



7. March 2026

LENTEN SPIRITUAL RETREAT

Day 18: “The Transformation of the Heart” (Part I)

As I mentioned at the end of the last meditation, I would like to include in our Lenten itinerary a short series on the transformation of the heart. On the one hand, it is a theme that appears again and again in the biblical texts of Lent, which describe how the human heart turns away from God and clearly point out the abysses that exist within it. On the other hand, it is also fitting to delve more deeply into this theme in light of the wars taking place in the world and which, unfortunately, are once again affecting the people of the Middle East. The war that has just broken out has a very significant impact on Israel, the land where Jesus accomplished the work of Redemption.

In the context of our “Lenten retreat,” I do not consider it my task to explain in detail the political, social, and religious background of the conflict between Israel and Iran. Rather, I am moved by the question of what we, as disciples of the Lord, can do to contribute to the true peace that comes from God.

Without overlooking the many problems that can lead to war, we must be clear that all discord on Earth has a common starting point: it arises because many people do not obey God’s commandments, do not believe in His Son as their Savior, and do not live according to His teachings.

God did not create human beings to wage war and quarrel with others, but to live in peace with themselves and with others in a communion of love. That would be the Kingdom of God on Earth! As disciples of our Lord, we have the urgent task of working to expand the Kingdom of God on Earth, just as we pray in the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy Kingdom come.”

What can we, the faithful, do about this?

1. Authentically proclaim the Gospel, because there will be no true peace in the world until people convert to God.
2. Implore God with great faith for true peace.
3. Deepen our own conversion—the conversion of our hearts.

This last point will be our theme for the next few days. To develop it, I will draw in part on meditations I have published previously.

“What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man.” (Mk 7:20-23)

For any spiritual advancement, it will be indispensable to interiorise this Gospel passage. No matter how many practices and sacrifices we impose on ourselves, no matter how many rules we follow, no matter how many important apostolic works we carry out, if we do not work on our hearts, it will be difficult for the love of God to grow in us. Here the well-known words of St. Paul can very well be applied: If we did not have love, everything would be like sounding brass (cf. 1 Cor 13:1). Indeed, the purification of our heart means to grow in love.

The interiorisation of this text consists, first of all, in becoming aware that in our heart there really dwells that evil of which the Lord speaks here. This awareness should make us vigilant and free us from all illusions about ourselves. At first, it may hurt us to discover all this within ourselves. However, if the Lord makes us see it so clearly, it is because it is very important to Him that we are not blind and do not overlook our own abysses: *"Listen to me, all of you, and understand"*, says the Lord.

This healthy realism of recognising ourselves as persons inclined to evil, as Catholic doctrine teaches us (Catechism, n. 402-403), must not lead us to fatalism or resignation. On the contrary, it prevents us from falling into illusions about ourselves and from a kind of a "self-produced holiness".

Instead, true self-knowledge is a call to turn to the One who can give us a new heart (cf. Ezek 36:26). With His help, we can cooperate so that God's grace can make us into men modelled on His image.

Let us take the first of the evils that Jesus mentions in today's Gospel: evil thoughts. And to these we could also add the corresponding feelings.

How can we overcome evil thoughts?

In the first instance, it is necessary to identify the evil thoughts as such. For a person who follows the Lord, this should not be so difficult. Here too the Gospel is a strong light in which we can recognise what is going on inside us; so is the presence of the Holy

Spirit in us, who reminds us of the Words of the Lord (cf. Jn 14:26) and becomes our teacher in the process of the purification of the heart.

However, already in the first stage a big obstacle can arise, which does not allow us to really embark on this path. It is pride, which does not want to admit that we have bad thoughts and can even justify them. Especially from a spiritual point of view, this becomes a serious problem, which gradually blinds the person. Pride stands at the entrance of the heart like an inflexible guard, which does not even allow self-knowledge.

For today let us keep the following: An essential first step in obtaining a pure heart is to be willing to perceive without fear or repression our own shadow; that is, to recognise and admit the evil that comes from within. We must always keep in mind that this happens in the presence of a loving Father, who wants to lead us out of darkness and into His light (cf. 1 Pet 2:9).

Tomorrow we will return to this theme...

Meditation on the reading of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/2019/03/23/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/2021/03/06/>