

Lenten Meditations from Saint Francis de Sales

Seventh Meditation: On Hell

Preparation

1. Place yourself in God's presence.
2. Humble yourself, and ask his aid.
3. Picture to yourself a dark city, reeking with the flames of sulfur and brimstone, inhabited by citizens who cannot get forth.

Considerations

1. Even so the lost are plunged in their infernal abyss—suffering indescribable torture in every sense and every member; and that because having used their members and senses for sin, it is just that through them they should suffer now. Those eyes that delighted in impure vicious sights, now behold devils; the ears that took pleasure in unholy words, now are deafened with yells of despair—and so on with the other senses.
2. Beyond all these sufferings, there is one greater still, the privation and pain of loss of God's glory, which is forever denied to their vision. If Absalom cared not to be released from exile, if he might not see his father's face, how much sorer will it be to be deprived forever of the blessed vision of God?
3. Consider how insupportable the pains of hell will be by reason of their eternal duration. If the irritating bite of an insect, or the restlessness of fever, makes an ordinary night seem so long and tedious, how terrible will the endless night of eternity be, where nothing will be found save despair, blasphemy and fury!

Affections and Resolutions

1. Read the prophet's descriptions of the terrors of the Lord, and ask your soul whether it can face them—whether you can bear to lose your God forever?
2. Confess that you have repeatedly deserved to do so. Resolve henceforth to act differently, and to rescue yourself from this abyss. Resolve on distinct definite acts by which you may avoid sin, and thereby eternal death. Give thanks, offer yourself, pray.

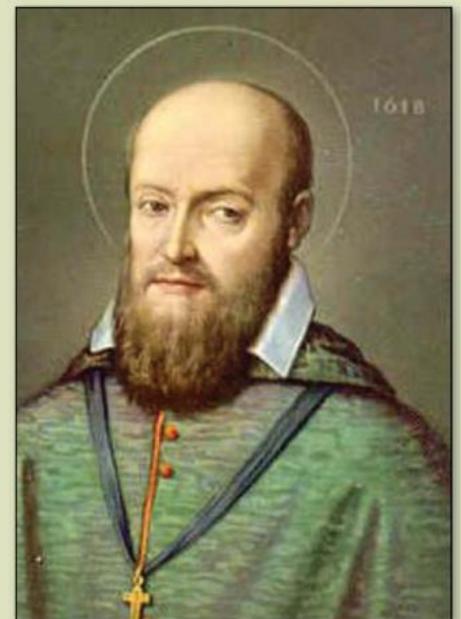
Eighth Meditation: On Paradise

Preparation

1. Place yourself in the presence of God.
2. Invoke his aid.

Considerations

1. Imagine a lovely calm night, when the heavens are bright with innumerable stars: add to the beauty of such a night the utmost beauty of a glorious summer's day—the sun's brightness not hindering the clear shining of moon or stars, and then be sure that it all falls immeasurably short of the glory of paradise. O bright and blessed country, O sweet and precious place!



St. Francis de Sales
1567-1622

2. Consider the beauty and perfection of the countless inhabitants of that blessed country—the millions and millions of angels, cherubim and seraphim; the glorious company of Apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins, and saints. O blessed company, any one single member of which surpasses all the glory of this world, what will it be to behold them all, to sing with them the sweet song of the Lamb? They rejoice with a perpetual joy, they share a bliss unspeakable, and unchangeable delights.
3. Consider how they enjoy the presence of God, who fills them with the richness of his vision, which is a perfect ocean of delight; the joy of being forever united to their head. They are like happy birds, hovering and singing forever within the atmosphere of divinity, which fills them with inconceivable pleasures. There each one strives without jealousy in singing the praises of the Creator. “Blessed are you forever, O dear and precious Lord and Redeemer, Who so freely gives us of your own glory,” they cry; and he in his turn pours out his ceaseless blessing on his saints. “Blessed are you, mine own forever, who have served Me faithfully, and with a good courage.”

Affections and Resolutions

1. Admire and rejoice in the heavenly country; the glorious and blessed new Jerusalem.
2. Reprove the coldness of your own heart for having hitherto so little sought after that glorious abode. Why have I so long lingered indifferent to the eternal happiness set before me? Woe is me that, for the sake of poor savorless earthly things, I have so often forgotten those heavenly delights. How could I neglect such real treasures for mere vain and contemptible earthly matters?
3. Aspire earnestly after that blessed abode. Forasmuch, O dear Lord, as You have been pleased to turn my feet to Your ways, never will I again look back. Go forth, my soul, towards your promised rest, journey unweariedly to that hoped-for land; why should you tarry in Egypt?
4. Resolve to give up such and such things, which hinder you on the way, and to do such others as will help you hereafter. Give thanks, offer, pray.

At the end of your meditation, linger a while, and gather, so to say, a little spiritual bouquet from the thoughts you have dwelled upon, the sweet perfume that may refresh you through the day.

I hope you find these meditations useful to your own prayer. Try and take 15 minutes a day to sit quietly. You can revisit this meditation all week.

