

WEEK FIVE

What Do I Really Want?

Our prayer this week explores the implications and consequences of following Christ. Ignatius does this by proposing three scenarios or “thought experiments” involving the challenge of being one of Christ’s disciples.

The question hovering over the whole week is: What do I really want?

What do you *want*? That is, what does your heart say? What do you *really* want? That is, look honestly at your desires as they are. God is more interested in what you feel than in what you think. And God is interested in your *real* feelings, not the feelings you think you *should* have.

Day One: The Call of Christ, Our King

We begin by contemplating the call of a worldly leader, which then leads us to consider the call of Christ, our King. In considering the call of a worldly leader, Ignatius relies on language and feudal images fitting for his time.

If the medieval imagery is distracting or unhelpful, consider the inspiration of a person of our time who personifies virtue and integrity, fights against injustice, or labors for the oppressed and marginalized. This person may be a civic leader, a modern-day saint or prophet, or a personal friend. Or you may rely on some mythical figure in literature or film. Reflect on anyone who inspires you and summons your zeal to make the world a more just and gentle place.

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following graces: to listen more attentively to Christ's call in my life; to become more ready and eager to do what Christ wants.

The Call of a Worldly Leader

Read through the scene slowly. Pause frequently as you immerse yourself in it.

First, I will place before my mind a human king, chosen by God our Lord himself, whom all Christian princes and all Christian persons reverence and obey. (SE 92)

Second, I will observe how this king speaks to all his people, saying, "My will is to conquer the whole land of the infidels. Hence, whoever wishes to come with me has to be content with the same food I eat, and the drink, and the clothing which I wear, and so forth. So too each one must labor with me during the day, and keep watch in the night, and so on, so that later each may have a part with me in the victory, just as each has shared in the toil." (SE 93)

Third, I will consider what good subjects ought to respond to a king so generous and kind; and how, consequently, if someone did not answer his call, he would be scorned and upbraided by everyone and accounted as an unworthy knight. (SE 94)

What feelings does this leader stir in you? What do you imagine you could do if you followed such a leader? Make note of your thoughts in your journal.

For Reflection

There are so many world leaders whose words and actions inspire us to service and who can remind us of Christ's even greater summons. One of my favorite inspirations is from Theodore Roosevelt, who said this in a speech at the Sorbonne in 1910:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

– Kevin O'Brien, SJ

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Two: The Call of Christ, Our King (Continued)

We now consider the call of Jesus Christ. Note the repeated use of two phrases, the “more” (or “greater”) and “with me.” Christ summons the best from us, calling us to the *magis*, to greater service and generosity.

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following graces: to listen more attentively to Christ’s call in my life; to become more ready and eager to do what Christ wants.

Responding to the Call

You might review your notes from yesterday before reading the meditation.

If we give consideration to such a call from the temporal king to his subjects, how much *more* worthy of our consideration it is to gaze upon Christ our Lord, the eternal King, and all the world assembled before him. He calls to them all, and to each person in particular he says: “My will is to conquer the whole world and all my enemies, and thus to enter into the glory of my Father. Therefore, whoever wishes to come *with me* must labor *with me*, so that through following me in the pain he or she may follow me also in the glory.” (SE 95, emphasis added)

Ignatius suggests two responses. Both are loving responses of a generous disciple. The first response is the offering of a disciple who commits him- or herself wholeheartedly to the work of the kingdom of God:

[I will reflect that] all those who have judgment and reason will offer themselves wholeheartedly for this labor. (SE 96)

This offering is a matter of reason and good judgment: it makes sense that if we are going to follow a noble, worldly leader, we will want to follow Christ all the more.

