

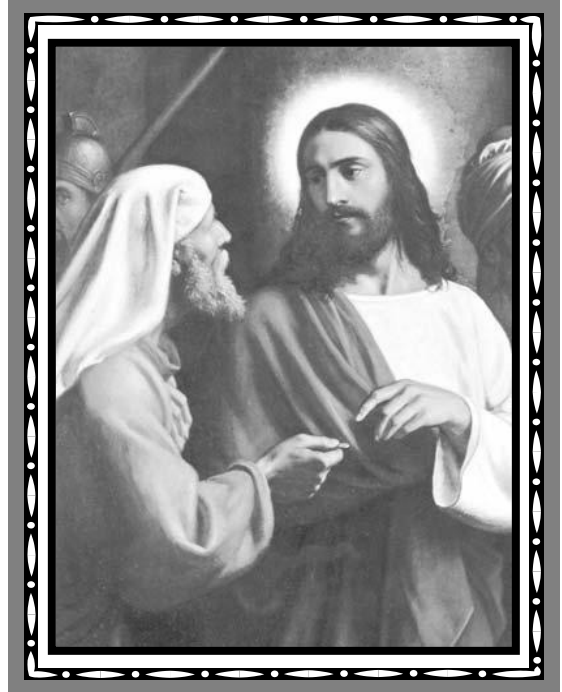
Three Kinds of Responses

*Grace: Ask for the grace to respond more and more freely,
that all you choose might be for God's greater glory and the salvation of your soul.*

Introduction:

Before exploring more deeply the life of Jesus, take some time to lay a solid foundation for your upcoming reflections. As you reflect on the life of Jesus, you may feel drawn more deeply into relationship with Him. Such a relationship can be very challenging and demanding. In fact, it requires greater freedom regarding the choices you make for living your life.

At this point in the Exercises, it is taken for granted that you want to do the will of God and to follow Jesus' example. However, Ignatius observed in his own life that careful discernment was needed in order to continue to make spiritual progress. There may still be some things in your life that you feel attached to. For example, one's car or iPod may be possessions that are important to them. Keep in mind that having a reliable car or an iPod is not bad. The question is, "Are you willing and free enough to give up your car or your iPod if doing so would be of greater service to God?" This attachment to things does not have to be only material objects. Remember from the Kingdom of Christ reflection that honor and pride can also be seductive. You may be drawn to honor because of the recognition you get from doing service work. You may be tempted by pride when you recognize how amazingly smart you are. Being smart and doing service work are good things; however, if you do them for the wrong reasons then they can also become stumbling blocks to your spiritual progress.



Ignatius asks you to reflect on three people who have come across a rather large sum of money. They have to decide what to do with the money. Each person wants to do God's will. Each also can imagine some very good ways of using the money. The curious thing about this reflection is that it has almost nothing to do with the final choice that one makes but everything to do with the reasons why the person makes the choice. The first type of person never gets around to really discerning the right way to use or dispose of the money. As a result, there is no freedom about what to do with the money because no real options have been explored. The second type of person starts to discern but rushes the process and does not ultimately come to a true sense of freedom. As a result, this person may think that he is doing God's will but in fact they may be tricking himself into believing that he is free when in fact he is not. The third type of person really struggles with the right thing to do and carefully considers that which will be to God's greater service and that which is most like what Jesus would do. It is important to note that it is not assumed that the person did not keep the money. The third person very well may have kept the money; however, he was also perfectly free and willing to give it up.

There are times when you respond like each of these three persons. Sometimes, you may want to do what is right but simply do not get around to doing it despite your good intentions. Other times, you want to free yourself from some attachment but you end up rationalizing and convincing yourself that not freeing yourself from the attachment is what God wants. At other times, you struggle and truly become free to act however it is that God desires. Obviously, Ignatius says this third way of carefully discerning God's will, struggling with the options, and being free is what is desired.

Read the Scripture passages and reflect on the one that you feel most comfortable with. Place yourself into the scene and ponder if you are as free as Jesus wants you to be. Do you at times try to serve two masters? Are you able to take the talents given to you by God and use them to serve God or do you become prideful and try to keep the talent for yourself? Are you like the good soil upon which the seed falls and produces an abundant harvest or are there weeds growing that choke out the good in you? Are you truly free? Speak to Jesus about what you need to do in order to grow in freedom.

Preparatory Prayer:

Lord, I so wish to prepare well for this time.
I so want to make all of me ready
and attentive and available to you.

Please help me clarify and purify my intentions.
I have so many contradictory desires.

My activity seems to be so full of busyness
and running after stuff that doesn't really seem to matter or last.

I know that if I give you my heart
whatever I do will follow my new heart.

May all that I am today, all that I try to do today,
may all my encounters, reflections,
even the frustrations and failings
all place my life in your hands.

