

All My Liberty

Chapter 11: Mysteries of the Life of Christ

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The solid core of the Spiritual Exercises, around which everything else revolves, is the set of fifty mysteries of the life of Christ normally placed after the key meditations and consequently liable to be taken as an after-thought instead of something essential to an Ignatian retreat. But whenever the Exercises are made for five or more days, most of the meditations will be given on the life of Christ. St. Ignatius' choice of mysteries, therefore, and the special emphasis which he gives them are of primary importance in setting the tone and giving orientation to any retreat where the reflections have not been reduced to the absolute minimum.

In the following analysis we shall not undertake to comment on the mysteries in detail, but rather evaluate the master ideas that dominate what looks to the inexperienced eye like an itemized list of passages from the Gospels, chosen at random and arbitrarily strung together into sets of three unrelated points.

The first salient feature of these mysteries is their vitalism. Ignatius had a large area of Scripture texts to choose from; by actual count over twenty-five hundred verses, exclusive of duplications, in the gospels alone. In adapting this vast material he made a point of choosing mysteries that are best suited for the delicate synthesis of meditation and contemplation as recommended in the Exercises. In varying degree, he makes each

mystery a dramatic episode, involving more than one person in communication or conflict and not just a static portrait or monologue. There are people to see and hear in action, and events are taking place in which the exercitant can participate with all the faculties of body and mind—all directed to the unique purpose of knowing Christ more intimately in order to love Him more fervently and serve Him more faithfully. The first and last of the fifty mysteries may serve as illustrations.

Annunciation of Our Lady

1. The Angel St. Gabriel, saluting our Lady, announced to her the Conception of Christ our Lord. "And the Angel being come in said unto her: 'Hail, full of grace ... Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son.'"
2. The Angel confirms what he had said to our Lady by announcing the conception of St. John the Baptist, saying to her: "And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age."
3. Our Lady replied to the Angel: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word."

Here we see all the essential elements of the Annunciation taken out of the Gospel of St. Luke and exhibited for concentrated meditation with perfect clarity. First the angelic message announcing with ecstatic suddenness the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies in the person of the Virgin Mary; then the sign of Christ's miraculous conception by the parallel miracle of Elizabeth bearing a child in her old age;

finally, the Incarnation itself, when Mary pronounces her consent to become the mother of God. Thus in a few words the main features of the mystery are delineated, like the few strokes of an artist's pencil sketching the outline of a future painting. With nothing essential missing, enough details are furnished to suggest both the general pattern and how the entire composition needs to be developed.

Ascension of Christ Our Lord

1. After Christ our Lord had shown Himself for forty days to the Apostles, "giving many proofs and signs ... and speaking of the Kingdom of God," He commanded them to await in Jerusalem the Holy Spirit He had promised them.
2. He led them forth to Mount Olivet, and in their presence "He was raised up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."
3. While they are looking up to Heaven angels say to them, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to Heaven? This Jesus, Who is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come as you have seen Him going into Heaven."

Again the same genius for reducing to miniature the whole sweep of an extended mystery, enabling the mind to penetrate with a single glance to the essence of the closing events of Christ's visible stay upon earth. After appearing for forty days with many proofs of His bodily resurrection He told the Apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit He had promised them. On the fortieth day He rose from the midst of His disciples into heaven on the same Mount Olivet where shortly before He had suffered

His agony in the garden. Then the closing angelic announcement, not unlike the first one at Nazareth, that Jesus who came down from heaven a God and ascended into heaven as the God-man, will return on the last day as the Son of Man to judge the living and the dead. Thus in less than one hundred words we are given a synthesis of the crowning event in the life of Christ, at the point where the Incarnation becomes a double test of our faith, that the Spirit which Christ sent animates the Church whose Mystical head is the living Son of God in human flesh.

Interpretation and Extra Scriptural Details

St. Ignatius is properly regarded as one of the Church's greatest mystics, whose life, from the time of his conversion at Loyola, was a series of heavenly visitations that gave him a profound insight into the truths of the Christian religion. In the process of canonization, the cardinal postulator for the cause of St. Ignatius testified that the Blessed Virgin alone appeared more than thirty times to Inigo during the eight months of his first retreat at Manresa. Ignatius himself supplies further details when confidentially describing his experiences during those early days when the Spiritual Exercises were born:

Often in prayer, (he said), and even during a long space of time, did he see the humanity of Christ with the eyes of the soul. The form under which this vision appeared was that of a white body, neither large nor small; besides, there seemed to be no other distinction of members in His body. This vision appeared to him often at Manresa, perhaps twenty or even forty times....He saw the Blessed Virgin under the same form, without any distinction

of members. These visions gave him such strength that he often thought within himself, that even though Scripture did not bear witness to these mysteries of faith, still, from what he had seen, it would be his duty to lay down his life for them. [1]

It is not surprising, therefore, that while keeping very close to the text of the New Testament, Ignatius more than once makes a personal interpretation or adds a significant detail that suggests divine illumination. But even as purely natural *obiter dicta*, they are valuable aids to a deeper understanding of the Exercises.

