



4 July 2026
GREAT DECEPTIONS
“Self-Deception (I)”

As I have done in recent years, I will occasionally use the daily meditations to explore important topics for our spiritual journey. In this case, we will begin a series on the topic of self-deception, though I will expand on it later, since we are currently facing so many deceptions in the world—and, unfortunately, also within the Church—that we cannot ignore them.

To address the topic of self-deception, I will draw on some passages written by Father Paulus Sladek, OSA. After true knowledge of God, self-knowledge is an indispensable pillar on the path of following Christ. Father Sladek’s texts highlight important aspects that can help us personally and help others who are living in self-deception or are blinded by it, at least in part. In any case, we must be clear that this is no easy task, as many obstacles seek to prevent us from awakening from self-deception.

Let us, then, listen to some excerpts from Fr. Sladek:

“The widespread blindness of man regarding his own heart—which the Lord already criticized in the Pharisees—has its roots in the ‘self-deception’ in which so many live. Self-deception necessarily stems from the inclination toward evil that we possess because of original sin. The tendency toward self-deception is the most dangerous phenomenon resulting from the weakening of the intellect and will. It is unfortunate that theology has not specifically mentioned self-deception as a consequence of original sin until now, even though the account of the first fall in Sacred Scripture clearly points this out (cf. Gen 3). The words with which Jesus prepares his disciples for martyrdom show us the alarming degree of self-deception that can be reached, into which even religious fervor can seep: ‘The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.’ (Jn 16:2)

Sin and self-deception are necessarily linked. Viewed from a psychological perspective, sin constitutes man’s autonomous attempt to attain happiness, perfection, and freedom—and thereby the love and power his heart yearns for (a desire instilled in him by God)—relying solely on his own strength. Self-deception, on the other hand, is the attempt to create a conscience free from guilt and sin, making oneself equal to God. Through self-deception, man sets aside the guilt and sins he actually bears. In other words, he lies to himself.”

As Fr. Sladek rightly points out, it often happens that, due to the human longing for a world of harmony and peace, a person attempts to create it on his own. In this sense,

there is also a tendency to fall into ideological or religious movements that promise to fulfill this longing easily. However, the abysses of the human heart remain and must first be overcome. How do we face them? Do we realistically acknowledge them, set out on the path of conversion, and allow God's grace to redeem us from all our wickedness?

This would entail a long journey of sanctification. But one can also take the wrong path and fall into self-deception.

Fr. Sladek continues:

“Through self-deception, a person abuses their ability to forget irrelevant things, pushing them out of their consciousness. Human beings tend to ‘repress’ what is unpleasant. Now, nothing is more unpleasant to a person’s pride and self-esteem than their own guilt. Therefore, the greater a person’s pride and self-esteem, the more they will strive to create a clear conscience for themselves, even if not consciously. In this way, they build a false conviction of their own goodness and self-esteem based on unrealistic values.”

We see that this is a dangerous tendency that can also generate a kind of “artificial identity” in religious people. Such people rarely arrive at a realistic understanding of themselves; they are extremely sensitive and always feel the need to justify themselves. It is possible that a false image of God also comes into play here—as if He could withdraw His love from us when our mistakes and sins come to light.

Let us listen once more to Fr. Sladek on what can happen then:

“Since we like to see ourselves as good and blameless, we unconsciously influence our thoughts so that we no longer see ourselves as we really are, but as we would like to be. The greatest danger of this behavior is that the intention and practice of self-deception are hidden from a person’s conscious mind and displaced into the unconscious. Thus, the person does not realize that they do not know the truth about the state of their heart—and in no way wants to know it.”

Fr. Sladek’s words make it clear that we are facing a danger of which we must become aware. We should not be afraid of God when we perceive dark shadows within ourselves, nor should we ignore or repress them in order to project a “perfect image” to ourselves and others. In the first case, we develop a relationship with God that lacks realism and freedom by forgetting that He is our loving Father. In the second case, we create an unrealistic image of ourselves, which ultimately leads to blindness of the heart.

We will return to this topic tomorrow.