

Call of Christ the King

In the Book of the Exercises: [91-100]

Usual Preparation Prayer.

First Prelude: The composition of Place: This is a mental representation of the place. Here it will be to see in imagination the synagogues, villages, and towns where Christ our Lord preached.

Second Prelude: The Petition I will ask for the grace I desire. Here it will be to ask of our Lord the grace not to be deaf to His call, but prompt and diligent to accomplish His most holy will. – “Knowing that His holy will is our sanctification in this life, we look to the example of Jesus Christ, to become prompt and diligent to do God’s will, to bring out in reality the work of changing my life and ordering myself in my acts and operations.”¹

“The contemplation on the Kingdom of Christ has been accurately called the heart of Ignatian spirituality,” says Servant of God Fr. John Hardon. “It epitomizes two ideals: . . . The first is a willingness to go beyond mediocrity in the service of Christ, the Son of God; the second a projection of personal love into the world outside, so that other souls may also ‘yield a higher than ordinary service to Christ their King.’”²

Ignatius breaks this meditation into two parts, the first which is easier to visualize, and then this will help when we compare this with Christ the King. Ignatius himself says that this “will help us to contemplate the life of the eternal king.” Remember, to contemplate means to be more involved in the scene, to be a player in it. Before we were meditating with our understanding, our memory, and our will; now, properly speaking, we have a contemplation, meaning, we are involving ourselves in the scene. What are they saying? What are they doing?

[092] I can place before my mind a human king or leader chosen by God our Lord Himself, to whom all Christian princes and people pay homage and obedience.

[093] This will be to consider the address this king makes to all his subjects, with the words: "It is my will to conquer all the lands of the infidel. Therefore, whoever wishes to join with me in this enterprise must be content with the same food, drink, clothing, etc. as mine. So, too, he must work with me by day, and watch with me by night, etc., that as he has had a share in the toil with me, afterwards, he may share in the victory with me."

[094] Consider what the answer of good subjects ought to be to a king so generous and noble-minded, and consequently, if anyone would refuse the invitation of such a king, how justly he would deserve to be condemned by the whole world, and looked upon as an ignoble knight.

1 Calveras, *Practica intensiva*, 187.

2 Fr. John Hardon, SJ.

Notice the earthly king is undertaking a *personal* campaign against his enemies, and he has called *everyone* to take part, to fight next to him. The response to the call of this king should be that every man, woman, and child offers themselves to fight with him, and not only to *work with their whole being*, fighting against anything that might get in the way, but even *in spite of humiliations, poverty, and suffering*.³

For us, in our day and age, it can be difficult to think of Catholic kings who inspire, which is important, because we want to have a clear image in our minds. For this, perhaps the best examples we can think of are Saint Joan of Arc and Saint John Paul the Second.

For Saint Joan of Arc, we have an abundance of testimonies from her contemporaries, who bore witness to her holiness at her retrial. For instance, regarding the privations that Ignatius mentions, Joan was inspiring: although she was young and by all accounts tiny in size, she wore a heavy suit of armor and stayed in the saddle all day, day after day, sometimes even sleeping through the night in her armor. One of her fellow officers noted that through the long weeks of her campaigns she “slept on the straw” as any soldier would without the least complaint. In fact, she never demanded anything special: she was completely simple.

What is perhaps more impressive, though, is the effect she had on her troops. Single-handedly, she raised the morale of the French army and encouraged them to fight as never before. As one of the officer recounted “I swear that the English, two hundred of whom had previously been sufficient to rout eight hundred or a thousand of the royal army, from that moment became so powerless that four or five hundred soldiers and men at arms could fight against what seemed to be the whole force of England.”

Another wrote that King Charles had no money to pay the army; nonetheless, nobles and commoners of all ranks “did not refuse to go with and serve him for that journey in the Maid’s company, saying that wherever she went they would go.” A young French knight named Guy de Laval wrote a letter home to his mother saying that in the army “never before did men go with a better will to a task than they go to this one.” He went on to tell his mother to sell and mortgage his lands if need be to raise troops for the cause.

