

We have spoken often about how helpful it is for growth in knowledge and love of our Lord to meditate on His Passion. If you read the mystics of the Church, you will find that our Lord Himself commends this over and over again. The Gospels reflect this as well, especially the Gospel of John; probably at least 1/3 of John's Gospel, maybe even half, is on the Passion of our Lord. And of course the Church herself holds this up – through Lent, through the Triduum liturgies, through her devotions like the Stations, and indeed in every Mass that is offered. There are 2 choices. One is to just “yeah, yeah, yeah” it away, I have important things to do. Another is to say: our Lord *is* good, He *does* desire the ultimate good for me, and He does know better than me how to bring it about; so, let me try to do what He says to do. As is so often the case, it is a choice between pride and humility, love of God or love of self.

Now it will not be at all unusual for someone to be of good will – they want to do what our Lord says – but they don't really know how to go about it. It's just something that's not familiar. How do I go about this or even get started? The first thing we should say is that this does not require, by any means, something like an advanced degree in theology or some great in-depth study of Scripture. Consider this: if someone was telling you about the horrors of the Communist gulags or the Nazi concentration camps, you would be repulsed by it. You've never been to one, you certainly never experienced it, you don't have advanced studies in history or psychology or physiology or anything else, yet you would still be horrified by what happened. Why? How? Because you listen carefully and thoughtfully to what the person is saying, you become absorbed in it, and you picture it in your mind. Do the same for the Passion of our Lord. That's all that meditation means – put everything else out of your mind, “listen” (or read) attentively, be absorbed in it, think about it, and picture it in your mind.

That's a good and necessary starting point – what is meditation, what does it mean, what is that I am trying to do. It's not hard, you've done it plenty of times before with other things, now just do it with our Lord's Passion.

While that is a good and necessary starting point – what is “meditation” – it is also helpful to have some examples or other aids as well. Reading the Gospel accounts of our Lord's Passion is certainly one. But the goal is not to just read the Passion and get it done; the goal is to become absorbed in it, picture it in your mind, really ponder it over. You might read just a few verses and then stop on that if a thought strikes you and you follow that thought; that's good. You can always come back and read more later. The Stations of the Cross are another good source for pondering our Lord's Passion – here again, not to just zip through them but to really think about them; you might get no further than the first Station on a given day. That's great. Like the Stations, the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary can also be a source to help contemplate our Lord's Passion. Perhaps one of the most helpful things are some of the meditations of the saints and even more specifically, the writings of some of the mystics of the Church where our Lord Himself talks about His Passion. One of the best examples of this that I've seen is “The Way of Divine Love” based on the visions of Blessed Sr. Josefa Menendez. Unfortunately, it seems that this book is now out of print but you might still be able to find some copies online. St Bridget of Sweden would be another, but there are plenty more.

Let us now come back to the question of: what is meditation on our Lord's Passion, what is it like? Although perhaps rather pathetic examples, perhaps a few little illustrations can be given here.

Maybe we can start with the 3rd Station: Jesus falls for the first time. He is weak and tired. He has had no sleep and no food or drink since the night before. Most of all, He has been badly beaten and mercilessly scourged, a “crown” of very sharp thorns have been driven into His head, He's lost a lot of blood, He is weak and tired, and He falls under the heavy weight of the Cross. The Cross is still on His shoulders, His head is bowed, blood and sweat are dripping from His face. Then He raises His head, somewhat slowly, and looks up. What does He see with that Divine and infinite glance? He sees me, off in the distance, running away from Him, denying Him in His suffering. He bows His head again and says...*No*, this one is mine. I will pay the price for him and when He sees Me raised on this cross he will return Me and I will unite his little sacrifice with My sacrifice and in this way, take him home. And then with the unimaginable power of infinite love, He picks up His Cross once again and proceeds up the hill, determined to lay down His life so that I might live.

