
The Triple Colloquy

1. I come into God's loving regard. I offer Him my whole self.

2. I compose my sinful self in this sin-filled world.

3. Then I ask of God what I want: A deeper and deeper understanding of my sin and sinfulness. I want to feel ashamed of what I have done and left undone, and to have a sense of revulsion from the disorderliness of my desiring and enacting. I would even ask God to fill my heart with tears, and my eyes, if He will give me that.

I consider some particular points from the meditations on the sin of the angels, of the First Parents, of one person, or from the meditations on my own sins. After that, I use these three colloquies in this way:

- First, I talk with the Mother of Jesus, asking her to obtain from her own Son these favors:

- i] A knowledge of my own sins that gets under the surface of just what I did, and a feeling of revulsion from these attitudes, decisions, actions, customs, habits.

- ii] A strong grasp of the disorder in these ways of mine—an understanding of them that fills me with horror and that moves me to straighten out my life.

- iii] A faith-filled knowledge of and insight into the world around me, and a disgust with its values and hollow pursuits. I want to shake all that off. I say the Hail Mary.

- Second, I talk with Mary's Son, and ask Jesus to obtain these same three gifts for me from the Father. Then, I say the Jesus Prayer several times.

- Third, I make these same requests directly of the Father, that He Himself, the eternal Lord of all, may give them to me. I end with the Our Father. ❖

The Sin of the Angels

1. I come into God's presence and offer myself to Him.

2. Then, I compose myself in my real world. I am one of many human persons. I hear about many wars, about dictators who make fortunes dealing in drugs. I read about murders every day, in my own city. I breathe air that people have filled with harmful and noxious chemicals. I eat foods that clog my arteries, tax my digestive system, and alter my consciousness. Perhaps I learned to smoke before we knew it harms us. Perhaps I have gotten used to some drugs. I help pay for weapons systems that are so deadly that they make impossible the security we intend them to achieve and threaten the entire earth. I am sold on things by advertising that skirts the truth. My culture is sated with pleasure, and it makes life choices simply because of pleasure. When the media do not tell me outright lies, they deceive by error and false worldviews. Even if I wanted a more equitable distribution of healthy water and nourishing foods, I know that millions die of diseases while I can drink water from any tap and eat cuisines from all over the earth.

So I continue listing wrongs and evils until I get a deep sense of how my life world really goes on. This is my real world, however secure and safe I may feel in my own situation. Without being lugubrious or silly, I see my life world and myself in it—for what they truly are.

3. And now I ask of God what I yearn for: I ask God to let me feel shame at my thoughtless sins and my deliberate sins; I want to feel confounded by the truth that others suffer such dire things because of human sinfulness, and I have suffered so little, although I know I have sinned and do sin.

Now, about the angels:

1. First, I recall that Jesus said He had seen Satan plunging down from heaven like lightning (Luke 10:18).

2. Then I think about this. Do I believe that God creates intelligent beings other than humans? Do all intelligent beings have to have bodies? St. Thomas says that because angels have enormously powerful intelligences, they know things amazingly swiftly and make up their minds with their whole being. Once an angel decides for or against serving God, that angel's whole self has moved to enact the decision. What do I think about this? Suppose one vastly powerful being managed all the forces of our galaxy—and that being determined to take things into its own hands instead of keeping the laws God had set. What kind of destruction would that be? Suppose once I made up my mind and chose, that would be the end of it, and that same kind of destruction would wrack my whole self.

3. Then I see how I feel about the times I have chosen to do what I wanted instead of what I knew was right. How can it be that the angels are now soaked in hatred, and I can still change?

At the end, I turn to Jesus Christ, hanging on His cross, and I talk with Him. I ask how can it be that the Lord and Creator should have come from the infinite reaches of eternity to this death here on earth, so that He could die for our sins. And then I reflect upon myself, and ask:

What have I done for Christ?

What am I doing for Christ?

What ought I do for Christ?

And I talk with Him like a friend. I end with the Our Father. ❖

The Sin of Adam and Eve

1. I come into God's presence and offer myself to Him.

2. Then, I compose myself in my real world. I am one of many human persons. I hear about many wars, about dictators who make fortunes dealing in drugs. I read about murders every day in my own city. I breathe air that people have filled with harmful and noxious chemicals. I eat foods that clog my arteries, tax my digestive system, and alter my consciousness. Perhaps I learned to smoke before we knew it harms us. Perhaps I have gotten used to some drugs. I help pay for weapons systems that are so deadly that they make impossible the security we intend them to achieve, and threaten the entire earth. I am sold on things by advertising that skirts the truth. Even if I wanted a more equitable distribution of healthy water and nourishing foods, I know that millions die of diseases while I can drink water from any tap and eat cuisines from all over the earth. So I continue: This is my real world, however secure and safe I may feel in my own situation. Without being lugubrious or silly, I see my life world and myself in it—for what they truly are.