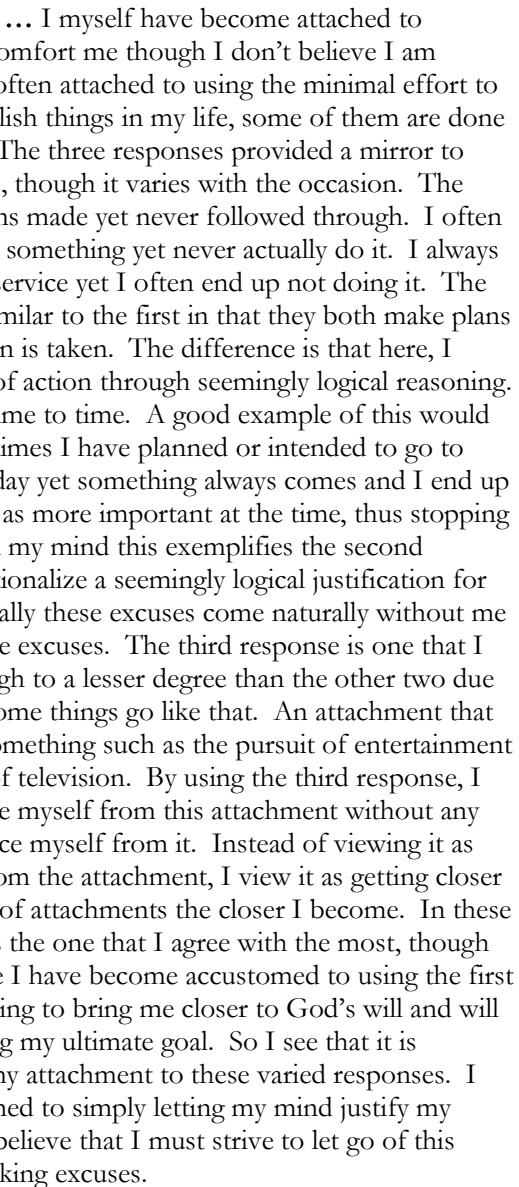
Lord, my life is in your hands.
Please, let this day give you praise.

Matthew 6:24-34 "You cannot be the slave of two masters." - You cannot be the slave of two masters! You will like one more than the other or be more loyal to one than the other. You cannot serve both God and money. I tell you not to worry about your life. Don't worry about having something to eat, drink, or wear. Isn't life more than food or clothing? Look at the birds in the sky! They don't plant or harvest. They don't even store grain in barns. Yet your Father in heaven takes care of them. Aren't you worth more than birds? Can worry make you live longer? Why worry about clothes? Look how the wild flowers grow. They don't work hard to make their clothes. But I tell you that Solomon with all his wealth wasn't as well clothed as one of them. God gives such beauty to everything that grows in the fields, even though it is here today and thrown into a fire tomorrow. He will surely do even more for you! Why do you have such little faith? Don't worry and ask yourselves, "Will we have anything to eat? Will we have anything to drink? Will we have any clothes to wear? Only people who don't know God are always worrying about such things. Your Father in heaven knows that you need all of these. But more than anything else, put God's work first and do what he wants. Then the other things will be yours as well. Don't worry about tomorrow. It will take care of itself. You have enough to worry about today.

Mark 4:1-20 Parable of the seed - Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times." Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'" Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."

John 8:31-36 - To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Matthew 25:14-30 Parable of the Talents - "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"



In these or similar words ... I myself have become attached to behaviors and things that comfort me though I don't believe I am dependent on them. I am often attached to using the minimal effort to succeed, so while I accomplish things in my life, some of them are done with little effort from me. The three responses provided a mirror to several of my own attitudes, though it varies with the occasion. The first response relates to plans made yet never followed through. I often have the intention of doing something yet never actually do it. I always plan on doing community service yet I often end up not doing it. The second response appears similar to the first in that they both make plans with intentions yet no action is taken. The difference is that here, I attempt to justify this lack of action through seemingly logical reasoning. I will do this as well from time to time. A good example of this would be going to Mass. Several times I have planned or intended to go to Mass on a Sunday or Saturday yet something always comes and I end up considering that new event as more important at the time, thus stopping me from going to Mass. In my mind this exemplifies the second response as I attempt to rationalize a seemingly logical justification for not going to Mass. Eventually these excuses come naturally without me noticing the pattern of these excuses. The third response is one that I have also experienced though to a lesser degree than the other two due to the difficulty of letting some things go like that. An attachment that could be let go would be something such as the pursuit of entertainment through constant viewing of television. By using the third response, I would be able to simply free myself from this attachment without any extreme measures to distance myself from it. Instead of viewing it as trying to distance myself from the attachment, I view it as getting closer to God and becoming free of attachments the closer I become. In these three responses, the third is the one that I agree with the most, though through the years of my life I have become accustomed to using the first two. The first two do nothing to bring me closer to God's will and will only deter me from reaching my ultimate goal. So I see that it is important to take note of my attachment to these varied responses. I become too easily accustomed to simply letting my mind justify my actions through logic, so I believe that I must strive to let go of this years-old attachment of making excuses.

Practicing What You Preach ... The Church has a long tradition of encouraging fasting and doing penance. One of the goals of fasting is to show control over one's desires which hopefully leads to a greater sense of freedom. During Lent, you may give something up; however, you do not have to wait until Lent to test whether you are free to give up certain things or activities that may be keeping you from making spiritual progress. Consider giving something up or fasting to get a sense of how free you really are. Discern whether that thing or activity helps you draw closer and to better serve God, your Creator and to be more like Jesus.