

Meditating on these Mysteries...

“imitate what they contain” and “obtain what they promise”

MEDITATING on these Mysteries is what we do at Holy Mass, the Divine Office and Rosary.

In the first prayer after the consecration in the first of the Eucharistic Prayers (the Roman Canon, which may always be chosen, cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, n. 365), the priest prays:

...as we celebrate the memorial of the blessed Passion, the Resurrection from the dead, and the glorious Ascension into heaven, of Christ, your Son, our Lord...

We offer in action what we celebrate in words. We enter into the mysteries of Christ and, by His sacramental power, these Mysteries of Christ become our mysteries. We become “sons in the Son”, “participants in the Divine Nature” by the indwelling of the Blessed Three in One.

“Go forth, the Mass in ended.” We have much to live up to — hence private prayer is fitting after Mass.

IN THE ROSARY, we meditate on the Mysteries of Christ’s “life, death and Resurrection”.

Our meditation on the life of God-incarnate begins with the Annunciation & Incarnation, infancy and boyhood, in the five Joyful Mysteries.

In the five Luminous Mysteries (Mysteries of Light), we meditate on His Public Life, inaugurated at His Baptism and completed with the last Old Testament paschal sacrifice at His institution of the new and everlasting Paschal Sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

Then there are the Sorrowful Mysteries and the Glorious Mysteries.

All are scriptural. In the case of the Assumption and Crowning of Our Lady, they derive from scripture in the development of doctrine.

THEOLOGY is “faith seeking understanding,” as St Thomas Aquinas said. He built on what St Augustine said, “Reasoning on the Divinity.”

St Thomas distinguished theology proper from “natural theology” (theodicy) based on reason by itself, without input from Divine Revelation.

Theology is a meditation on the mysteries, but more intellectual than the meditation of prayer. However the two are akin:

“Theology relates the Mysteries one to another, and with the ultimate end of man,” Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* (Denziger-Schönmetzger §3016; former numbering, §1796).

Good theologians seek to make the truth shine more brightly and to teach it more clearly. The Dominican motto says, “To contemplate Divine things and hand on to others the fruits of what is contemplated.”

Bad theology uses misguided reasoning and/or false statements of faith. False philosophy and ‘stranger danger’ of bad intellectual companions weaken or can even destroy piety and faith. That’s the outcome!

MEDITATION

from *Catechism of Catholic Church* (CCC) emphasis added

MEDITATION is above all a quest. The mind seeks to understand the why and how of the Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking. The required attentiveness is difficult to sustain. We are usually helped by books, and Christians do not want for them: the Sacred Scriptures, particularly the Gospels, holy icons, liturgical texts of the day or season, writings of the spiritual fathers, works of spirituality, the great book of creation, and that of history the page on which the “today” of God is written. (CCC n. 2705)

To meditate on what we read helps us to make it our own by confronting it with ourselves. Here, another book is opened: the book of life. We pass from thoughts to reality... It is a question of acting truthfully in order to come into the light: “Lord, what do you want me to do?” (CCC 2706)

There are as many and varied methods of meditation as there are spiritual masters... (CCC 2707)

Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire... Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in *lectio divina* [= Divine or Godly reading, spiritual reading] or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him. (CCC 2708)

Facing difficulties in prayer

The habitual difficulty in prayer is distraction... (CCC 2729). Another difficulty, especially for those who sincerely want to pray, is dryness... (CCC 2731)

The Divine Office

The hymns and litanies of the Liturgy of the Hours integrate the prayer of the [O.T.] psalms into the age of the Church, expressing the symbolism of the time of day, the liturgical season, or the feast being celebrated... (CCC 1177)

The Liturgy of the Hours, which is like an extension of the Eucharistic celebration, does not exclude but rather in a complementary way calls forth the various devotions of the People of God, especially adoration and worship of the Blessed Sacrament. (CCC 1178)

The faithful who celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours are united to Christ our high priest, by the prayer of the Psalms, meditation on the Word of God, and canticles and blessings, in order to be joined with his unceasing and universal prayer that gives glory to the Father and implores the gift of the Holy Spirit on the whole world. (CCC 1196)

Facing temptations in prayer

The most common yet most hidden temptation is our lack of faith. It expresses itself less by declared incredulity than by our actual preferences. When we begin to pray, a thousand labours or cares thought to be urgent vie for priority; once again, it is the moment of truth for the heart: what is its real love? ... (CCC 2732)

Another temptation, to which presumption opens the gate is... depression due to lax ascetical practice, decreasing vigilance, carelessness of heart. “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”... (CCC 2733)

Christians owe it to themselves to develop the desire to meditate regularly, lest they come to resemble the three first kinds of soil in the parable of the sower... (CCC 2707)

Praying More Personally

with Intercession Lists and Examination of Memories

EUCHARISTIC PRAYER n. 1 has pauses for personal intercession. The others do not. It is 'the Roman Canon' or Roman *rule*', the original and the greatest of the four Eucharistic Prayers in the 1969 New Order of the Mass of Roman Rite (now there are nine 9 more).