In the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel reportedly “confirms what he had said to our Lady by announcing the conception of John the Baptist.” This is an informative gloss on the passage in St. Luke since Mary, otherwise than Zachary, did not ask for a miraculous sign as a condition for belief. Yet Ignatius so interprets Elizabeth’s conception in her old age and thus highlights an important factor in the criteriology of faith, that even the faith of the Blessed Virgin could profit from having a truth of revelation confirmed by external miracle.

After the Circumcision of Christ, those who performed the rite “return the Child to His Mother, who felt compassion at the blood shed by her Son.” It would be a mistake to suppose that this was only a dramatic touch to focus attention on the Blessed Virgin’s sympathy for the Child Jesus. St. Ignatius was too restrained in literary composition for us to doubt that he had some higher reason for the addition. Even if the reference to Mary’s compassion was not the result of a private inspiration, it fits in perfectly with the Mariology of the Exercises. The role of

mediatrix between Christ and mankind is characteristic of Ignatian spirituality. But if Mary is mediatrix, she must have earned this title by her close association in spirit with the redemptive sufferings of her divine Son – not only in the Passion and under the cross but from the first time that He shed His blood in obedience to the will of His Father manifested through the Mosaic law.

In line with the same concept of mediation, when Jesus enters on His public life, He “takes leave of His Blessed Mother,” where the mutual pain of separation is specified at the very moment when Christ began the final stage of our salvation. Since a generous retreat election may require the sacrifice of family ties and consolations for the sake of the Gospel, this episode may serve as an example of how Christ and His Mother should be imitated if we would be perfect and offer “gifts of greater than ordinary worth” for the love of God.

And again at the marriage feast of Cana, Ignatius takes the liberty of changing two verbs in the Gospel story, to highlight the authority that Mary has as our mediator with Christ. The evangelist relates simply that Mary “says to Jesus” that the wine has run out, and that she “says to the attendants” to do whatever Jesus will direct. But in the Exercises, Mary does not merely tell Jesus, she *points out* to Him that the wine has run short; and she *orders* the waiters to follow the instructions of Christ. As told by St. Ignatius, the mystery shows Mary taking the whole initiative, from recognizing that the wine had given out to commanding that her Son’s directives should be promptly obeyed.

When driving the sellers out of the temple, Jesus acts somewhat differently towards the

money changers and towards those who were selling doves. St. John says that He overturned the tables of the former and told the latter to “take these things hence and do not make the house of my Father a house of business.” St. Ignatius adds two pertinent details. He describes the money changers as rich and the sellers of doves as poor, and according to him Jesus spoke mildly to the poor merchants but angrily to the others. For any one else it might have been only a trivial detail, but considering the insistence on poverty throughout the Exercises, the overt distinction in this mystery between the rich and the poor and the different attitude of Christ toward each was scarcely indeliberate.

The Passion and Death of Christ include a number of revealing interpretations and additions. In the agony in the garden, St. Luke relates that Christ sweated blood which ran down upon the ground. From this St. Ignatius concludes that the flow of blood must have been copious and “supposes that His garments were already full of blood”; otherwise how explain the running down from the body onto the ground? And if the flow of blood was so copious, how intense must have been the agony to produce it?

During the terrible night in the house of Caiphas, when the soldiers mocked the Savior, blindfolded and buffeted Him, St. Ignatius adds that “in a thousand other ways they blasphemed Him,” which is nowhere directly alluded to in the sacred text.

On the way to Calvary, the three synoptics tell us that the soldiers prevailed on Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross after Jesus. But they do not give the reason. According to Ignatius, it was because the pain and fatigue were beyond endurance; “as He could not carry it,

Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry it after Jesus.”

After the crucifixion, the Gospel narrative tells how Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus and took it down from the cross. John adds the information that Nicodemus came with a mixture of myrrh and aloes and, together with Joseph, buried Jesus. But St. Ignatius states that both Joseph and Nicodemus took Jesus down from the cross and adds, “in the presence of His sorrowful Mother.” He therefore implies that Mary remained with her son on the cross to the very end, the valiant woman who shared in His sufferings and along with Him cooperated in the redemption of mankind.