3. And now I ask of God what I yearn for: I ask God to let me feel shame at my thoughtless sins and my deliberate sins; I want to feel confounded by the truth that others suffer such dire things because of sins, and I have suffered so little, although I know I have sinned and do sin.

Now, about Adam and Eve:

1. I recall what St. Paul said to the Romans: "Well then, sin entered the world through one man, and through sin death, and thus death has spread through the whole human race because everyone has sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

2. Then I think about this. Even though I may believe that God brought humankind onto the face of the earth through evolution, I have to believe that at some point in time and on some spot on the globe, the earliest humans came into life. They grew intellectually aware of right and wrong, and some among them—the Church has always believed it was the very first—chose to do evil. They abused what was given them. They chose to use what was forbidden by their own consciences. They decided willfully to make their own value system instead of letting the Spirit of God instruct them. From that sin came others, more and more. From that sin came death. So, from this earliest sin came flooding down all the misery, wretchedness, evildoing, and death-dealing in the world today.

3. What they did—some ordinary human action—can it have been so enormously, overwhelmingly worse than what I have done, and perhaps do? Yet, what comes from my sin? Why does God deal so differently with me? So I consider how I feel about all this.

Finally, I make my colloquy with Jesus crucified. How did You come to this? And the questions form in me: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ? I talk this over with Him. I end with the Our Father. ❖

The Sin of One Person

1. I come into God's presence and offer myself to Him.

2. Then, I compose myself in my real world. I consider how I live surrounded by violence and anger, in a deteriorating environment steeped in self-deception, untruth, and error, and under genuine threat of nuclear holocaust. I have to make my way through all this.

3. And now I ask of God what I yearn for: I ask God to let me feel shame at my thoughtless sins and my deliberate sins; I want to feel confounded by the truth that others suffer such dire things because of sins, and I have suffered so little, although I know I have sinned and do sin.

Now, think about a person who died in alienation from God.

1. I recall that Jesus said in one of His stories that a rich man, "Dives," had despised his wretched neighbor and ended up in a place divided by a great chasm from the bosom of Abraham, forever thirsty (Luke 16:19-31).

2. I think about this. Jesus Himself said very clearly that some people were on the way to living forever apart from God. The Church has consistently taught that some deeds and some ways of life lead to self-destruction, to a life after life that can only be called totally wretched. If a person has really loved only himself or herself, and wanted only that—he or she may get it, forever, and live deeply alone and without love except self-love.

3. I remember that some dictators in this century have murdered vast numbers of people, because of their lust for personal power over others. Where are they now? I remember that some rich people spend their entire lives amassing money, while doing nothing for the poor and suffering right under their noses. What happened to them when they died? Other people spent their whole brief life relentlessly enjoying themselves in sensuality, really recklessly hurting and harming others, whom they simply use for their own pleasure. What happens to them when they die? Where are they now?

4. I imagine a young man in Vietnam, gradually growing callous as he fires into huts. He actually kills some people. He gets a taste for this deadly occupation. He figures he cannot tell who are the enemy and who are not, so it doesn't much matter. One day, he faces an old man and some children, and kills them quite wantonly and deliberately. Then he is killed. What kind of life did he lead? Where is he now?

5. Then I think about myself. Have I pursued some thing, destroying myself as I did it? Why haven't my stupidities caused the wretchedness that others' have caused? Do I want to risk ending up all alone, forever alone, loving no one but myself?

Then I make my colloquy with Jesus on His cross, letting the three questions rise in me: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ? Our Father. ❖

Praying with the Fantasy

We have another way of knowing besides our reason and our memory. That way is the imagination. We use our imagination to make scientific discoveries and to create works of art that give others insight into the human condition.

We can very reasonably use our imagination to know God and His Christ better, and the Church, and our own selves as we grow in God.

- We find many ways of using our imagination in coming to know God and our selves. To mention just a couple: When we are considering whether to take an action even though we tend to think it morally wrong, we imagine to ourselves all the evil consequences that God would or might allow, and that helps us turn away from this doubtful way of acting. Or again, when we do not know what God hopes for in us, we imagine ourselves taking one course or another, and "seeing" ourselves in those ways of living, we come to understand what our most authentic self calls for.
- Another way of praying with our imagination is by fantasizing. In this activity, we imagine places we have never been and places that do not exist. We imagine events that never happened and could never happen. We imagine wildly and freely.
- Then, in those fantasies, we let the Spirit of Life—who surely imagines infinitely more than we—open our minds and our hearts to

truths and realities that we may have been defending ourselves against by the ordinary and the conventional.

