.

*Person Two:* This person has all the qualities of Person One, regarding a desire to do God's will and to use the money only as God wants. But they go a step further. They pray about it. They give some of it away. They resolve to use it only for God's glory. But they still hold onto it and remain confused about what to do. They fail to look deeply at this question and, day after day, resolve to try again. But they make little progress and hold onto the money.

*Person Three:* This person also has the same qualities as the above two regarding a desire to do God's will and to use the money as God wants. But this person goes much further. This person sees clearly that the money is neither good nor bad. It can neither fulfill them by keeping it nor sadden them by giving it away. On the deepest level, they have achieved an authentic "holy indifference" to the money. If God wants them to keep it, that's fine. If God wants them to give it away, that's fine. Furthermore, this person decides to first actively discern God's will and then to do it, no matter what it is. Thus, they enter into a time of discernment. Upon the completion of their discernment, they make a decision. Upon making a decision, they fully, wholeheartedly and joyfully act on the will of God.

Notice with the third person, the choice to keep the money or give it away is not the central spiritual focus. Rather, the focus is 1) to know that which gives God the greatest glory; 2) to let go of any preference of their own; 3) to have no hesitancy in acting on whatever they honestly discern to be God's will.

Using the above examples, consider your personal attachment(s) and then consider which person you are more like. Pray once again for grace to see and for grace to know how you can personally become Person Three. What do you need to do? (Silent Reflection)

### **Three Ways of Humility (Ignatian Spiritual Exercise)**

**Lesson:** In this meditation, Saint Ignatius identifies what he calls three "degrees" or "methods" of

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES TO BRING ABOUT AWARENESS OF SIN

being humble. All three are good, but the third degree is best. Not everyone will fully embrace the second and third degrees, but everyone must obtain at least the first one for the sake of eternal salvation.

This meditation will require self-examination on these three degrees of humility. First, understand each degree. Then examine your own life in light of each degree.

**First Degree:** In Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans 1:29–32 (RSV-CE), there is given a list of sins that keep people from the grace of God:

*They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them.*

Even one of these serious sins is enough to keep a person from union with God. These mortal sins must be understood and rejected completely.

The first degree of humility is reached if a person would refuse to ever do even one of these mortal sins under any and every condition. Thus, even if one's physical life were at risk, one must choose death rather than a mortal sin. Obedience to the will of God and the complete rejection of serious sin is required of all people.

**First Reflection:** Spend some time with the above list of sins and perform an examination of conscience. You may also use the Ten Commandments or the Seven Capital Sins as a guide. Consider how passionately you reject these sins. Do you love God to the point that your love of God compels you to reject all that is contrary to His holy will? Prayerfully work to grow in your desire of love over sin.

**Second Degree:** One of the fundamental teachings of Saint Ignatius is indifference and detachment from all personal preferences. This is hard to obtain. The person who obtains the second degree of humility will first and foremost desire that everything they do is done so as to give the greatest glory to God. Once that desire is present, this person must also strive to have no personal preference for what God wills. Thus, if God wills that one be rich, that's fine. If He wills that one be poor, that's fine. If He wills that one encounter praise, or humiliation, honor, or rejection, an easy life, or a hard one, etc., then the person is ready for all. In other words, one's only desire is to seek to give God the greatest glory and to choose what that involves.

Additionally, since every sin is offensive to God, this person must strive to be purified of every desire for even a venial sin. The desire to commit serious sin was already eliminated in the first degree of humility, but now the desire to commit even the smallest sin is to be eliminated.

**Second Reflection:** Spend time reflecting upon the small sins to which you are attached. Prayerfully surrender those sins over and seek to be free even of the desire for these sins.

Additionally, reflect upon contrasting states in life. See yourself wealthy, then poor. Praised by others, then ridiculed. Successful in business, then unsuccessful. Most likely you desire the "good" outcomes.

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES TO BRING ABOUT AWARENESS OF SIN

But that which is truly good is that which is the will of God. Therefore, ponder God calling you to poverty, persecution and the like. Seek to eliminate any repulsion you have for this and strive to desire only what God wants.

**Third Degree:** This third degree is the most difficult to attain. This person has already achieved the first two degrees to perfection, but rather than being merely detached from riches or poverty, praise or ridicule, etc., this person chooses and deeply desires that path which most clearly imitates our Lord in His humanity. Therefore, this person positively desires poverty rather than riches, humiliation rather than honors, the loss of all rather than gaining all. The only caveat is that the poverty, humiliation and loss of all will enable the person to give at least as much glory to God as the alternative. Thus, as long as God can be glorified, the most undesirable choice is desired since this is the path our Lord walked. The lowly road is the road that most imitates our divine Lord, so that is what one should desire and choose.

**Third Reflection:** Spend time reflecting upon the rejection, humiliation and poverty of our Lord. Then look at your own life and prayerfully seek this same life. Surrender your desires over to God and pray that He fill you with the deepest desire to imitate His earthly life. How does He want you to be poor, rejected, mistreated, etc., in such a way that these experiences will lead you to give the greatest glory to God.