The second offering suggests an even more generous, more heartfelt response. The disciple devotes him- or herself not simply to laboring for the kingdom but also to being with Christ and imitating more completely his way of living:

Those who desire to show *greater* devotion and to distinguish themselves in *total* service to their eternal King and universal Lord, will not only offer

their persons for their labor, but *go further* still. They will work against their human sensitivities and against their carnal and worldly love, and they will make offerings of *greater* worth and moment, and say (SE 97, emphasis added):

“Eternal Lord of all things, I make my offering, with your favor and help. I make it in the presence of your infinite Goodness, and of your glorious Mother, and of all the holy men and women in your heavenly court. I wish and desire, and it is my deliberate decision, provided only that it is for your *greater* service and praise, to imitate you in bearing all injuries and affronts, and any poverty, actual as well as spiritual, if your Most Holy Majesty desires to choose and receive me into such a life and state.” (SE 98, emphasis added)

Ask: What desires, dreams, concerns, fears, or hopes does Christ’s invitation stir in me? How am I moved to respond now?

For Reflection

Better Than Your Best?



Magis is one of the more mysterious Ignatian terms. It’s a Latin word meaning “the greater, the excellent, the best.” It’s associated with restless striving to always do better, to undertake a greater project, to set more ambitious goals. Sometimes I find the *notion of magis* inspiring. Often I find it intimidating.

The idea of the magis comes from the *Call of the King meditation* in the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius has us imagine Christ as a King calling us to join him in his work to save and heal the world. Who wouldn't want to respond eagerly to this call? It makes perfect sense to sign up. "All those who have judgment and reason will offer themselves wholeheartedly for this labor," St. Ignatius comments.

But Ignatius urges us to consider something more: to "go further still," to "make offerings of greater worth and moment." We're asked to serve the King with something more than wholehearted service. How is this possible?

It really isn't possible. I think Ignatius is raising the possibility of greater-than-wholehearted service as a personal invitation. He's putting it out there for us to consider. It has more to do with personal commitment to Christ than with restless type-A overachieving. What can you imagine that would motivate you to do more than your best? It's a question each of us can answer only for ourselves. It's a question we can answer only as we get closer to our King.

—Jim Manney

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Three: The Call of the Disciples

God's call is meant to give us a fuller life of deeper meaning and authentic joy (though not without the sacrifices that accompany a life of discipleship). Far from being imposed from above, God's will – or God's desire – for us is found in our own deepest, truest desires.

Allow God's Spirit to inspire holy desires in you. We don't have to make any offering or commitment if we're not ready. For now, we just want to be open enough to hear the call and to get excited about Christ's engaging vision for us and the world.

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following graces: to listen more attentively to Christ's call in my life; to become more ready and eager to do what Christ wants.

Read Matthew 4:18-25

Consider Jesus' call and the response of the disciples. Use the techniques of imaginative prayer to reflect on this passage.

For Reflection

Why God Makes Us Wait

from St. Augustine's homily on the first letter of John

Something to think about | The entire life of a good Christian is an exercise in holy desire. You do not see what you long for, but the very act of desiring prepares you, so that when God comes you may see and be utterly satisfied.

Suppose you are going to fill some holder or container, and you know you will be given a large amount. Then you set about stretching your sack or wineskin or whatever it is. Why? Because you know the quantity you will have to put in it, and your eyes tell you there is not enough room. By stretching it, therefore, you increase the capacity of the sack, and this is how God deals with us. Simply by making us wait God increases our desire, which in turn enlarges the capacity of our soul, making it able to receive what is to be given to us.

– dotMagis Editor

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Four: Meditation on Two Standards

For the next two days we pray with another key exercise: the Two Standards. Ignatius borrows from his military past to construct this meditation. A standard is a banner or flag under which the followers of a particular leader rally. Ignatius asks us to consider the opposing tactics and values of Christ and Lucifer (also known as the enemy of our human nature, the father of lies, the evil one, the deceiver). We are asked to choose the banner under which we will stand.

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following graces: an awareness of the enemy's deceptions and courage in the face of them; an understanding of Christ's way of living and a desire to live that way.

Stand with Jesus or with the Way of the World

We begin this meditation by imagining the setting of our choice between the two standards. In the end, there is no middle ground: we must choose.