- For instance, we can fantasize that we are in a place where no good person and no angel could come, and let evil toss us about. Then we could call on God to deliver us from temptation. Or again, we could fantasize that we are falling into the sun, which does not burn us, and come to its still center; then we could shift the fantasy and imagine that we have fallen not into the sun but into God. We could let God tell us what it is like to rest at the center of the universe and of all that exists.
- We can fantasize living as a lily, and how utter our dependence on the Spirit of Life is then. We can fantasize living like a great person, and what we would do if we had vast fortunes and great personal power. Then we can ask which of the things we would do then we can do now.
- Always when we use fantasy, we place ourselves in God's presence and beg for God's grace. We then imagine what we have set ourselves to imagine, letting our fancy go free. Even as we fantasize, we know that God our Creator and Lord stays with us. In the end, we turn to God with whatever real thing we have learned and ask the God of all consolation to confirm us. ❖

Centering

When we come to prayer, we need to collect our scattered thoughts and affects so that we come to God with a single heart. Writers give this process various names. Some talk about coming to quiet, or reaching a sense of harmony with all beings. Some talk about reaching self-concentration, so that my thoughts and desires are not running all over, but come to coherence and rest. Many talk about "centering," meaning that we can come to the core of our self for a moment and desire and act out of that center.

Whatever name you use, recognize that some quiet and concentration help very much as we begin our prayer time.

Here are some ways of accomplishing that "centering" that you might find useful. You might already have your way of doing it. If not, test various ways until you are able to pray a little more readily.

- Stand or sit (or take some other position that you come to find helpful). Concentrate for just a moment on yourself standing, or sitting, or in whatever position. Attend to each part of your body: to the tiny feelings on your scalp and face, to the pressure of clothing on your neck; to the position of your arms and hands; to the pressures of chair or floor on back, stomach, rump; to the feelings on thighs, knees, calves; to the pressure of the floor on heel or sole. Then just sense yourself in this total position, and go on to ask God to let you feel your presence to your Creator and Lord.
- Take a quiet position. Slowly and gently concentrate your attention on your breathing, focusing down onto the air moving in and out of your nostrils. Keep focused on that moving air for a while until you are quiet.
- Breathing that way, you might begin to think some words as you breathe. So, think "Lord Jesus Christ" as you breathe in, and "King of Eternal Glory" as you breathe out—over and over. Or use the Jesus Prayer, thinking "Jesus Christ" as you breathe in, and "have mercy" as you breathe out. After continuing this for a time, gently turn to the prayer materials you have prepared. Understand that we never "finish" this kind of praying, we simply turn from it to another kind.
- Take a quiet position. Gradually grow aware of what you are hearing. Listen to each sound, trying to distinguish single sounds from the general noise. Simply hear the sounds, without trying to figure out where they are coming from or to interpret them. Consciously let the sounds continue on their own, aware of the fact that they do not attack you or violate you or depend on you. As you let them go on entirely on their own, grow aware that you are present to your Creator and Lord.
- As you can grow aware of the sounds you are hearing, so you can also grow aware of the sights you are seeing, and even of the odors and fragrances you smell.
- Instead of becoming quite still, you might come to concentration by gentle gesture or movement. For instance, you could think some prayerful thoughts—"Lord, You are God; I come to You; I give these moments to You alone; You hold me utterly"—and as you think them, you could gesture or dance them out. Slowly raise your hand, slowly bow from the waist, slowly hold up your hands together as though they were filled with gifts. After a time of this, you will know to grow still and turn to the matters you have decided to pray upon.
- Others use other means. Light a candle for its fragrance and presence. Gaze at a small object before you, such as a little stone, carefully seeing everything about it, until you can feel the fact that God our Creator and Lord keeps making you and the stone. Play some quiet music. Burn incense.
- Note these general rules: We each find a way to concentrate. We commonly find one or other way more useful at one time than at others. We sometimes feel more dissipated than usual and need to use some means of centering that we would not ordinarily use. Centering proves useful, but is not an end in itself, and on occasion it expresses or leads to a kind of self-absorption that makes praying a little more difficult. Centering at the start of prayer ordinarily makes praying more feasible. ♦