Christ’s first appearance after the resurrection to His Blessed Mother is taken for granted. For although not mentioned in Scripture, if He appeared to many others besides the few named, it is clear that among these His Mother was the most worthy and therefore the first to be consoled by His risen humanity. All the known sources that Ignatius consulted took the fact for granted, as Suarez explains in commenting on this mystery. “There is not the slightest doubt that after the resurrection, Christ appeared to His Mother before anyone else. This is so intrinsically credible as to be almost universally accepted by the great doctors of the Church, the faithful in general and by all Catholic writers who touch upon the subject.” When Mark says that Christ “appeared first to Mary Magdalen,” this should be taken to mean either that she was the first among those whom the Gospels describe as witnesses of the resurrection or among those to whom Christ appeared in order to confirm their faith. Hence the omission of any reference to the Blessed Virgin. [2]

In the apparition at Emmaus, St. Ignatius states without apology that Christ was recognized when He consecrated the Eucharistic elements and gave Holy Communion to the two disciples. The author of the Exercises was here following the teaching of many of the Fathers who, like St. Augustine, saw in Christ's revelation of Himself at Emmaus an expression of the common law of Christianity that "no one should be considered as really knowing Christ, unless he is a member of His body, which is the Church, whose unity in the Sacrament of Bread is described by the Apostle when he says, because the Bread is one, we though many, are one Body." [3]

Other appearances of Christ, not narrated in the Gospels but included in the Exercises, are the apparition to Joseph of Arimathea, His descent into Limbo where "He appeared in spirit to the holy fathers," and His frequent appearance to the disciples during the forty days before the ascension. Since Joseph of Arimathea was so closely associated with Christ during life and in death, it seems only natural that the Lord should have favored him with a personal visitation. The descent into Limbo is an article of faith, taught by the early Church and incorporated in the Creed at least since the fourth century. The appearance "many times to the disciples," amplified St. Paul's statement to the Corinthians that the Risen Savior was seen by more than five hundred of the brethren and by all the apostles. Thus stated without hesitation and without the qualification "as may piously be believed," we may suppose it was the fruit of divine communication.

Areas of Special Concentration

Although St. Ignatius makes a fairly complete coverage of Christ's life in the mysteries that he chooses, there are certain aspects which he favors more than others, certain omissions and an obvious concentration in certain areas which deserve to be better known as revealing the mind of the author of the Exercises.

The Divinity of Christ is the first cardinal mystery which Ignatius emphasizes. At the beginning of His public life, during the baptism in the Jordan, a heavenly voice proclaims Jesus the beloved Son of the Father. Immediately after, during the temptation in the desert, the devil tries to test the divinity of Christ. He fails, but the lesson is impressed on the readers of the Gospel narrative. In the sermon on the mount, Christ proclaims His superiority to the law of Moses and His equality with the Lord of the Mosaic code. In the transfiguration He appears between Moses and Elias as the fulfillment of their prophecies. After the resurrection, He accepts the confession of St. Thomas, "My Lord and my God," and just before the ascension declares that all power was given to Him in heaven and on earth.

Then in attestation of these claims to divinity, Christ works miracles of transcendent power: changing water into wine at Cana, calming the storm at sea and walking on the water, multiplying the loaves and fishes, and raising Lazarus from the grave. Significantly, of all the forty miracles recorded in the Gospels, St. Ignatius chooses only these, prodigies of power over nature which bows in obedience to her Creator. By contrast not a single healing narrative occurs among the mysteries of Christ's life in the Exercises.

St. Ignatius' preoccupation with the divinity of Christ is not accidental. It places the humanity of the Son of God in proper focus and gives it a dogmatic foundation without which the following of Christ would be only devotion to a great leader or dedication to a great cause. It would not be the imitation and service of God in human flesh.

Throughout the Exercises, the retreatant learns to know Christ more intimately in order to love Him more ardently in order to serve Him more faithfully. The knowledge of Christ, therefore, is the basis of Christian perfection and the measure of all our holiness. We cannot serve with genuine fidelity unless we love and we cannot love unless we know. But what does it mean to know Christ? What is there to know about Him and what kind of knowledge do we have? The answer to these questions cuts so deeply into the science of theology that it separates the whole Christian world into two camps, those who possess the true faith and those who do not. And among true believers, it distinguishes those who live only on the surface of Christianity from those who have penetrated to its depths.