Lent and Going to Confession (*Re-printed from last week*)

I wanted to create for you a guide to going to the Sacrament of Confession this Lent. In my reading I found something written by a priest of our diocese. Monsignor Pereda is a very fine priest, pastor and the former Judicial Vicar of the diocese. The following are his words:

“For much of our history, the frequent reception of the Eucharist was not something everybody did. There was a keen awareness that one should not receive the Body and Blood of Christ unworthily¹. Since there was, and still is, no obligation to receive the Eucharist at every Mass (one’s obligation to attend Mass is satisfied simply by being there), many people did not in fact

¹ I Cor 11:27 - Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy way will be guilty of sin against the body and blood of the Lord.

receive the Eucharist very often. Some did so out of an arguably over-abundance of piety, and others just figured they'd put off confession as long as they could - years even - and would simply do without.

Well, the Church eventually said that since the Eucharist is so integral to the Christian life, a Catholic must receive the Eucharist at least once a year, ideally at Easter², and it is this command that was and still is the "Easter Duty." Naturally, since everyone racks up at least some sins throughout the year, it naturally followed that going to confession would normally precede that, hence the confusion that the Easter Duty concerned going to confession.

In fact according to canon law, a person is only strictly required to go to confession for mortal sins³, although it is highly recommended to go to tidy up all those other smaller or venial sins as well. The reason it is highly recommended is that few other things, except for the reception of Christ's Body and Blood, fill us with such profound grace as the sacrament of confession. Hearing confessions is truly one of the most humbling and awesome things I do as a priest.

Alas, many do not make use of the sacrament. Maybe people don't commit serious sins anymore (highly dubious). Maybe it is because people don't realize some of the things they do are serious (closer, I think). Or maybe some just have not been in such a long time that they are nervous about the process and/or think they have nothing to say (more likely still).

If that is the case, fear not! What follows is what I call the 90% confession. It contains 90% of the things that 90% of people can confess 90% of the time. A typical confession need not be any more complicated than what follows. In fact, most things that are often added to a confession, like a list of your virtues (good to know, but not what we are there to discuss), lists of struggles in your life (while worth talking about to a priest, the confessional is generally not the place for that either), lists of other people's sins against you (this comes up often, but the focus should stay on you), and lengthy explanations or details tend only to distract from the business at hand. The fewer details the better. Names should never be mentioned in confession. If the priest has any questions, he will ask.

So, without further ado, here is a sample confession that you can use to guide your own confession (bring it with you if that helps). Recite the sins applicable to you, and of course mention any other serious sins not on the list (I presume you already know what those might be).

You begin simply by saying, "Bless me Father for I have sinned. It's been (*state how long*) since my last confession. Here are my sins...

- I have not loved God with all my heart, and all my soul.
- I have placed people or things in my life as taking priority over God.
- I have been disrespectful to my parents or legitimate authorities.

² Can. 920 §1. After being initiated into the Most Holy Eucharist, each of the faithful is obliged to receive Holy Communion at least once a year. §2. This precept must be fulfilled during the Easter season unless it is fulfilled for a just cause at another time during the year.

³ In short, "mortal" sins are those that are of serious matter (sexual relations outside of marriage, murder, abortion, missing Mass, viewing pornography, etc.) and freely (not coerced) committed by someone who knows at the time that they are indeed serious.

- I have used the name of God carelessly.
- I have brought scandal upon God or the Church through my bad example as a Christian. I have missed Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
- I have been prideful.
- I have not been kind to everyone in my life.
- I have been impatient with people in my life.
- I have let anger get the best of me.
- I have judged others.
- I have dwelled on impure thoughts.
- I have been impure with myself or with another person.
- I have artificially frustrated God's desire to create life.
- I have dwelled on impure images that objectify men or women.
- I have overindulged in food or drink.
- I have abused drugs.
- I have told lies.
- I have been envious of what others have.
- I have not been thankful for all the gifts I have been given.

I am sorry for these, and all my other sins that I have failed to remember.”

The priest may say a few words of counsel, give you a simple penance to say later, and ask you to make an act of contrition. There are many forms, but the short and simple one is: “Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

At this point the priest says the prayer of absolution: “God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, + and of the Holy Spirit.”

You answer “amen” and the priest dismisses you.



That's it! All done. Clean as a whistle, and all in a few minutes. Interestingly, the two greatest saint confessors in the history of the Church, St. Jean Vianney, the Cure of

Ars, and Padre Pio, never gave more than 90 seconds to each penitent. Usually more time than that is superfluous and is often the fruit of the imagination of the heart. Believe me, as a priest who has heard confessions for 38 years, in confession the more concise we are, the more contrite we are.

So, if you haven't been to confession in a while, I sincerely hope you will decide to break that streak. There are scant few things in life that I can guarantee, but I can guarantee you will not regret going to confession and receiving the Lord's mercy and forgiveness.

So, what do you have to lose other than your sins? I'll see you there!"

As you can see this guide should cut down on the anxiety of going to Confession. It will also keep your confession focused on the essential matter. I will keep reprinting this in the bulletin for all of Lent.

God bless you all,

Father Sikorski