

# Contemplations for Love

Tad Dunne

*"Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbor as yourself." (Mk12:30)*

There are two sets of contemplations here, one set to experience love for God and the other to experience love for your neighbor. These are meant to be non-taxing exercises, using imagination and feeling, simply to allow your love to surface and let all other concerns recede. They can be made for very brief periods or for longer periods. Plan to make them often.

There are three things to remember about love, however. First, the test of genuine love is the desire to act. Good will is not enough. Even the words of love are inappropriate; what counts is deeds. So enter into these exercises with the desire and expectation that they will dispose you to act in some concrete, loving way. If this frightens you, then at least let yourself *want* to want to act.

Second, love does more than give something to the beloved; love also joins the beloved in a spirit of common purpose. That is, love not only takes care and gives, love joins and shares. So in these exercises, be prepared not only to act, but to act in consort with God. Think of yourself as carrying out a work that you cannot carry out alone. When you love, you love *with* God – not only when you love your neighbor, or love yourself, but even when you love God. You love with God's strength, God's perseverance, and God's tender care. If this seems presumptuous – assuming that you love with God's love when you know very well how far from God you are – then recall that God in his mercy does the approaching, and desires to approach, despite your imperfections.

Third, although we can rely on God's promise to give us the hearts and minds necessary to love, our promises are not so reliable. While on earth, we are permanently capable of acting against our better judgment. So, besides expressing our love in deeds, we also need to ask God for the grace to carry out what we desire.

***I: You must love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
with all your mind  
and with all your strength.***

## **1. Nature**

Contemplate the world of nature around you. Look at the trees, the flowers, the stars above, the planet beneath your feet. None of it had to be, but there it is, radiant and wonderful. Forget the names of things. Look at your surroundings with an artist's eye, wishing you could capture its splendor in paint or stone, but knowing your every attempt could not match the glory of the singular, astonishing thing there before you.

Everything in nature speaks. Each thing in itself as well as the entire cosmos, is a word, a message, a voice. It tells us, "Pay attention! I am giving myself to you!" It is God's voice, giving humanity a splendid environment, a home, and a message of love. In a mysterious but real way, the eternal unseen God speaks a visible, tangible, and audible word of love for us.

You too are God's word of love to the people around you who can hear it. Whenever you act with integrity, you reveal God to others. If you relish this truth, you will want to act on it. Make a covenant with God. Write out an offering you would like to make of yourself.

## **2. History**

Contemplate the world of history whose flow you are a part of. Remember the past with a storyteller's affection, wishing you could tell it all but knowing your every story reveals only a glimpse of the great, dark mystery of the emergence and demise of generation after generation.

Then call to mind how God's word entered human history to give it meaning and direction. Think of how God's Word grew from covenants and laws, through messages to prophets, to the Good News of Christ Jesus, who is God's perfect and irrevocable Word.

God has been working throughout history, caring for us, leading us, protecting us. In Jesus we first heard the news that we are reconciled with God, and soon realized that Jesus is God's personal entry into our history, teaching, healing, gathering, with the very highest human cost to himself. We learned how intensely God desires to work for us and in us where we are.

By your own words you too give meaning to your historical situation. God has no other voices to speak with except voices like yours. Speak to God about how you want to give your word to others.

### **3. Hearts**

Consider how God is alive in human hearts. As the very Spirit of the Father and of Christ, God labors incessantly around and within us:

God hovers over creation lovingly, bringing order into chaos. "Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God's Spirit hovered over the water" (Gen 1:2). "Like an eagle watching its nest hovering over its young, the Lord spreads out his wings to hold his people" (Deut 32:11).

God makes us like Jesus. We are turned into the likeness of Christ by God who is Spirit. "We, with our faces unveiled, reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, grow brighter and brighter as we are turned in to the image that we reflect. This is the work of the Lord who is Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18).

God welcomes the Word in us. God worked in Elizabeth, John the Baptist, and Simeon, to recognize and welcome the Christ of the Lord. "The Good News came to you not only as words, but as power and as the Holy Spirit and as utter conviction" (1 Thes 1:5). In a special way God worked in Mary, welcoming the eternal Word-made-flesh with her entire person. To honor Mary, we can do no better than welcome the Word with our entire persons.