To know Christ certainly means to know the man who was born at Bethlehem and during life was revered as a prophet until He was murdered by the Jewish leaders who envied His successful preaching and resented His exposing their hypocrisy. It means to know all that the Gospels relate about Jesus of Nazareth, His miracles and teaching and all the events that are recorded about the man whose thirty short years have revolutionized the history of mankind. This kind of knowledge, however, may be only information which even a pagan or unbeliever can have, or, at best, a sublimated form of earthly wisdom which sees in Christ perhaps

the greatest teacher that the world has ever known and a prologue of his Gospel, that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, or what St. Paul means when he writes about the Image of the invisible God, in whom were created all things in the heavens and on the earth.

An adequate knowledge of Christ comprehends not only His humanity but especially His divinity. It sees with the eyes of faith, illumined by grace, that the man Jesus was the incarnate Son of God, and as a consequence His every human action which affects my life takes on a new dimension. The virtues of patience, humility, and poverty that I seek to imitate are theandric perfections that reveal the Word become flesh, and the kindness and mercy to which I am attracted are the Infinite Goodness in human form. The mysteries of faith that I am asked to believe and the commandments I am told to observe, both beyond the capacity of nature to understand or obey, are made credible and possible because the human being who proclaims them has the wisdom and authority of God.

If I consider the Church which Christ established, I see it is not only a juridical organization but a Mystical Body animated by the divine Spirit of its founder. The result is a sense of nearness to Christ for which no earthly substitute can be found. Removed from its bare historical setting, the Incarnation enters into perspective as the eternal union of God with human nature, physically in the person of Christ and mystically in the *totus Christus* of which I, as a member of the Mystical Body, am an integral part. Indeed, Christ Himself, personally present in the Church, gives us the highest motive for loving the Society which He directs as its living

Head. “For it is Christ who lives in the Church, and through her teaches, governs and sanctifies.” [4] But all of this becomes possible only because Christ is God.

So, too, the sacraments take on a deeper meaning in the light of Christ’s divinity. They are seen not only as external signs which He instituted to be the instruments of grace but as seven channels through which His redemptive blood flows in a constant stream, like so many arteries, to impart, sustain and increase the supernatural life of the cells in the Mystical Body. For although Christ originated the sacraments during His visible stay upon earth, as the divine Author of grace He is perennially active in every sacramental ritual where He directly exercises His almighty power for the sanctification of souls.

The Kindness and Mercy of Christ are nicely balanced with the power of His divinity by a judicious choice of those mysteries which picture the Saviour as acquainted with our infirmities and more willing to help us than we are to ask for His aid. By His temptation in the desert, He showed us how perfectly human He was, being like to us in all things except sin, and how intrinsic to human nature are trials and temptations, from which even the Son of God was not exempt. He can therefore sympathize with our own sufferings and probation as one who had the same experience. At the wedding feast in Cana, His solicitude for the guests when the wine had failed shows the range of Christ’s interest in everything that concerns us, not excluding our temporal welfare and including the amenities of bodily comfort.

In the sermon on the mount, in addition to the beatitudes of meekness, mercy and peaceableness, Ignatius directs our attention to

Christ’s exhortation that we love our enemies and do good to them that hate us, in the spirit of the Lord’s Prayer, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” This concept, according to a Hebrew scholar, of asking forgiveness of God in return for mercy towards man is foreign to Jewish theology, and adds a new principle to social morality. [5] It required the example and teaching of incarnate Love to propose the idea and make it the hallmark of Christian perfection.

At least two miracles of Christ which Ignatius makes into separate meditations are designed to encourage our confidence in His care for us and under no circumstances to distrust Him. During the storm at sea, when the terrified disciples awakened Christ, He reproved their “little faith” and then commanded the winds and the sea to be still. Again on the Lake of Galilee, when Peter at Christ’s bidding walked upon the water and then “hesitating” began to sink, the Lord took him by the hand but reproachfully asked him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” In both mysteries, the original word for “faith” comes from the Greek *pistis*, which the evangelists regularly use to describe the confidence in Christ’s power and mercy that He required of those in whose favor He worked miracles. “Daughter,” He said to the woman with the flux of blood, “your faith (*pistis*) has made you whole.” And “because of their unbelief (*pistis*), He did not work many miracles there” in Nazareth.