These pauses for personal prayer are prescribed in the rubrics. (Rubrics are those directions for priest and people printed in the Missal in red or in italics: hence the old saying, "Do the red, say the black").

There are two such pauses: the **Memento of the living** and the **Memento of the dead**. Mass is offered as a propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead. A memento is a remembrance; a propitiation something which makes up for sins and thereby makes peace.

In the old days, long before Pope St Gregory the Great (about A.D. 600) the names of the living and the dead were written on two pieces of waxed metal or ivory or wood. They were called 'the diptychs', from the Greek, meaning a pair of tablets. These were kept up to date so they could be used by the priest at the places where the Missal has "N. and N.", meaning, put in the Names.

From the way the Missal is worded, it would seem that a few names could be read aloud. Of course, in some parishes the names of the dead are read aloud just before the Offertory, in the Prayer of the Faithful. Moreover, there is provision in the ritual Mass for a Baptism to insert the names of the godparents.

MAKING YOUR OWN DIPTYCHS

1. Some of the lay faithful as well as some priests make their own private diptychs or **intercession lists** for use in their morning prayers. They write the names out on a card and update them from time to time — adding new names, promoting 'baby' in the womb to a Christian name after birth, and promoting the recently deceased from the living to the dead (perhaps by underlining or retyping later on in italics).

2. Such lists are an adult extension of the *God bless Mummy and Daddy etc* prayers of childhood. Once personal relationships multiply, and deepen, a single simple list may grow into several pages, repeated in a weekly or even a monthly cycle.

3. Sometimes the list is simply read out to God, asking for His blessing on them, without detail. They can be read over in this fashion just before Mass, as a personal intention for the sacrifice.

4. Other times, this intercession list is mentally personalized by putting in particular and personal requests for friends, relatives, acquaintances, enemies, etc., something like the Novena Box petitions or the revived Prayer of the Faithful (cf. Good Friday solemn prayers).

ADVANTAGES

Personalised praying has a number of advantages:

1. It broadens our perspective of God's Providence. When we pray for others, there gradually dawns on us a realization how much God loves them, just as

He loves us; that He works through them, just as He works through us. The communion of saints!

2. Also, God gives us the actual graces, the helps we need, to practise charity towards those for whom we pray. In other words, He strengthens us to love our neighbour as ourself, for God's sake. This means we see good in people who perchance annoy us, and we become glad about the good they do, and grateful for them... This is a sort of 'a return' blessing on ourselves for asking for blessings on others.

3. In the bigger scheme of things, praying for others depends on the great reality of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Communion of Saints. God blesses other human beings, at least in part, through our interceding for them, for "whatever we ask the Father in Christ's name, He will do," (John 14:13), and we intercede for others through Christ our Lord, Who "ever lives to intercede for them," (Hebrews 7:24-25).

PERSONALIZING NIGHT PRAYERS

1. Night prayers should always include an Act of Contrition. Ideally, this should follow an *examination of conscience*. Many grown-ups and children are mentally lazy, so they dodge examination of conscience. Yet an **examination of memory** is one of the simplest ways of praying personally about oneself. We remember our sins, to be sorry for them and make amends.

2. There there is the other side of the coin, and it is often best to start with it: an **examination of memory** of the good things that have happened over the day, to thank God for them. Perhaps only half a dozen items will come to mind: good things that happened to us or to our loved ones; and the good things we did under God's prompting graces.

3. Through such a daily remembrance, through such a personal 'thank You', God makes us more aware that "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28—where St Paul is quoting a pagan poet), and that, "as the days and weeks pass by, nothing remains but God and what we have done for Him."

4. Further, the daily remembrance of good things helps us appreciate how we are partners in the great work of the Holy Spirit Who is our *Paraclete*, that is, our Helper and Guide (as the Rite of Confirmation describes Him).

5. This personalised 'thanks' matches our Morning Offering of all the prayers, works, joys and sufferings of the day. It wins for us the grace to do better with that Offering tomorrow. Like the intercession lists, but more personally, the thanksgiving for others opens our eyes to the myriad interventions of God, in His personal Providence.]

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