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Robert L. Faricy, S. J.

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## *Contemplation: Looking at Jesus*

ROBERT L. FARICY, S. J.

Jesus' teaching on prayer in Luke's gospel has, as a kind of preface, the story of his visit to the two sisters, Martha and Mary. Martha, the owner of the house and the one who receives Jesus, complains to him while serving dinner, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me." The Lord answers, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and bothered about many things; only one thing is necessary; Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42, my translation). What is the "better part" that Mary has chosen? Mary sits at Jesus' feet, looking at him with love.

### KNOWLEDGE THROUGH LOVE

Contemplation means looking at the Lord with love. Contemplation is a way of knowing; I can know the Lord through contemplation — not the way I know data or facts or some truth, but the way I know a person. Through contemplating Jesus, I come to know him better — not to know more about him through study, but to know *him* better through love.

The knowledge of the Lord that comes through contemplation is real knowledge, not less than knowing facts, but more. To know a *person* differs from knowing *about* that person. I do want to know as much as I can about someone who loves me and whom I love. But beyond that I want to know the person better. Jesus knows me perfectly, accepts me totally, loves me intensely, and calls me by name. And he leads me to love him, and to know him better through love

This article is a chapter from Father Faricy's book, *Seeking Jesus in Contemplation and Discernment*, to be published late in 1983 by Michael Glazier, Inc., Wilmington, Del.

— through his love of me and through my loving response to his love.

Knowledge through love, then, is not abstract. The knowledge through love that comes from and that constitutes contemplation is often obscure, dark, vague, shadowy. But not abstract. Contemplation means concrete knowing, because contemplation is lovingly knowing a person, this particular person, Jesus present for me here and now.

Contemplation is an experience of Jesus, of his presence and love and care — not only nor primarily intellectual experience, but affective experience, of the heart. Contemplation is affective knowledge, a knowing that takes place through being loved by Jesus and through loving him back.

Feelings, then, count. Sometimes, of course, I can and must pray in dryness in a kind of desert, without any special feelings, and perhaps feeling out of touch with the Lord. Ordinarily, however, my contemplating Jesus will involve me to some extent at a feeling level, and I will have the spiritual taste that comes with love.

I can expect my contemplating Jesus, my sitting at Jesus' feet and looking at him with love, to have a certain congruency, a fittingness, with my own temperament and nature. Contemplation's knowledge through love is with and according to my whole being, my entire self, my own personal nature. Because it is through love, and because love is an act not just of my will but of my whole person, contemplation is with and through my whole nature, cooperating with my nature, co-natural or connatural. This connatural knowledge is mine, my particular knowing, and so it will have my personal stamp, the quality of my own personality. I do not have to turn into someone else to contemplate Jesus; I do not have to change my personality. The only self I have to relate to Jesus with is the self that I am now. Come as you are.

Contemplation is a gift, a seed that can fall on hard ground, or get choked off with thorns and brambles, or be eaten by the birds, or fall into fertile ground, develop, grow, and bear fruit. In other words, I need to cooperate with the grace of contemplation.

What are the conditions of contemplation? Two. The first is that the gift be given. The second is that I cooperate with that gift.

How can I cooperate with the gift of contemplation? In faithfulness, in freedom, and in simplicity.

#### FAITHFULNESS

Through his gift of contemplation, the Lord calls me to faithfulness to him. He calls me to fidelity, to devote a certain substantial amount of time every day just being with him, looking at him with love. And my fidelity to time-with-him is really fidelity to him, faithfulness in responding to his calling me by name. There is, certainly, more to contemplation than just putting in the time. Time is a necessary but insufficient condition of contemplation. I have to be there. That is not enough, but it is necessary.

Time is, in this world, a primary expression of commitment, of faithfulness, whether to a project, a cause, an apostolate, or a person. If I am committed to the Lord, I put in time for prayer, an hour a day, or at least a half hour.

But is it not sufficient to give, frequently or usually, a substantial period of time to contemplation? No. It is not enough. The Lord is not a timekeeper. It is not the time in itself that matters, but time as a measure of the quality of commitment, time as a measure of the quality of love. If I am committed in love to Jesus, then I spend time with him regularly, daily, and I let nothing interfere with that, I put nothing in his place or ahead of him in my heart.

Faithfulness, lived out, takes the form of putting in time.

#### FREEDOM

Contemplation calls for an undivided heart. It calls for the interior freedom that comes from putting the Lord first in my life. The Lord wants my whole heart, undivided. This does not mean that I should not love other people or that I should not be attached to my work, to my community, to my friends and my family. It means freedom not from all attach-

ments but from inordinate attachments, from the attachments that distract me from the Lord.

Distractions in contemplation are a clue to my inordinate attachments. If I have a real distraction (not a fly buzzing, or the coldness of my room), something or someone on my mind, that can be a clue. If I am trying to look at the Lord with love but find myself distracted instead by the thought of my friend whom I love, or someone who has hurt me, or the job I have to do, or the fact that I am not adequately appreciated, then I know I have a problem. The content of that distraction indicates an obstacle in my life, an obstacle to contemplative loving union with the Lord.

The Lord calls me to interior freedom. To love my friend not possessively but with an open hand, leaving the friend free from my manipulation and needs and self-gratification. To forgive whoever has hurt me and to be reconciled in my heart with that person. To trust in the Lord for the job I have to do, and to depend wholly on him for the results because, after all, it is his work. To renounce my excessive need for attention and appreciation and narcissistic feedback, and to walk in humility and in service of others. Anything less will block me in contemplation.

On the other hand, putting my inordinate attachments completely in the Lord's hands in my prayer, and then continuing to just look lovingly at the Lord will help me to grow in interior freedom. It will help to straighten out, to put in good order, what remains inordinate in my relationships with other persons, with my work, with myself.

Freedom, lived out, takes the form of an undivided heart.

#### SIMPLICITY

The Lord calls me to receive the Kingdom like a little child. The Kingdom is his heart, and he offers me his heart in my contemplative prayer. I want to receive it — not in a childish way but in a *childlike* way, simply. The appropriate behavior for an adult in an intimate love relationship is childlike behavior. Contemplation is the intimate expression

of an important love relationship in my life. I can and should act in a simple and childlike way.

Martha acted in a quite adult way with Jesus, with great responsibility, with competence, busy about many things, taking care of Jesus, doing a good job. Mary, childlike, sat at Jesus' feet and looked at him with love, simply; contemplation does that.

Simplicity, lived out, takes the form of quiet attentiveness.

#### PRAYER

Lord Jesus, increase in me your gift of contemplation. You have said, "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it will be opened to you." I am asking you for a new and great outpouring of the gift of contemplation. I seek you, your face, to be able to look at you with love. I am knocking, knowing that your opening the door further for me means giving me more fully the gift of intimate, loving contemplative union with you. Amen.

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#### THE KINGDOM HAS COME

Thy Kingdom *is* come, and thy Will *is* done on earth,  
as it is in heaven.

Even so, Come Lord Jesus! More and more set up thy Kingdom in the souls of the children of men;

That the holy Will of thy Father may be done in earth;

That mercy and Truth, righteousness and Peace  
may embrace and kiss each other.

So shall the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdoms  
of the Lord, and of his Christ;

Who is God over all, blessed for ever.

William Penn, 1695 (*Works*, vol. 3, p. 350)