

DAY 1

II - THE CALL OF CHRIST

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As we find ourselves encountered by God and loved in forgiveness, as we wonder the kind of response we should offer to God, it will make sense to ask God what God's desire is for us. To use the late Fr. Tom H. Green's image, it is not a matter of *working for God*, but rather of *doing God's work* and the two things are not the same. When I was a young Jesuit, our external wardrobe was limited to a cassock and we did not have any other needs in that respect. So, when people wanted to give me a present, they would often give me new handkerchiefs, whether I needed them or not, and as a result I ended up with an embarrassing supply of handkerchiefs. They never asked me what it was that I needed or wanted. For our part we sometimes go all out with our own project and then present it to God: *this Bud's for you*. Doing this is a *working for God* that results in a surplus of needless handkerchiefs in God's dresser. If, instead, we first ask God: *what is it you desire from me at this point?*, we are *doing God's work*, rather than *working for God*. God's desire for us was articulated in the Lord's transfiguration. The text of that narrative from Matthew [11: 1-8] is printed later in this section's pages. Already at Jesus' baptism the Father had given testimony on behalf of Jesus: *This is my beloved Son, on whom my favor rests*. These words are now repeated in today's passage, but here the Father adds: **listen to him**. This is God's desire for us, that we become familiar with Christ's message, that we listen to him. Doing this is *doing God's work*. Now, in the Old Testament there are different modes of God's revelation. There is a *sight-revelation* in the various theophanies; there is a *word-revelation* in the various messages given to God's prophets; there is also a *deed-revelation*, which for Israel peaked in the liberation from Egypt. So, as we *listen to Jesus*, we need to be attentive to his words, his deeds and his very presence among the people of his time. This *listening* is what God desires of us.

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius make use of an allegory to help us get hold of what God's call in Christ is like for us. The first half of that allegory presents some ideal human leader: attractive personality, courageous and with a good cause. This leader is calling for followers to engage with him in a noble enterprise, in which he will lead by example experiencing fatigue, hardships, even combat if needed. This one concrete example is hard for us to grasp, because we live in an age different from that of Ignatius and in a different culture and because in our experience of human leadership such leader might appear to us as utopian.

But its counterpart, the calling of Jesus, in the second half of the allegory has validity for us beyond the details of the allegory. Christ is presented addressing every one of his followers – every one of us – and proposing to us his project. The first thing he presents to us is his **desire**: “to bring all people to him”, a desire made explicit in John's gospel: *I must bring to one flock other sheep outside the fold* [10: 16]; *when I am lifted up from earth, I will draw all people to myself* [12: 32]. He then presents to us the **conditions** of his call: “to be willing to labor **with me**, so that, by sharing in the struggle, they may follow me in glory” and this is what Jesus is telling us in the gospel of Luke: *take the cross **with me*** [9: 23-25] and what Paul tells us writing to the Romans: *we are co-heirs, sharing in the struggle to share in glory* [8: 17]. The core of his calling is “to be **with me**, so you can be sent” and this is how the gospel of Mark narrates the calling of the twelve: *He called twelve to be with him and to be sent* [3: 14], where the order of being-with and being-sent is not accidental. In the gospel of John Jesus uses the image of the vine and

branches: “*remain in me, for without me you can do nothing* [15: 1-8]. This *with me* requirement is an absolute.

Although the Lord’s words were addressed directly to his apostles, they have validity for all of us, a *royal priesthood* [2 Pet. 2: 9]. Because not all faithful are part of the ordained priesthood, Peter’s words may sound to us like just words and especially to at least some women they may sound not just like words, but actually like unjust words. Yet the fact is that all of us baptized exercise a form of priesthood, even if not all at the same level, since a key dimension of the priestly function is to be mediator between people and God. We exercise the priestly function at mass during the prayers of the faithful, as we intercede for others as **mediators**. When after the offertory the presider invites the faithful to *pray that my sacrifice and yours...* that is, *my sacrifice, which is also yours...* So, the Lord’s injunction **to be with Him** in order to be then sent is addressed to all of us, who participate in the more general priestly function. This is the primary object of the Lord’s calling to all of us and this is the Father’s urging all of us to **listen to Him**.

Yes, there are many different vocations, such as being a parent, lawyer, nurse, Sister... Yet the difference lies not on the side of our response, but on the side of the calling itself. The key commandment for Israel, which remains a key commandment for all believers, is expressed in the *Shema Israel...* [Dt. 6: 4-5]: *you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your strength, with all your life*, to love God whole-heartedly. Then, as we recognize our different personal gifts and the needs surrounding us, we channel in different ways our already wholehearted desire to respond. It is not as if the “professionals” (nuns, priests, brothers...) were called to a 100% response, while the rest of the baptized were called only to just “muddle through” with a 25%, 40%, 60% response. The difference in vocation lies on the side of the calling, not on the side of the response.

At the end of the first section of this day we considered a triple question before the crucified Lord:

- in the past, what response have I made to Christ?
- how am I responding to Christ now?
- what response should I make to Christ from now on?

Now the third question becomes not so much *what response should I make to Christ from now on?*, as *how is the Lord inviting me to respond from now on?*; *what does it mean for me now “doing God’s work” instead of just “doing work for God”?*; *what is the Lord calling me to be, so as to listen to Him?*

REFERENCE SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Mt. 17: 1-8

After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him*. When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, Rise, and do not be afraid. And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone.

Other pertinent texts

Mt. 9: 36-37

Harvest rich, laborers few.

Mk. 3:14

He called twelve to be with Him, and to be sent.

Lk. 9: 23-25

Take the cross with Me.

Jn. 1: 35-51

Rabbi, where do you stay? Desire to be with Him.

10:16

I must bring to one flock other sheep now outside the fold.

15:1-8

Vine-branches; remain in Me; *without Me you can do nothing.*

Rom. 8: 17

Co-heirs, sharing in the struggle to share in glory.