Even the simplest peasants followed her example. In parts of France occupied by the English, the previously docile peasants rose up in partisan resistance as word of Joan’s exploits spread. In those parts of France under the rule of the eventual King, peasants came in droves, of their own volition, to join an army that ostensibly belonged to Charles but that in its soul belonged to Joan. Popular eagerness to fight for France and for Joan became so intense that a force of peasants attempted to storm the walls of Jargeau even before Joan arrived with the army. The peasants were routed, but when Joan came on the scene, so did victory.

Joan was often the first to scale walls, and, if her troops ever began to flee, she would simply turn and charge the enemy to inspire them back to the fight. Once, while attacking, she was hit with an arrow. When she saw how her troops became nervous,

3 Calveras, *Practica intensiva*, 188.

she pulled out the arrow and, once the bleeding stopped, continued fighting. No difficulties, no challenges stopped her campaign.

We can also think of Pope Saint John Paul the Great: when he returned to Poland for his first apostolic visit on June 1-10, 1979, fully two-thirds of Poland's population came to see him. Bear in mind that the Poles had suffered greatly during the World Wars, and now under Communism. Yet, on June 2nd, in Victory Square in the Old City in Warsaw, the pope held a mass, and gave what George Weigel called the greatest sermon of his life.

Why, the pope asked, had God lifted a Pole to the papacy? Perhaps it was because of how Poland had suffered for centuries, and through the 20th century had become "the land of a particularly responsible witness" to God. The people of Poland, he suggested, had been chosen for a great role, to understand, humbly but surely, that they were the repository of a special "witness of His cross and His resurrection." He asked if the people of Poland accepted the obligations of such a role in history.

The crowd responded with thunder. "We want God!" they shouted, together. "We want God!" For 11 minutes, the Pope had to stop his homily, because the crowd was cheering so loudly. Mikhail Gorbachev later said that that visit was the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union, and many historians call that visit "nine days that changed the world."

There were tons of sacrifices involved for the Polish people. In his homily the pope alluded to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier nearby, and said, "The history of the motherland written through the tomb of an Unknown Soldier! I wish to kneel before this tomb to venerate every seed that falls into the earth and dies and thus bears fruit. It may be the seed of the blood of a soldier shed on the battlefield, or the sacrifice of martyrdom in concentration camps or in prisons. It may be the seed of hard daily toil, with the sweat of one's brow, in the fields, the workshop, the mine, the foundries and the factories. It may be the seed of the love of parents who do not refuse to give life to a new human being and undertake the whole of the task of bringing him up. It may be the seed of creative work in the universities, the higher institutes, the libraries and the places where the national culture is built. It may be the seed of prayer, of service of the sick, the suffering, the abandoned—'all that of which Poland is made.'"

In other words, this is the sacrifice you have to make; if you want God, if you really want Him, you must want and love sacrifice.

These are the sorts of leaders that we're talking about.

We can imagine either case, either listening in the camp to Joan of Arc, or being a part of that crowd with Pope John Paul the Second. With a little modification, we can hear what Saint Ignatius has them say: "See how these leaders speak to their people, saying: "It is my Will to conquer all the land of unbelievers. Therefore, whoever would like to come with me is to be content to eat as I, and also to drink and dress, etc., as I: likewise he is to labor like me in the day and watch in the night, etc., that so afterwards he may have part with me in the victory, as he has had it in the labors." Joan wants to reconquer France; the Pope wants his people not to be afraid, to trust in God and bear

witness to His power.

Now, try to hear the answer of those who are standing beside this leader. Try to see the two very different reactions:

First of all, the cowardice of some, of those who try to hide themselves from the presence of these holy people. Try to hear the weak arguments that they set. "I am too young or I am too old or too . . . whatever [any adjective will do]." "I don't know if I can endure something so long!" "Many people need me here . . ." "I never left the country, how I can go to a place that I don't know . . ." "We don't know what will happen." "What if I lose everything?" "What if I die?" "What will the future hold for me?"

