

The Kingdom Meditation

Grace: *Pray for the grace to have the clarity of vision and the courage to be the kind of person who will hear when Jesus summons you, and not be shy or hang back, but quick and persevering in following Him.*

Introduction:

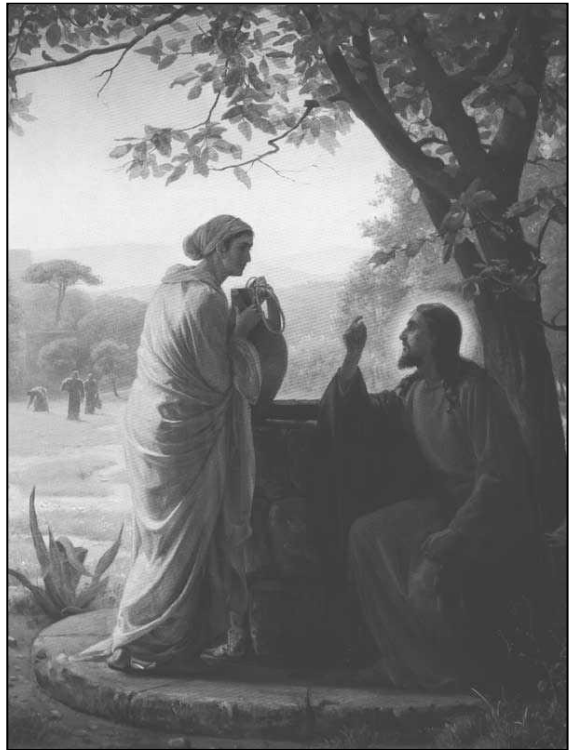
You have been called by name to be a follower of Jesus. Saint Ignatius asks you to consider the level of your commitment through a meditation known as the Kingdom of Christ meditation. In the meditation, Ignatius asks you to imagine that Jesus is calling you to serve with him in building up the Kingdom of God. It is assumed that you want to make the world a better place; however, Saint Ignatius experienced that the desire to make the world a better place or to do the right thing was not always sufficient for him. Instead, he felt that Satan, the angel of darkness, would often try to deceive him and prevent his progress.

Because Saint Ignatius was familiar with military protocols, he uses an example of two standards. This word is not used as much today but you can think of it as a banner or a flag. When times get tough in a battle it is easy to become disoriented. The standard or flag is meant to help orient you. And so, Ignatius proposes the Standard of Christ the King as a way of orienting your life.

However, following Jesus can be challenging. In fact, following Jesus is often counter-cultural and even counter-intuitive. Before proceeding, Ignatius invites you to reflect on your level of commitment to follow the Standard of Christ. Are you willing to look toward Christ as the ultimate source of truth when you are lost, confused, or hurt? Making a firm commitment to look toward Jesus as the model to live your life by allows you to continue to make progress in the Spiritual Exercises. You must freely choose to be a Christian and to follow Jesus. The goal is to be able to see as Jesus sees, to hear as Jesus hears, and to perceive reality as Jesus perceives it. No other vision can ultimately satisfy you if you are to truly call yourself a follower of Jesus.

Of course making a commitment to Jesus comes with a price. Following Jesus may mean that you cannot always follow your own personal desires. You give up a certain amount of control over your own destiny when you put your life in Jesus' hands. Satan may well try to entice you to follow other ambitions or to manipulate you in to using some other standard for your life. You will be asked to choose between "the mentality of Satan – riches, honor, pride; and the mentality of Christ – poverty, contempt, humility."* The Samaritan woman at the well gives a good example of someone who spoke honestly and frankly with Jesus about her concerns. Following Jesus will be difficult. There was a cost for John the Baptist and there will be a cost for you to; however, if you fight the good fight and remain focused on the goal hopefully the Lord will give you the grace you need to persevere.

Read the various Scripture passages and reflect on how committed you are to following Christ's standard. What do you need to be more committed? Speak with Mary about what it is that draws you to Jesus. Have a conversation with Jesus to ask for clarity about what it really means to be His follower. Speak with God, the Father, about the courage you will need to follow Jesus or any fears or concerns you might have. Listen to what Mary, Jesus, and God share with you and write about your conversations in your journal. As you enter into the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises, you will be growing in relationship to Jesus. This initial commitment in response to your personal call helps to support this growing relationship.



* Aschenbreener, S.J., George. *Stretched for Greater Glory: What to Expect From the Spiritual Exercises.* (p. 94)

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 power 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.*



Philippians 3:7-14 - But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25 - When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

John 4:1-42 Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well - The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he." Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him. Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor." Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

In these or similar words ... I see my basketball team in trouble, down by 25 points at halftime and have been pushed to the physical limits of the body. We are embarrassed and don't feel worthy of wearing a uniform. Then coach comes into the locker room and says that he is proud of us and we are playing as hard as we can. He also says we're going to win this game that he has faith in us and no matter what he wouldn't do anything to change this team. This speech lifts up our spirits and gives us new strength and the confidence that we can do anything. Our coach and leader always knows what to say to get our team to perform to the best of its ability. I imagine myself as the leader and having the ability to change the mood of the crowd with a few diligent words. I feel great to be a person people come to in hard and great times. When our leader speaks he is straight forward with us and says hard times and long hours are ahead but it is all worth it when our goal is reached. I see myself compelled to do this job and I would feel great for having chosen to do it. Now I see Jesus as the leader telling me that he needs my help. At first I'm in a state of shock that Jesus needs my help. I feel the highest honor that Jesus says he needs my help and my service. I would feel it was my duty and a privilege and I would do what Jesus asks me in a heartbeat if I feel it is something that Jesus would really want me to do. The difference between an earthly leader and Jesus calling me is quite simple. I admire the earthly leader so I feel great if offered a challenge but if Jesus asked me, who I worship and praise, this would be the ultimate feeling of consolation.



Practicing What You Preach ... The Sacrament of Confirmation provides an opportunity for you to reflect on your commitment to Jesus. Attend a Mass of Confirmation and listen carefully to the words and pay attention to the symbols used to help strengthen the person receiving the Sacrament to live out his or her faith. Recall your own Confirmation and reflect on what has happened to your own commitment to Jesus since that time.