

## *Two Standards* *A Prayerful Meditation*



by Fr. Mark Link, SJ

### *Preparation for Meditation*

**W**e begin our meditation by placing ourselves in God's presence. One of the many ways to do this is to close our eyes, relax our body, and monitor our breathing.

As we focus on our breathing, we recall that breath points to God's presence within us. The Book of Genesis says, "The Lord God formed a man, and he breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and the man began to live." Genesis 2:7

Breathing also points to the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. Jesus said to his disciples, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." Then he breathed on them, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." John 20:21-22 We conclude our "act of presence" by praying:

*"Lord, you are closer to me than my own breath. May each breath I take deepen my awareness of your presence within me, especially as I begin my meditation."*

### *Grace We Desire*

Next we ask for the grace we desire. In the meditation of the Two Standards, it is for a deeper understanding of the diametrically opposed approaches used by Satan and Jesus to gain entry into the human heart. Satan's strategy is one of attachment to material things; Jesus' approach is one of detachment from them. Finally, we set the stage for our meditation.

### *Setting the Stage and Mood*

In the 1990s Queen Elizabeth II visited the United States. For the visit, she brought 4,000 pounds of luggage. She also brought along her own hairdresser, two valets, and several other attendants.

She was met at the airport by a number of TV crews and then escorted by motorcade to the finest suite in the finest hotel.

The Queen's arrival in the United States stands in stark contrast to the arrival of Jesus, the King of Kings, on planet Earth. It took place at night in an obscure animal shelter, with only a handful of smelly shepherds to greet him.

The contrast between the arrival of the King of Kings on earth and the Queen of England in the United States, leads us to the

first consideration of our meditation: Why would the King of Kings choose to enter our world as he did?

### *Two Strategies*

The meditation on the Two Standards sets before us the contrasting strategies Satan and Jesus use to gain entry into the human heart.

Satan's strategy is one of subtle seduction. He leads us slowly and gently from the "path of light" to the "path of darkness." For example, he lures us subtly from a "noble striving for security for our family" to an almost "addictive striving for wealth and material possessions." Recall the man in Luke 12 who builds bigger barns to house his material possessions.

Satan lures us so subtly that we don't realize what is happening to us, until we wake up one day, shocked at how far we have drifted from our noble starting point.

Not only that, Satan uses our success to create in us a gradual attraction to worldly recognition and honors.

His strategy then is to lead us, subtly, from the "path of light" (grateful recognition of God's gifts to us) to the "path of darkness" (an attitude of arrogant superiority over everyone else). Recall Jesus' harsh rebuke of people who are "sure of their own goodness and despise everyone else." Luke 18:9

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis says of this arrogant pride, "It leads to every other vice. A person with such a pride cannot know God."

After reading this passage, Charles Colson, one of President Nixon's top aides convicted in the Watergate scandal, said, "Suddenly, I felt naked and unclean. Lewis was describing me." Colson adds: "That passage, in particular, seems to sum up what had happened to all of us at the White House: Pride ruled. It's a spiritual cancer that eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense."

Colson's words lead us to the second consideration for serious meditation: How might the strategy of Satan be at work in my own life?

### *Strategy of Jesus*

The strategy of Jesus is diametrically opposed to the strategy of Satan. Instead of leading us to attachments to worldly possessions, pleasures, and honors, Jesus seeks to liberate us from these attachments.

Moreover, he seeks to liberate us from them to the point that—with the help of God's grace—we are ready to choose or accept suffering and humiliations, rather than comfort and honor, providing they lead us closer to God and to greater service to God's Kingdom.

Correspondent Terry Anderson of the Associated Press was kidnapped by Shiite Muslim extremists in 1985. He spent the next seven years in windowless cells, often in chains. He nearly despaired in December 1987, banging his head against a wall until it bled. Later he said, "I think we come closest to God at our lowest moments. It is easiest to hear God when you are stripped of pride and arrogance; when you have nothing to rely on except God. It's pretty painful to get to that point, but when you do, God is there."

That brings us to the third consideration in our meditation on the Two Standards. How willing am I to choose or accept poverty over wealth, honor over humiliation, or sickness over health—if by doing so, they lead me closer to God and of greater service to God's Kingdom?

### *Image of Jesus*

A fitting conclusion to our meditation on the Two Standards is this poetic example of Jesus and his strategy. The example is inspired by Roland's Sill's poem "Opportunity" and it reads:

*In a dream I beheld a cloud of dust on a plain  
And in the cloud of dust a mighty battle raged.  
Brave soldiers shouted, as swords clashed and broke  
The King's banner fluttered to the ground.  
Fear gripped the King's men all around.*

*A king's soldier thought,  
"If only I had the sword of the King's Son,  
rather than this broken thing."  
With that he threw aside the sword and  
fled the cloud of dust.*

*The King's Son, wounded and weaponless,  
saw the broken sword and snatched it up.  
With a mighty cry heard in heaven he  
sallied forth into the fray  
and turned the tide of battle that dark and  
wintry day. ■*



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Fr. Link is the author of *Challenge: a Daily Meditation Program Based on the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. It's filled with meditations similar to these. If you'd like to receive a complimentary copy (while supplies last) please contact Eileen Meehan at 800-922-5327 or [Eileen@jesuits-chi.org](mailto:Eileen@jesuits-chi.org).