St. Ignatius, following the more common tradition, identifies the sinful woman in Luke’s Gospel with Mary of Magdala, and entitles the meditation “the conversion of Magdalen.” Commentators since patristic times have regarded this mystery as the classic example of Christ’s mercy and

suggested that it was preserved specially for the gentiles (through St. Paul's disciple) to prove that Christianity is the religion of love. Characteristically, Ignatius also transmits the problem of reconciling Christ's parable on that occasion with its application to the sinful woman. In the parable, the remission of debt becomes the source of grateful love; but applied to the woman, her love is described as the cause of forgiveness. Ignatius omits the parable and isolates the application, thus giving greater force to the words of Christ which he quotes, "Many sins are forgiven her, because she has loved much." In other words, her extraordinary manifestation of love shows how well she recognized the debt of gratitude that was owed to the mercy of Christ.

For the benefit of those working in the apostolate, Ignatius singled out a mystery where the understanding sympathy of Christ is contrasted with a certain callousness on the part of the disciples. They suggested He dismiss the crowd that was following Him, since "this is a desert place and the hour is already late." But the Saviour did not listen to them. Instead he told ("commanded," says Ignatius) the disciples to bring some loaves and fishes and proceeded to feed the multitude of five thousand, not counting the women and children. The striking feature of this miracle, like the one at Cana, is its "superfluity." Immediately after feeding the people, Christ dismissed them; so there was no question of supplying food to sustain them for more instruction but only as a convenience to relieve their hunger before they came home. This was an object lesson for the followers of Christ in their dealings with souls, to extend their charity to every need they find, whether bodily or purely spiritual, essential or even dispensable.

The Call and Duties of the Apostolate are prominently featured, with an obvious aim to instruct those who are teaching or preaching the word of God. The longest single meditation among the fifty mysteries is on the "Vocation of the Apostles," where Ignatius distinguishes three stages in their calling to follow Christ. The first was "to some knowledge" of the Master, as described by the evangelist, John, which suggests the first step in the grace of an apostolic vocation. Christ invites a soul to learn more about Him and the redemptive purpose of His Incarnation. Then comes a further invitation to follow the Saviour more intimately, "with the intention of returning to what they had left," comparable to a temporary profession of vows or a transient commitment to Catholic Action. The final call is "to follow Christ our Lord forever," in a permanent dedication to His service. St. Ignatius therefore recognized the divine strategy which begins by gently presenting the apostolic life as attractive in the person of Christ and then by degrees leading a soul to consecrate itself for life to the advancement of the Gospel.

Furthermore, "three other things are to be considered," which give us a rare insight into the nature of the apostolic vocation. We should reflect "how the Apostles were of a rude and lowly condition," with nothing to recommend them except their natural incompetence for the monumental task of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. Yet it was precisely for this reason, the ancient writers tell us, that Christ chose such weak instruments, in order to manifest the supernatural character of His Church and forestall any suspicion that the society which should one day surpass empires was the creation of human genius. In the same way, on the level of the apostolic worker, Christ often

chooses the least likely persons for the work of evangelization and crowns their labor with phenomenal success, so that no flesh should glory in His sight. At the other extreme, we are to consider “to what dignity the apostles were so gently called.” Elsewhere in his writings, St. Ignatius was so impressed with the sublimity of the apostolate that he allowed himself the rare liberty of describing it in extravagant terms. “Not only not among men, but not even among the angels can a more noble life be conceived than that of glorifying God and of drawing creatures to Himself, so far as they are capable of that attraction.”

[6] In spite of the grandeur of this calling, however, or perhaps because of its sublimity, it comes to the soul “gently” as an invitation to greater generosity and not as an imperative command. Between this dignity of cooperating in the work of redemption and the natural impotence of the apostles stand “the gifts and graces by which they were raised above the Fathers of the Old and New Testament” to become, in the words of St. Paul, the foundation of the holy temple of God. As with the first evangelists, so with their successors, the law of compensation must be operative. What nature cannot do becomes possible and easy through grace, to remind us that in the last analysis not we but the indwelling Spirit of Christ transforms sinners into saints and leads them from darkness to light through our ministrations.

Another meditation on the apostolate covers the mission that Christ gave to His chosen twelve, and through them to all who are dedicated to the spiritual welfare of their neighbor. Ignatius picked four qualities that characterized the ministry of the apostles, and by implication should characterize the work of their followers. On the injunction of Christ, the apostles were to be most prudent in their

dealings with others, by acting with the wisdom of serpents and the simplicity of doves. Along with prudence, they were to be patient, since the Master foretold that He was sending them as sheep in the midst of wolves. Part of their patience was to be voluntary poverty, demanding no remuneration for their services, “Freely you have received, freely give,” and taking no money for the journey but trusting in the support of providence. Finally the subject of their ministry was specified. They were to preach a spiritual message, the Kingdom of God, to which all material and secular interests were subordinate.