Here it will be to imagine a great plain in the region of Jerusalem, where the supreme commander of the good people is Christ our Lord; then another plain in the region of Babylon, where the leader of the enemy is Lucifer. (SE 138)

In other words, we imagine a place that is peaceful, just, and beautiful, and another place that's full of corruption. Feel free to imagine places like these in the world today.

Next, we meditate on the two standards, beginning with the standard of the enemy:

Imagine the leader of all the enemy in that great plain of Babylon. He is seated on a throne of fire and smoke, in aspect horrible and terrifying. (SE 140)

Consider how he summons uncountable devils, disperses some to one city and others to another, and thus throughout the whole world, without missing any provinces, places, states, or individual persons. (SE 141)

Consider the address he makes to them: How he admonishes them to set up snares and chains; how first they should tempt people to covet riches (as he usually does, at least in most cases), so that they may more easily

come to vain honor from the world, and finally to surging pride. In this way, the first step is riches, the second is honor, and the third is pride; and from these three steps the enemy entices them to all the other vices.

(SE 142)

Pay attention to your affective or emotional reactions when praying this meditation.

For Reflection

The Two Standards



Jesus contrasted his way to the way of the world quite emphatically: “He who is not with me is against me” (Luke 11:23). Master Ignatius helps us apply this to ourselves in a key meditation in the Spiritual Exercises called “A Meditation on the Two Standards” – a “standard” meaning a flag.

Stand with Jesus or with the Way of the World

All disciples have to choose where we are going to stand – with Jesus or with the world. No matter what life the Spirit has drawn us to, once we are baptized and confirmed we are called to stand in Jesus’ company under his flag.

We begin to move under Jesus’ standard when we join him in the living conviction that everything we have and are is God’s gift. However much or little we have, we say gratefully, “Look at all God has given me.” Then the way opens through the smoke of self-satisfaction and approval of others. “How can I help?” becomes a daily

preoccupation. And through a life of love and service, the Spirit leads us to live as meekly and humbly as the Lord lived – whether we are a famous ballerina or an anonymous computer programmer.

The way of the world differs entirely. The starting point is getting as much wealth as you can. You say, “Look at all this stuff I have.” When the world’s way opens before you, you shift your focus, saying, “Look at me with all this stuff.” As those around you grow more deferential, you start saying, “Look at me.” You become convinced that you are the center of your world. You may not have sinned yet, but it is only a matter of time.

Three Forms of Collusion with the World’s Standard

Even without subscribing to theories of the subconscious, we can see that the world’s standard is as inviting to Christ’s disciples as it is to anyone else. In a way, even after we have made a solemn, lifelong choice to follow Christ’s standard, we have to purify our daily life of collusion with the world’s standard. The collusion comes in three forms.

First, there is benign secularism. Certainly, there are people who do not know Jesus Christ who lead deeply good lives. But even the baptized can live in a benignly secular way. We join civic movements and help the needy because that’s what our neighbors do. We are good to our families and honest in the workplace. There is no immediate harm in this way, but neither is there anything more than a secular spirit, even though people today call it spirituality.

The second form of collusion, seen particularly in the affluent first world, is the search for pleasure. We are surrounded by people who live what St. Paul describes as the way of the flesh. Those who follow this way are the target of advertising; they need to have whatever everyone else has right now. Their less lovely side manifests self-indulgence, lust, envy – all seen as acceptable social mores. The flesh has its own laws, and those who follow this way will readily obey those laws into sin.

Finally, there is the collusion of succumbing to darkness. Think of the report of an adult who forced a twelve-year-old to kill another and then drink some of his blood. It is evil manifest. But most of the works of the dark are not manifest. Hatred, vengeance, violence, self-destructive habits – these flourish in the dark corners of the sinful human self.