Try to see their faces, try to see if they are happy or they are sad. Try to hear the commentaries of others about them: "What sort of people are these? Do they not get it? Don't they see what's at stake? Don't they see who's leading them?"

Later, you can see the second group. People with light in their eyes, and with blood in their veins, noble people whose hearts are on fire. And what is it to be noble? It is to have heart. They can give themselves because they fully possess themselves. They're the ones who know what things in their lives are worth dying for, worth giving up everything for, worth surrendering their time, talents, and even their very lives for.

These noble princes, hearing the words of the holy leaders, cannot say any other words than these: "Serviam . . . I will serve."

CHRIST THE KING

Ignatius then tells us to apply the example of the earthly king to Christ our Lord.

[095] If such a summons of an earthly king to his subjects deserves our attention, how much more worthy of consideration is Christ our Lord, the Eternal King, before whom is assembled the whole world. To all His summons goes forth, and to each one in particular He addresses the words: "It is my will to conquer the whole world and all my enemies, and thus to enter into the glory of my Father. Therefore, whoever wishes to join me in this enterprise must be willing to labor with me, that by following me in suffering, he may follow me in glory."

[096] Consider that all persons who have judgment and reason will offer themselves entirely for this work.

"The call of the temporal king was fictional; no earthly king has called us to overcome his enemies, we weren't with Joan of Arc or in the crowds with John Paul II. What Christ is asking of us, the call of Christ the King, however, is extremely real and always in effect; His kingdom and His universal reign are also real. His call is universal, to everyone, as if He had them all in front of Him, but also to each and every one of us in particular."⁴

⁴ Calveras, *Practica intensiva*, 194.

His will is to conquer the whole world, and our lives are part of this world; that's where He wants and needs to start His conquest. And each aspect of our lives has to be conquered. To follow Him means imitation. It is not an invitation simply to go behind. It is an invitation to imitate Him: to live as He lives. Ignatius tells us "Consider that all persons who have judgment and reason will offer themselves entirely for this work," meaning, if we have really processed the Principle and Foundation, if I have really assimilated the truths contained therein, my judgment and my reason see that it is only logically to decide to follow Christ. It's not rocket science; it's not the fruit of profound years of study. It's simply reasonable.

"Jesus Christ, our redeemer, has done *so much to save us*. He came to earth, suffered, and died to save me from my sins, but He has done even more: He is constantly working for my sanctification. Moreover, He doesn't just work for me; *He Himself is my example*. He shows me how to live, on one hand, because He Himself overcame all manner of difficulties to save me and work my sanctification, suffering from Bethlehem to Calvary, poverty, humiliations, sufferings, but also because He is the most perfect model of all virtues. His actions are a model for me." This is why, for the rest of the Exercises, we follow Christ's life, but it all begins here, with His call to us: *Follow me!*

What does it mean *to follow Christ*? To follow Him means renunciations: the rich young man understood this point perfectly, and "on hearing the invitation of Jesus, he went away sad for he had many possessions" (Mt 19:22; cf. Mk 10:22).

To follow him means sacrifice and sometimes the supreme sacrifice. We have to be aware of this: following Christ will mean sacrifices, privations, difficulties, and challenges, but we can't give up or stop because of it! Christ didn't give up, and He warns us about it. This is why He says to his disciples, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it . . ." (Mt 16:24-25).

This is what Saint Louis Marie de Montfort points out in his Letter to the Friends of the Cross: "You are the members of Christ, a wonderful honor indeed, but one which entails suffering. If the Head is crowned with thorns, can the members expect to be crowned with roses? If the Head is jeered at and covered with dust on the road to Calvary, can the members expect to be sprinkled with perfumes on a throne? If the Head has no pillow on which to rest, can the members expect to recline on feathers and down? That would be unthinkable!

