

Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on me
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me
Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.

Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me: there is a striking progression in these four requests that in some way reminds us of the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises. If the Spirit melts me in the conversion of the first week, then I pass from the rigid and brittle state of my sinfulness to a new softness and pliability which allows my shape to be molded as the Spirit wants. Once molded – that is the work of the second week marked by discernment – my newly molded self needs to be confirmed in its new shape. The grace of the third week is this confirmation in imitation of Christ totally committed to his mission all the way to its painful end. This remolded and confirmed self needs to be transformed by the gift of the Spirit which the risen Christ offers us in increasing measure in his resurrection (4th week) and his Pentecost. Once melted, molded, confirmed, and filled with the Spirit, I become an apt instrument for achieving God's purposes. In the spirit of the Take and Receive, I ask the Lord to use me as He wills.

Melt me: there is a lot of rigidity, stubbornness, inflexibility in each one of us. So often do we want the way we currently are to be cast in iron and inalterable. We might keep beating our heads against the wall in grief from some addiction, for example, but in our sinful pattern we prefer to stay in our rut, in our pain, than to find genuine relief, which involves a change of heart and of behaviour. In the final analysis resistance to God, failure to be pliable in God's hands, is our main sin. All the other sins cluster around it.

We ask God to melt our resistance, indeed to melt us. Not to melt us into a puddle, in which we cease to be ourselves, losing our consistency, but to melt us enough that we can bend, that we can be shaped in whatever way God wants to shape us, re-forming the partitions within ourselves and with others that we have built as barriers. In this process we become our genuine selves.

When we ask to be melted, we are asking God to give us a humble and broken heart, which is a heart that is pliable and available for what God has in mind for us. Rather than locked in a narrow self-satisfaction, we become aware of our sin, and in our moment of repentance we become open to God's grace which will change us in unexpected ways.

An extreme image of melting comes out of psalm 22:14, applied to Jesus as he made himself vulnerable to the melting process that affects each of us: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me."

For us this melting process is also seen as a purification. We are akin to metal which is refined by fire, leaving behind impurities and scum that can be easily scooped out, for example in Ez 22: 17-22 "Then the word of the Lord came to me: 'Son of man, the people of Israel have become dross to me; all of them are the copper, tin, iron and lead left inside a furnace. They are but the dross of silver.' Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'Because you have all become dross, I will gather you into Jerusalem. As silver, copper, iron, lead and tin are

gathered into a furnace to be melted with a fiery blast, so will I gather you in my anger and my wrath and put you inside the city and melt you. I will gather you and I will blow on you with my fiery wrath, and you will be melted inside her. As silver is melted in a furnace, so you will be melted inside her, and you will know that I the Lord have poured out my wrath on you.'”

Old Testament texts like this one often reflect a more primitive view of God as an all-powerful tribal leader full of wrath and revenge. Later texts lead us to understand that underneath what is described as God’s wrath there is an immense love. What fuels what is described as God’s anger is God’s love. When one truly loves, rejection is felt even more intensely and gives rise to greater sorrow and anger, but that love is not thereby extinguished. God’s wrath does not seek to punish us in a cold, calculating, and vengeful way, but to push us to realize how much God cares for us and for our welfare, and to turn to God to receive healing and transformation.

Mold me: Once through the grace of conversion I have become pliable in the hands of God, I seek God’s direction, His plan for me. How does God through the call of the eternal King want to mold me? The answer to that question emerges in my prayer as my own life with its many events and challenges and desires comes into contact with Jesus’ earthly life as presented in the Gospel. What facets of his personality, his life, his ministry, his interaction with others emerge as attractive to me? How am I inspired to follow him? The process of answering these questions is under the guidance of the Spirit, and, as I carry it out, little by little by my choices big and small I become the person God wants me to be, I am molded into the image of Jesus.

While everything God does is done by all three persons, it is very appropriate to highlight the role of the Spirit in this molding. That role is very clear in the process by which, faced with numerous desires, I am moved to choose the right path for my life or the right way of following that path. This choosing is not without my own collaboration. The Spirit guides me in my discernment, a discernment sometimes laborious, sometimes without intervention on my part. And the end result is that the Spirit has molded me as God wants.

But the choices (elections) I have made in the second week need to be confirmed. They are not to be ephemeral choices made today and forgotten tomorrow but are to be continued throughout my life. The third week presents to me Jesus as an example of that. His commitment to His Father’s will is absolute. I am to imitate him, through his grace, to carry the cross of my own commitment no matter where it leads me.

Fill me: once the mold is set the way God wants it and firmed up as I contemplate his passion and death, he fills the mold with his love. Here the Spirit, present throughout the Exercises, plays a key role. The key text is from Romans 5:5: “The love of God is poured into our hearts by the spirit that is given to us.” We could be filled with our own image of ourselves, our own self-love, and in the end this would be futile. But by this infilling that love of self is replaced by the gift of the Spirit, which offers us a power beyond measure, a power that works through patience and long suffering but which in the end is the only power that achieves anything worthwhile.

We see this power at work especially in the fourth week dedicated to the resurrection and its aftermath. During his post-resurrection time on earth Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon his disciples, dispels their fear and readies them for the time where they start their mission to preach the Good News and build a new community, but without his visible presence. Pentecost fills them with the Spirit, and we see the results of this in Acts.

Use me: The final prayer of the Spiritual Exercises is the Contemplation for Obtaining Love. It recapitulates the four weeks that the retreatant has completed, and invites him or her to renew a commitment already made, but with greater depth and greater breadth, becoming an instrument in the hands of God fully pliable to His will and direction. This comes to a focus in the Take and Receive prayer, in which I offer all I am and have to him for the service he wants of me.