

CHAPTER 5

THE THREE ACTS WHICH REFER TO OURSELVES

- 150** The acts to be made next in mental prayer refer to ourselves.
The first is an act of humility,
The second is an act of remorse,
The third is an act of contrition.

#1 THE ACT OF HUMILITY

- 151** The act of humility is made
by acknowledging ourselves unworthy to appear before God
because we are nothing.

To maintain ourselves in this sentiment
we can make use of these words of Abraham in
Genesis, Ch. 18:

How shall I dare appear before my Lord,
since I am but dust and
ashes?

Gn 18,27; Cf. Jb 30,19; Ps 144,13

- 152** It is very appropriate for us to make this act at this point,
(for after offering God our homage)
by adoration and thanksgiving
for His goodness in allowing us
to come before Him;
and to speak to Him,
it is only right that we should look within ourselves
to consider
what a great honor is given us,
and how unworthy we are of this grace,
since we are nothing,
and hence much less than dust and ashes;
which are not only something which exists,
but are also useful in some manner,
whereas since we are nothing,
we are good for nothing;
and all that we can do of ourselves
is to offend God.

Gn 18,27

This is something which we should always have deeply impressed
in our mind in mental prayer,
(so as to keep ourselves in a sentiment of deep humility.)

153 This is how we may make this act of humility.

a. What am I, O my God?

I, who of myself, (possess)
only nothingness and sin;
that is all I can rightly claim as my own.

cf. Rm 7,14; Ga 6,3

If an ancient hermit said to himself.

What can you glory in,
since you are nothing but dust
and ashes?

Gn 18,27; Jb 30,19

what reason can I have to exalt myself,
convinced as I am that it would be paying me too much
honor to call me dust and ashes,

for dust and ashes
are the work of God;
and thus they do not belong to me
but rather they belong entirely to God who made
them.

Thus the only thing I can claim is nothingness;
that is all there is in me except for what God has
done,

and all that I rightly own is sin.

b. How then could I dare approach Thee and think
of Thee,

cf. Gn 18,27

if I thought only of what I am?

All I can do, O my God,
is to humble myself before Thee,

recalling to mind
what I am
and what Thou art.

c. And yet,

what a great honor Thou payest me
by keeping me in Thy presence
and doing me the favor
of conversing with me.

cf. 2 Co 6,16

Thou dost act thus so that,
since I am nothing of myself,
I may be wholly lost in Thee,
and that Thou mayest be totally in me.

d. Give me this grace, I beg of Thee, O my God,
since Thou wilt that I should be entirely Thine.

#2 ACT OF REMORSE

- 154** After this act of humility
it is appropriate to make an act of remorse,
which consists
in recognizing ourselves unworthy to appear before God
because we have so grievously offended Him;
for it is not sufficient for us to admit our nothingness,
and in consequence
to humble ourselves before God;
it is also very useful to feel ashamed in His presence
because of our sins,
and to make our own and to share the attitude and feelings
of the publican in the Gospel,
who, standing in a corner of the temple, said to God
and not daring even to lift his eyes to God
so great was the shame he felt.
My God, have mercy on me, a sinner! Lk 18,13
- 155** The act of remorse may be made as follows:
- a. I recognize, O my God,
how grievously I have offended Thee!
and my sins
are always vividly before my mind,
for it is against Thee that I have sinned,
and I have done so in Thy presence,
still more, I was conceived in sin, Ps 51,5-7
and this gives me continually
a reason to feel remorse.
- b. But this sentiment is powerfully increased in me
when I dare appear in Thy presence,
and take the liberty
of conversing with Thee in mental prayer.
Abraham, although a just man, did not dare to do this,
because he considered himself
nothing but dust
which people trample upon. Gn 18,27
How then shall I dare to presume this,
covered with sin as I am?
- c. Yet do Thou pardon me, O my God.
I come to Thee to avow my sins
and to manifest to Thee my injustice, Ps 32,5
because I know that
not only will this action