No, no, my dear Companions of the Cross, do not deceive yourselves. Those Christians you see everywhere, fashionably dressed, fastidious in manner, full of importance and dignity, are not real disciples, real members of Christ crucified. To think they are would be an insult to our thorn-crowned Head and to the truth of the Gospel. How many so-called Christians imagine they are members of our Savior when in reality they are his treacherous persecutors, for while they make the sign of the cross with their hand, in their hearts they are its enemies!

If you are guided by the same spirit, if you live with the same life as Jesus, your thorn-crowned Head, you must expect only thorns, lashes and nails; that is, nothing but the cross; for the disciple must be treated like the master and the members like the

head. And if you were to be offered, as was St. Catherine of Siena, a crown of thorns and one of roses, you should, like her, choose the crown of thorns without hesitation and press it upon your head, so as to be like Christ.”

What is our response to be? “How should subjects respond to the invitation of a king who is at once so generous to invite others to come, and so human: He doesn’t command us, but rather invites, rather pleads with us, begs us, to come join Him.” We can’t even imagine rejecting that call; it would be illogical and be the greatest mistake of our lives, since our lives are *meant for this*, to follow Christ. To do this, is simply to follow right reason and judgment.

[097] Those who wish to give greater proof of their love, and to distinguish themselves in whatever concerns the service of the eternal King and the Lord of all, will not only offer themselves entirely for the work, but will act against their sensuality and carnal and worldly love, and make offerings of greater value and of more importance in words such as these:

But, Ignatius tells us here, among these who simply follow Christ, there are some who will stand out; they won’t simply be a soldier on the field, but a leader, a hero, an outstanding warrior. These are the ones who don’t simply go to war, which is only logical, but rather give themselves wholeheartedly to the cause.

In a lot of tasks, most tasks, you can decide how you do them. You can do your task, get the job done ok, and that’s that. Here, you can go forth in Christ’s service, following Him, but not giving yourself entirely. You can let obstacles and impediments get in the way, little attachments here and there.

Sensuality is an inordinate love of this world or the things of this world. It might be a disordered inclination to the satisfactions of the exterior and interior senses, or a sensual love that rejects physical pain and, even worse, interior work, or it could be a carnal love that rejects work and fatigue, the inconveniences of hunger and thirst, the privations of poverty, vain honor, and show. In the very moment of decisions worldly things cry: “You cannot live without us” “You don’t know how to live without us.” “You won’t be able to.” When the battle begins, or the struggle breaks out, how often our attachments come calling to us!

The main problem is that “this - go forward . . .” means to die, and you are sure of this. But you came to this battlefield to give up your life, because you love the cause, and you think that is worth dying for. If something is worth living for, it must be worth dying for, and, if it’s worth dying for, it’s worth dying the daily death, the slow martyrdom, of giving up anything and everything that prevents us from giving ourselves entirely.

Then, only those who have heart will go forward with this prayer in their lips:

[098] Eternal Lord of all things, in the presence of Your infinite goodness, and of Your glorious mother, and of all the saints of Your heavenly court, this is the offering of myself which I make with Your favor and help. I protest that it is my earnest desire and my deliberate choice, provided only it is for Your greater service and praise, to imitate You in bearing all wrongs and all abuse and all

poverty, both actual and spiritual, should Your most holy majesty deign to choose and admit me to such a state and way of life

There is no greater proof. This is the evangelical proof of love, “No man has greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15: 13). Looking at the cross of our King and Lord, we are encouraged to renounce ourselves, to take up our cross daily and walk behind him.

How do I respond to Christ’s invitation? Am I satisfied with just offering *myself* to the task, or with I *work with my works*, signing up to go in the front lines, next to Christ, in poverty and humiliations? Will I be a hero in this war, or just another one of the soldiers? Christ might have millions of soldiers, but what He needs, and what He is asking for, is heroes. The choice, and the response, is left up to us.

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Note I.

This exercise should be gone through twice during the day, that is, in the morning on rising, and an hour before dinner, or before supper.

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Note II.

During the Second Week and thereafter, it will be very profitable to read some passages from the *Imitation of Christ*, or from the Gospels, and from the *Lives of the Saints*.