



Tau Maria Franciscan Formation Meditations
The Evening Sermon on St. Francis— Preached at Paris,
October 4. 1255 By St. Bonaventure

M Meditation – Franciscan Minority

Learn from me, that is, be meek and humble after my example. A person is meek by loving his brothers, humble by loving lowliness or “minority.” To be meek is to be a brother to everybody; to be humble is to be less than everybody. Therefore, to be meek and humble of heart is to be a true lesser brother. St. Francis can say to us: “Learn from me to be meek and humble, that is, to be lesser Brothers.” Although it is not for everyone to take the habit and profess the *Rule* of the Lesser Brothers, it is necessary for everyone who wants to be saved to be a lesser brother in the sense of being meek and humble. As the Lord himself teaches: *Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

As the easier of the two, he mentions meekness first. While it is no effort for a soul that is well-disposed, it is nevertheless both necessary and profitable to the spiritual life: to the pursuit of truth for beginners, in the practice of virtue for the advanced, to make right judgments by those in authority, and to attain eternal life by those tending toward it. Meekness, in fact, pertains to every form and state of life.

First, then, meekness is necessary to the pursuit of truth both in those learning and those who teach. Those learning have to be meek in order to grasp the truth, as Sirach says: *Be meek to hear the word, that you may understand.* As an image is reflected only in peaceful waters, so the word of doctrine is received only by meek minds. Also those who teach have to be meek because, “anger hinders the mind from perceiving the truth.” As the *Gloss* on Matthew 5:4 explains: “He is meek whom neither anger nor spitefulness, harshness, nor bitterness disturbs.” Saint Paul writes to Timothy: *The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness.* How much more gently ought he to listen to those who are seeking the truth.

Second, meekness is necessary for the inward and outward practice of virtue so that one may remain serene in conscience and be well pleasing in the judgment and minds of one’s neighbors. Sirach urges us to acquire interior meekness: *My son, keep your soul in meekness and give it honor according to its desert.* To keep one’s soul in meekness and give it honor according to its desert is to let it not be troubled except on account of sin. He exhorts us to outward meekness with the words: *My son, perform your tasks in meekness, then you will be loved by those whom God accepts.* Everybody loves a meek man because he epitomizes natural human goodness and is naturally blessed with a fondness for company.

Third, meekness is necessary to make right judgments, for without it others are not corrected, but destroyed. Saint Paul asks the Corinthians: *What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?* That is to say: I will come with both, because there can be no truly equitable judgment if meekness is not coupled with the rod and *visa versa*. Without the rod, meekness is a defect in a prelate, as it was with Eli. Zephaniah tells us: *Seek the Lord all you meek of the earth, you that have wrought his judgment.* Likewise, the rod without meekness destroys, it brings no correction. The Psalmist says: *For mildness is come upon us and we shall be corrected.* A good prelate does not rage against a subject as if he were an enemy, but corrects him as a friend and companion. As Sirach advises: *Do not be like a lion in your home, terrifying the members of your household, and oppressing those under you.*



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Finally, meekness is necessary to attain eternal life. The Gospel tells us: *Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth*, and the Psalm says: *the meek shall possess the land and shall delight in abundance of peace*. Because they lived on this earth in goodness and peace even when unjustly oppressed by harsh people, by God’s just judgments the *meek shall inherit the land*, not this earthly land, but the *land of the living*, and the harsh will be rejected. The land of the living will be assigned and awarded them in future judgment, just as the kingdom of heaven will be awarded to the poor who, having set their hearts on heavenly treasures, willingly give up earthly possessions. We read in Isaiah: *With righteousness he shall judge the poor*, which means God will grant them the kingdom of heaven; the text continues: *and decide with equity for the meek of the earth*, which is to say, he will give them the land of the living.

We ought to learn meekness, which is utterly necessary, from Saint Francis. He cherished an extraordinary meekness not only toward other people, but also toward dumb animals. He called all animals by the name “brother” and we read in the accounts of his life that even wild animals came running to him as their friend and companion. And so what is said of Moses in the Book of Numbers, may well be sung in praise of him: *The man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth*. Like another Moses, Saint Francis can say: *Learn from me for I am meek of heart*.

He can say to us: *Learn from me for I am humble of heart*. Learn, that is, to have true, not counterfeit, humility as hypocrites cunningly humble themselves. Of these Sirach says: *There is one who humbles himself wickedly and inwardly he is full of deceit*, and Saint Paul writes to the Colossians: *Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking this stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind*. He is not encouraging us to that sort of humility, but to humility of heart on which Saint Bernard writes: “The truly humble man wants to be considered despicable rather than to be proclaimed a humble man.”

Saint Francis possessed this humility supremely. He loved and sought it, from the origin of his religious life until his death. For this he left the world, ordered that he be dragged naked through a city, ministered to lepers, told his own sins while preaching and even commanded others to pour scorn on him. We ought to learn this virtue especially from him.