God in agony cries out in us for freedom. "From the beginning until now, the entire creation has been groaning in one great act of giving birth; and not only creation but all of us who possess the first-fruits of the Spirit, we too groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to be set free" (Rom 8:23). "God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cries, 'Abba, Father!'" (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15).

God heals divisions by working in people spiritually. "There is one Body, one Spirit" (Eph 4:3-4). "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven" (Jn 20:22).

God works in all people, drawing them to Christ. "Jewish believers ... were all astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit should be poured out on the pagans too" (Acts 10: 45).

God's presence in our hearts brings the opposite of self-indulgence. "What the Spirit brings is very different: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control.... Since the Spirit is our life, let us be directed by the Spirit" (Gal 5:22-26).

Then consider that the best way to return love for God is to cooperate with God who labors within you.

#### **4. The Body of Christ**

As a member of Christ's Body, and as inspired by God within, pray the following prayer:

Kind God, I am but one voice in your family.

But I praise you today for our minds, for our hearts, and especially for our selves, called from nothing to unending friendship with you.

May we hold your name holy.

May your Kingdom come, and come quickly.

Let us not forget one another but remember and forgive.

Let us turn to you for our daily bread.

With your grace and your love, draw us to yourself and away from the lure of temptations.

And may every dawn and every dusk find us grateful as we remember your faithfulness.

Compose your own prayer in a similar vein.

### ***II: "You must love your neighbor as yourself."***

#### **1. The Good Samaritan**

Read the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). Consider that Jesus created this parable drawing upon his knowledge of the Father and of human nature. Enter into the consciousness of Jesus, seeing how fittingly this parable represents the love of God the Father. See how in each of us there is a priest and a Levite who switch to the side of the road where no one suffers. And there is also a Samaritan in us, often a rejected side of us, that is moved with compassion and tenderly cares for the victims of the world. Talk to the Samaritan within you.

#### **2. Loving Passers-by**

Sit somewhere where many people gather or pass by. Watch each person and consider how each one is a veteran of an interior battle between grace and sin. See how they are burdened down by false values of society, and yet how love still glows in their hearts. See the scars of that struggle. See in them your own struggles. Let your love and compassion flow out to them.

### **3. Love in History**

Imagine all of history as a single flow of people, generation after generation, each generation leaving a mixed legacy of the good and the senseless. Think of how the dead live on in the memories, the stories, the style, and the values of the living. Think about how each person alive today will enter the cavern of death, joining his or her ancestors to await the coming of the Lord. In this perspective, think of how important each moment of life is, and how precious deep human contact really is.

### **4. Your Loving**

Think of how dear someone you love is to you. How most of what you do, you do as a common enterprise, even when he or she is absent. Let yourself realize that not only is your friend a gift, but your love is a gift also. God as Spirit recognizes eternal worth in him or her. Be happy to cooperate with that love.

### **5. Your Being Loved**

Think of how dear you are to someone else. Realize your loveableness, not on any evidence, but on the word of the one who loves you. Let yourself realize it, not as a matter of self-importance, but as an instance of the loving connection God desires between all people, as the work of God's Spirit delighting over you. Consider very realistically how you treat yourself.

### **6. A Prayer for Love of Neighbor**

Pray something like the following prayer:

I believe, my God, that you are absolutely real.

I repudiate my eyes, which report not seeing you;

I repudiate my ears, which say they never heard your voice;

I repudiate my nose and mouth, which prefer sweeter delights;

I repudiate my hands, which feel they were never clasped in yours;

I repudiate my body, which whines for sleep and comfort.

I stand firm in the truth.

I will lean against my culture's frenzied rush past people toward things.

I trust in your great love in me for others.

And I beg you to choose these eyes to catch your searching eye,

these ears to hear your gentle voice,

these two hands to lift up your broken body,

and this body of mine to comfort your aching heart.  
Compose a prayer of your own like this one.

Tad Dunne - 2008