The first Station: Jesus is condemned to death. Under Roman law, Pilate is the one who has to pronounce sentence; our Lord's enemies, those who handed Him over, cannot. Pilate has real civil authority. He has a duty to the truth, to do what is right. And he knows that our Lord is guilty of nothing, he knows that Jesus has been handed over out of envy. Pilate knows what's right, he even seeks a way to release Him. But he is threatened. He is afraid of those demanding His death, He is afraid they will denounce him to Ceasar and that there will be consequences for him if he does not yield to their demands, so...he does. Out of interest for himself, Pilate turns away from what is right, from the truth, and commits the greatest injustice in human history. This is a hard one to look at. How often have I done the same? How often have I followed Pilate? How often have I put my own worldly good before the will of God, thus handing over our Lord to be crucified? Seeing Pilate, I see myself all too often. I am so deeply sorry Lord. Please have mercy. And then I see those who handed Him over – the Pharisees, the chief priest, the Sanhedrin – and how they manipulated Pilate to get what they want, to secure their own position. Have I not done the same in countless other ways, smaller ways perhaps, but the same sort of thing nonetheless. Like the tax collector who came to the Temple to pray, I am too ashamed to even look up. Our Lord looks at me as He did Peter after Peter's denials. The look penetrates to the depths of my soul. There is no denying it. It is said that Peter wept so much over his denial that the tears put furrows in his cheeks. It is a look that opens the wound – not to condemn but rather to heal, which magnifies the goodness of our Lord. I wound Him with my offense and in doing so wound myself and what is His only thought? To heal the wound that I caused. I deny Him and His only desire is to bestow His mercy, if only I will accept it.

“A sword will piece your heart as well.” These were the words to Mary of the old man, Simeon, when Joseph and Mary brought our Lord to the Temple after His birth. Mary is there. The pain in her heart is indescribable. She is my Mother and I know that my sins have caused her this pain. I am too ashamed, too deeply sorry, to even look at her, to beckon to my own Mother. It seems there is nowhere to turn, nothing I can do. But let us consider the order of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Stations. The 3rd Station: Jesus falls the first time; there is dire need. The 4th Station, Jesus meets His sorrowful Mother. The 5th Station, Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry His cross. What has happened here? There is dire need, Mary comes, help comes. Why did God arrange or permit Simon of Cyrene to help carry the Cross? Maybe there are a number of reasons but almost certainly one of them was to provide some very small modicum of relief for His Mother. Our devotion to our Holy Mother is well founded, it flows out of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, it is willed by our Lord. Dire need, the Mother comes, help comes. But our Lord gave His Mother to us now, as our Mother, which means this applies now to us as well. Even the worst of sons can call on their Mother with a sincere heart and she will hear them. Like her Divine Son, she has no interest in her own desires, her only desire is the desire of her Son, which is our salvation. Looking at this, how can I be anything but grateful for this unbelievable gift? It's too much, Lord, too much. Your love is beyond compare, it is beyond comprehension.

Father forgive them for they know what they do. Look at how badly, brutally, inhumanely our Lord has been treated. He is not even allowed to die in peace but is rather mocked and ridiculed while publicly strung up on the worst instrument of death the Romans had. This is not only a gross lack of charity but the ultimate injustice. And how does He respond? By seeking forgiveness for us. We are called to imitate Christ. Do I even come close to doing the same? Am I not easily outraged at even the smallest slight? I must again look at our Lord with great sorrow for having refused to follow Him, to be like Him, in so many ways, so many times. You are my Father, and I have refused to be like you countless times, Lord, especially in this way. Mother, I want to sit at table with you, the angels and saints, and your Divine Son. But how can it be? I do not fit in. Please Mother, obtain for me the mercy of your Son and the grace of real conversion. I am sick to death, I need the medicine you can obtain. She does come to my aid, I remember my own countless sins, countless injustices. If I remember them, I too will not condemn even an enemy – how can I when I myself have been so inimical so many times. Is there anyone whose sins are as bad as mine?

These are a few paltry examples of what is meant by “meditation” on our Lord's Passion. They may or may not be of any help. The point of these is just to illustrate what this mediation is like. Our Father's Kingdom waits on the other side of these. Go forward with all your strength. *God bless you, Fr Kuhn*