

Meditations

FOCOLARE CLASSICS SERIES

Meditations

Chiara Lubich

NCP
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Enkindling the Spirit of Unity

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Preface

Chiara Lubich's *Meditations* are fast becoming considered by many people to be spiritual classics.

Yet when they first come to Chiara Lubich's *Meditations*, many readers find themselves with a mixture of feelings. They are intrigued, delighted, and occasionally baffled. A strange quality of darkness and light characterizes the writings. In a sense they dazzle us.

The reason is not that the *Meditations* are complicated. In fact, they are extremely simple, and the ideas they contain are beautifully and lucidly expressed. But at times their depth of meaning, so different from the normal way we reason about things, makes them seem strange, almost from another world. And in a way they are. They express, very clearly, something of heaven's viewpoint. And the human way of seeing things and the heavenly rarely coincide.

Perhaps it is useful, therefore, to suggest how to read these writings. Certainly, they need to be looked at with care, but it is also helpful to understand that the thoughts they express

can make the heart leap for joy and the spirit sigh with relief at finding words that give life, yet sometimes leave the mind puzzled. But not for long. The ideas, if profound, are simple; all that is needed is to practice as much as has been understood, and sooner or later the depths of meaning start to become clear.

The most common experience when reading these *Meditations* is that they open up a dialogue with the Eternal, and the reader finds that a new logic, the heavenly way of reasoning, begins to filter into the soul. We feel that we become better, and we discover a yearning, almost a homesickness, for heaven. And that turns us to face our everyday life, with its everyday struggles and all our everyday neighbors, with renewed resolution. We wish to care for others in the most realistic and down-to-earth way possible.

Indeed, we feel enabled to take part in fulfilling the driving theme in the *Meditations*, the prayer with which Jesus summed up his lifework, uttered to his Father the night before he died: "That they may all be one" (John 17:21) In short, these *Meditations* lead us on an adventure into God.

Note on Translations

This book is the latest in a series of translations of the original Italian *Meditazioni* (Citta' Nuova Editrice Rome, Italy, 1959) by Chiara Lubich. In 1974 New City Press published its first English version as *The Christian Eye*. In 1986 NCP issued *Meditations*, translated by William Neu. In 1997 a new, revised translation by Julian Stead, OSB and Jerry Hearne was published as *Christian Living Today*.

This 2024 edition, *Meditations*, follows the order of the original *Meditazioni*, with most passages taken from the 2007 English-language collection of Chiara Lubich's principal texts, *Essential Writings*, translated by Thomas Masters and Callan Slipper. Many of these meditations were originally composed as sections of Lubich's yet-to-be-published *Paradise '49*, also translated by Masters and Slipper. Where possible, that newest, most up-to-date version has been used.

Heaven and Earth Will Pass Away

And I realize more and more that “heaven and earth will pass away” (Mt 24:35; Mk 13:31), but God’s plan for us does not pass.

The only thing that *fully* satisfies us is to see that we are at every moment where God, *from all eternity*, meant us to be.

The Attraction of Modern Times

This is the great attraction
of modern times:
to penetrate to the highest contemplation
while mingling with everyone,
one person alongside others.

I would say even more:
to lose oneself in the crowd
in order to fill it with the divine,
like a piece of bread
dipped in wine.

I would say even more:
made sharers in God's plans for humanity,
to embroider patterns of light on the crowd,
and at the same time to share with our neighbor
shame, hunger, troubles, brief joys.

Because the attraction
of our times, as of all times,
is the highest conceivable expression.
of the human and the divine,
Jesus and Mary:
the Word of God, a carpenter's son;
the Seat of Wisdom, a mother at home.

The Cross

“Let them take up their cross . . .” (see Mt 16:24).

So strange and unique are these words. Like all the words said by Jesus, they have something in them of a light that this world does not know. They are so bright that the dull eyes of human beings, including those of apathetic Christians, are dazzled and therefore made blind.

There is nothing, perhaps, more puzzling, more difficult to grasp than the cross; it does not penetrate the head and the heart of human beings. It does not penetrate because it is not understood, because often we have become Christians only in name, merely baptized, maybe practicing, yet immensely far from being what Jesus would like us to be.

We hear about the cross during Lent, we kiss it on Good Friday and sometimes hang it up in our rooms. It is the sign that seals some of our actions. Yet it is not understood.

And perhaps the whole mistake lies here: in the world, *love* is not understood.

Love is the finest of words, but it is also the most deformed and debased. It is the essence of

God, the life of the children of God, the breath of the Christian, yet it has become the heritage, the monopoly of the world. It is on the lips of those who have no right to use it.