In your heart of hearts, you may loathe the dark and leap to the light. But in everyday life, you will find yourself in the twilight of benign secularism or the flesh over and over again. You will find safety in Christ's standard only if you resolutely begin everything with thanks to God and keep watching what you are doing and why you are doing it.

—Joseph A. Tetlow, SJ, excerpt from *Making Choices in Christ*

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Five: Meditation on Two Standards (Continued)

We now consider the standard of Christ, who stands in stark contrast to Lucifer. Although the enemy is repulsive, harsh, and seeks only to deceive and enslave people, Christ is inviting, gentle, and desires only to liberate people to love God and serve others. Both want to rule the world, but in different ways and for different reasons.

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following graces: an awareness of the enemy's deceptions and courage in the face of them; an understanding of Christ's way of living and a desire to live that way.

Christ's Invitation

Listen to Christ's invitation. Gaze upon him as he speaks to his disciples. Feel free to imagine a modern-day setting for the parable:

In contrast, gaze in imagination on the supreme and true leader, who is Christ our Lord. (SE 143) Consider how Christ our Lord takes his place in that great plain near Jerusalem, in an area which is lowly, beautiful, and attractive. (SE 144)

Consider how the Lord of all the world chooses so many persons, apostles, disciples, and the like. He sends them through the whole world, to spread his doctrine among people of every state and condition. (SE 145)

Consider the address that Christ our Lord makes to all his servants and friends whom he is sending on this expedition. He recommends that they endeavor to aid all persons, by attracting them, first, to the most perfect spiritual poverty and also, if the Divine Majesty should be served and should wish to choose them for it, even to no less a degree of actual poverty; and second, by attracting them to a desire of reproaches and contempt, since from these results humility.

In this way there will be three steps: the first, poverty in opposition to riches; the second, reproaches or contempt in opposition to honor from the world; and the third, humility in opposition to pride. Then from these three steps they should induce people to all the other virtues. (SE 146)

For Reflection

Poverty of Spirit

As we see in the exercises on the call of Christ, our King, and in later exercises, the disciple of Christ aspires to poverty.

All of us are called to “poverty of spirit,” or **spiritual poverty**, which describes a stance of utter dependence before God, not in any demeaning, servile sense, but in the sense of the **Principle and Foundation**: God is God, and we are creatures created to praise, love, and serve God. Before all else, we depend on God for our happiness and fulfillment. While we are grateful for our talents, abilities, wealth, and achievements, we are free enough to offer them to the service of God and others and to let go of them when they get in the way of that self-giving.

In short, poverty of spirit is an emptying of self so that God can fill us with life and love. Our prayer helps us grow in spiritual poverty and freedom. Christ is the model of spiritual poverty par excellence.

Christ also lived in actual or **material poverty**, with a lack of material goods. Some people may be called to this way of living. Priests, brothers, and sisters in religious orders profess a vow of poverty, renouncing personal possessions and wealth and depending on their religious community for their material needs. God may call others to a life of material poverty without professing vows. Material poverty is not an end in itself, for abject poverty is degrading to the human person (as a survey of our world so tragically reveals). Instead, for those called to this state of life, material poverty is a means to deepen one’s commitment to the poor whom Christ held so dear.

Although not everyone is called to live a life of actual poverty, we are all called to live simply and in freedom with respect to the riches we have – whether they are in the form of material possessions, talents, reputation, or influence. All are called to labor with Christ to help the poor and powerless in some way. All are called to give countercultural witness to the rampant competition and materialism around us.

– Excerpt from *The Ignatian Adventure* by Kevin O’Brien, SJ.

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Six: Meditation on the Three Types of People

The Meditation on Two Standards stirs in us noble desires to serve and follow Christ in his simplicity of life, his humility, and his selflessness. It presents an ideal way of living. Now we do a reality check. With the call of Christ come the demands of discipleship. Do we want to be disciples?

In this meditation, we reflect on concrete choices that three different types of persons may make as they try to live according to their calling in life. In doing so, we experience some tension between the high ideals of Christ's call and our lack of interior freedom and deeply embedded resistances to Christ's invitation to us personally.