not incur Thine indignation
 but that it will rather
 draw down Thy mercy on me. cf. Ps 32,1-5
 This is why the remorse I feel
 over the great number of sins I have
 committed cf. Ps 51,19
 serves to increase my confidence;
 for the greater my remorse
 for having committed them.
 the more willing
 wilt Thou be to pardon them. cf. Ps 32,1-11; 51,10-14; 19

d. This is why I beg of Thee, O my God,
 to permit me to appear today in Thy presence
 as a sinner, full of remorse
 not in appearance only,
 but in truth. cf. Lk 18,9-14

#3 ACT OF CONTRITION

156 After this act of remorse,
 it is important to make an act of contrition,
 by asking God to pardon all our sins,
 and by taking a firm resolution not to commit them again,
 for this act is able to obtain for us the remission of all our
 sins,
 as David says in Psalm 31:
 I said, I confess my sinfulness to God,
 and at the same time Thou didst take away, O my God
 the guilt of my sin. Ps 32,5

157 This act made from the depth of our heart
 and with a sincere resolve to give up our sins,
 will cause God to forget them; cf. Is 43,25;
Ps 85,3; 78,3
 they will even be hidden from Him,
 as David again says in the same Psalm,
 they will not be imputed
 to the one who committed them, Ps 32,1-2
 during the whole time he makes mental prayer.

158 This is why,
 when making this act,
 we should especially strive to ask God for true contrition,
 and then have full confidence
 that God will not despise the prayer

of a contrite and humble heart,
as David says in Psalm 50.

Ps 51,19

159 This is how we may make such an act of contrition:

a. How sorry I am, O my God,
for having so grievously offended Thee.

My sins are before me always,
and I cannot think of them
without fainting away,
to speak like the Royal Prophet,
when I reflect on the great number of sins
I have committed against Thee.

Ps 51,5

Ps 38,5

Reprove me not, O God,
as David again says,
in Thine anger,
and do not chastise me
in Thine indignation.

Ps 6,2;38,2

b. I know that I deserve nothing but Thy wrath;
but have compassion on me
because I am so weak, even weakness itself,
cast Thine eyes upon me,
and draw my soul from sin,
since no one but Thee can do this.

Ps 69,17

cf. Ps 6,2-6

c. I offer Thee the sorrow of my heart,
and its groanings,
because my sins are so great
both in number and in grievousness,
that, as David says,
they rise over my head
and crush me down like a very heavy
burden.

Ps 6,7

Ps 38,5

d. How miserable I am, O my God,
seeing myself in this state!
I am afflicted and humbled beyond belief,
seeing myself overwhelmed by so many sins;
and the groanings of my heart are great,
and are not hidden from Thee.

Ps 38,10

Pardon me, then, for all my sins,
so that I may appear before Thee
in a state
and in an attitude which Thou wilt find

Ps 51

agreeable.

cf. Lk 18,9-14

e. I am ready, O my God,
to accept all the sufferings it will please Thee to make
me endure
to satisfy for my sins.

Do not abandon me, then, I beg of Thee,
and depart not from me.

Ps 38,22

Turn away Thine eyes only from my sins,
and give me the grace to be purified of them
all. For this purpose, create in me a pure
heart,
(and renew within me Thy Holy Spirit.

Ps 51,1-2

f. I hope for this grace from Thee, O my God,
because Thou wilt not despise
the prayer of those who humble themselves,
since this prayer is most agreeable to
Thee.

Ps 51,19

**(This act of contrition is largely made up of extracts
from the seven penitential psalms.)**

160 After having made an act of contrition,
if it has been done with a sincere heart,
deeply penetrated with horror for sin,
we may feel confident
that God will no longer consider our transgressions.
Thus we will be able to appear in His presence
as freed from our sins,
or at least as covered
by the veil of His divine mercy
and of His good will towards us.

cf. Ps 85,3;78,38