Certainly, in the world, not all love is like this. There still exist, for instance, the feelings of mothers which, because they are mingled with suffering, make love noble. There is fraternal love, marital love, filial love, which are good and wholesome. They are traces although perhaps unconscious, of the Love of the Father, Creator of all things.

But what is not understood is love par excellence: which is to understand that God who made us, came on earth as one human being among others, lived with us, and allowed himself to be nailed to a cross: to save us.

It is too high, too beautiful, too divine, too little human, too bloodstained, painful, intense to be understood.

Perhaps maternal love can give us an inkling of it. For the love of a mother is not only hugs and kisses; it is above all sacrifice.

Thus it is with Jesus: love impelled him to the cross, considered foolishness by many.

But only this foolishness has saved humanity and has formed the saints.

Saints, in fact, are people who are able to understand the cross. They are men and women who, following Jesus, the God-who-is-human have taken up their daily cross as the most precious thing on earth. At times they have brandished it like a weapon, as soldiers of God. They have loved it all their lives, and they have known and experienced that the cross is *the key*, the only key to a treasure, *the* treasure. The cross gradually opens souls to union with God. Then, through human beings, God once more reappears on the scene of this earth. He repeats—although in a way that is infinitely lesser, yet *similar*—the actions that he himself once performed when, as one human being among others, he blessed those who cursed him, forgave those who insulted him, saved, healed, preached the words of heaven, fed the hungry, founded a new society based on the law of love, and revealed the power of the One who sent him.

In short, the cross is the necessary instrument by which the divine penetrates the human, and a human being participates more fully in the life of God, and is raised up from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of heaven.

But we must “take up our cross. . . ,” wake up in the morning expecting it, and knowing

that only by means of it can we receive those gifts which the world does not know: that peace, that joy, that knowledge of the things of heaven, unknown to most.

The cross. It is such a common thing. It is so faithful that it never misses its appointment every day. To take up this cross is all we need to make us saints.

The cross, the badge of the Christian, is unwanted by the world because it believes that by fleeing it, suffering can be escaped. The world does not know that the cross opens wide the soul of the person who has understood it to the kingdom of Light and of Love: that Love which the world seeks so much, but does not have.

Our Mother Is So Beautiful

So beautiful is our Mother in her continuous recollection as shown us by the Gospel: “Conservabat omnia verba haec conferens in corde suo” [She treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart] (Lk 2:19). That full silence has a fascination for the soul who loves.

How can it be possible for me to live Mary in her mystical silence when my vocation is to speak in order to evangelize, always out and about, in every kind of place, rich and poor, from cellars to Parliament, from the street to communities of friars and of nuns?

Our Mother spoke too. *She said Jesus. She gave Jesus.* Never has anyone in the world been a greater apostle. Never has anyone had such words as she, who gave and spoke the *Word*.

Our Mother is truly and deservedly called the Queen of the Apostles.

And she kept silent. She kept silent because the two could not speak at once.

Always the word must rest against a silence,
like a painting against a background.

She kept silent because she was a creature.
Because nothingness does not speak. But upon
that nothingness Jesus spoke and said: himself.

God, Creator and All, spoke upon the
nothingness of the creature. How then to live
Mary, how to give my life like the fragrance of
her fascination?

By silencing the creature in me, and upon
this silence letting the Spirit of the Lord speak.

In this way I live Mary and I live Jesus. I
live Jesus upon Mary. I live Jesus by living Mary.

Enlarge Our Heart

We need to enlarge our heart to the measure of the *Heart of Jesus*. What a job! Yet here is the only and necessary thing to do. When this is done, all is done. It means loving everyone we meet as God loves them. And since we live in time, we must love our neighbors one by one, without holding in our heart any left-over affection for the brother or sister met a moment before.

After all! it is the same Jesus we love in everyone! If anything left over remains, it means that the preceding brother or sister was loved for our sake or for theirs . . . not for Jesus. And here is the problem.

Our most important task is to maintain the chastity of God, that to say: maintain love in our hearts as purely and solely Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in the Trinity is the Relationship of the Two, hence their Love and Purification . . . He is the fire that burns, purifying.

Hence, to be pure we need not deprive our heart and repress the love in it. We need to enlarge our heart to the measure of the Heart

of Jesus and love everyone. And as one Sacred Host, from among the millions of hosts on the earth, is enough to nourish us with God, so one brother or sister, the one that God's will puts next to us, is enough to give us communion with humanity, which is the mystical Jesus.

And to have communion with our brother or sister is the second commandment, the one that comes immediately after the love of God, and is the expression of it.



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