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following grace: to grow in interior freedom so that I'm able to respond wholeheartedly to Christ's invitation in my life.

The Procrastinator, the Compromiser, and the Truly Free Person

Imagine three persons of good will who are trying to serve God and grow in faith. They sincerely want nothing to get in the way of their relationship with God.

Imagine that each acquires something that is very attractive to him or her. Ignatius suggests a large amount of money, but you can imagine something especially attractive to you, such as a certain material possession, a place to live, a high-profile job, or a particular honor. None of these things is intrinsically evil; each one can be used for good. But each of the three typical persons is excessively attached to the possession in some way.

The one who procrastinates. The first person wants to let go of the attachment, but she never gets around to it. Even on her deathbed, she is still thinking about letting go of her attachment.

The one who compromises. The second person sincerely desires to be free of that excessive preoccupation; at the same time, he wants to keep the possession. So he does lots of good things and makes honorable sacrifices, but he fails to do the one thing that he really needs to do: free himself from his disordered attachment. This person is trying to negotiate with God. Rather than conforming his will to God's will, the compromiser wants God to do what he wants to do.

The one who is truly free. In Ignatius's words:

The person typical of the third class desires to get rid of the attachment, but in such a way that there remains no inclination either to keep the acquired money or to dispose of it. Instead such a one desires to keep it or reject it solely according to what God our Lord will move one's will to choose, and also according to what the person himself or herself will judge to be better for the service and praise of the Divine Majesty. (SE 155)

Considering the important choices you have made, how have you resembled the three persons: the procrastinator, the compromiser, and the truly free person?

For Reflection

Note where the third person begins: she is not sure whether or not God is asking her to give up the possession; she simply desires to be free to do what God wants her to do. So she begins by asking God what she should do. She is open to how God directs her through her prayer, her experience, her reasoning through different options, her discernment of consolations and desolations, and the wise counsel of others.

The truly free person checks her motivations, which are often mixed. She tries to choose from a desire to better serve God and others. The third person may feel some attachment to the possession and does not mind waiting to make a decision. But she does not procrastinate. She does make a timely decision (acknowledging that we rarely reach complete indifference).

– Kevin O'Brien, SJ

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.

Day Seven: Jesus Calls the Rich Man

End this week by listening to what God is saying to you. Recall your reaction to the meditations on the Call of the King, the Two Standards, and the Three Types of People. Review your journal notes.

The Grace I Seek

I pray for the following grace: to grow in interior freedom so that I'm able to respond wholeheartedly to Christ's invitation in my life.

Read Mark 10:17-31

Read the passage imaginatively, placing yourself in the scene. Notice the rich man's noble desires but also his lack of interior freedom because of his excessive attachments. Look at Jesus looking upon him *with love*. Hear Jesus' words of encouragement to Peter and to you. Ask: *What attachments or disordered loves are getting in the way of my responding to Christ's invitation?*

For Reflection

A Loving Disciple's Offering

Eternal Lord of all things, I feel your gaze on me.

I sense that Your Mother stands near, watching; and that with You are all the great beings of heaven –

angels and powers and martyrs and saints. Lord Jesus, I think You have put a desire in me. If You will help me, please, I would like to make my offering:

I want it to be my desire, and my choice, provided that You want it, too,

to live my life as You lived Yours. I know that You lived an insignificant person in a little, despised town; I know that You rarely tasted luxury and never, privilege,

and that You resolutely refused to accept power.

I know that You suffered rejection by leaders, abandonment by friends, and failure.

I know. I can hardly bear the thought of it all. But it seems a toweringly wonderful thing that You might call me to follow you and stand with You.

I will labor with You to bring God's reign, if you will give me the gift to do it.

Amen.

—Joseph Tetlow, SJ, *Hearts on Fire*

Journal

Journal your feelings, thoughts, or impressions.