In all the voluminous instructions and correspondence that St. Ignatius wrote on the apostolic life, there is a special accent on the virtues of prudence, patience and poverty, and a constant insistence on the priority of spiritual values. Each of these elements was seen as a balance between opposite extremes: prudence as a counterpoise to thoughtless indiscretion and over-calculation; patience as a middle course to reluctant endurance and passive quietism; poverty concerned to promote a successful apostolate while imitating the poor Saviour who had not whereon to lay His head; and above all a supernatural realism that places union with Christ and the sources of grace above human effort and ability, but without despising any of the natural means that may advance the Kingdom of God. When Ignatius warned “the apostolic man not (to) forget himself; he has not come to handle gold but mud. He cannot therefore watch himself too carefully that he may not contract the leprosy of which he seeks to cure others”; or “there is nothing of which apostolic men have more need than interior recollection,” he was only repeating

the ideas he had woven into the Spiritual Exercises. [7]

The Resurrection of Christ

The most striking feature in St. Ignatius' treatment of the life of Christ is the attention he gives to the resurrection, apparently out of all proportion to the objective value of the mystery. Where the resurrection narratives occupy only five percent of the total content of the Gospels, in the Spiritual Exercises fourteen out of fifty mysteries deal exclusively with the risen life of the saviour. In order to have enough material for this specialization, Ignatius develops a single passage from Scripture into a separate meditation, like the apparitions to James and the five hundred brethren; he also goes outside the Gospels to the Acts and the Pauline Epistles for additional subject matter, and even makes a meditation out of Christ's appearance to Joseph of Arimathea, "as may piously be thought and as we read in the lives of the saints." Clearly St. Ignatius was preoccupied with the resurrection to a point that must seem strange until we examine the full import of this mystery in the economy of the redemption.

According to St. Thomas, to whom Ignatius was most devoted, the first purpose of the resurrection was to vindicate the divine justice, which elevates those who humble themselves. "Since Christ humiliated Himself even to the death of the Cross out of love and obedience to God, He was therefore exalted by God even to His resurrection from the dead." [8] It is this glorification of His risen humanity to which Christ refers in the meditation on the Kingdom when He says, "My will is to conquer the whole world and

all my enemies, and thus to enter into the glory of my Father."

The resurrection of Christ is also the great proof of His divinity and in that sense the keystone of our faith. During His mortal life Christ had often professed Himself to be God in human flesh. "The Father and I are one," He declared. In testimony of this claim He allowed Himself to be crucified, died, and by His own power arose from the dead; thus clearly manifesting that He was indeed the Resurrection and the Life, first in His own favor and then for all the rest of mankind. Without the divinity of Christ, confirmed by the miracle of Easter Sunday, the incarnation is a misnomer and the redemption a sham. "If Christ has not risen," says St. Paul, "vain then is our preaching," and vain all the ideals of Christianity as presented in the Exercises.

Besides confirming our faith in His divinity, Christ's resurrection gives the hope of our own restoration from the grave. As the first fruits of those who sleep, the Head of the Mystical Body became a pledge of immortality to His faithful members on the last day. In the context of the Kingdom meditation this is integral to the promise of Christ that those who follow Him in labor and suffering will also follow Him in glory. While only part of the reward, the glorification of our body after the example of Christ can be a powerful motive in the spiritual life. Since the control of bodily passions by "acting against sensuality and carnal desires" often demands a great deal of sacrifice, there should be a corresponding remuneration, not only for the soul but also for the body which shared in the earthly struggle. For the soul, this reward is the beatific vision; for the body, it is the resurrection which endows the sensible faculties with transcendent powers and

inebriates them, in the words of revelation, with the torrent of God's pleasure.

Finally and most importantly the resurrection of Christ is the cause of our reinstatement in the friendship of God. In patristic terminology, it is the complement of our salvation. As the result of Adam's fall we were twice removed from divine love, once by reason of original sin that infected our human nature and once again by the loss of sanctifying grace that gave us a title to the vision of God. Accordingly, St. Paul distinguishes two stages in our restoration by the mercy of Christ. "Jesus our Lord," he says, "was delivered up for our sins, and rose again for our justification." [9] This concept of a distinction between the redemptive work of Christ's passion and His resurrection deserves to be better known. Two kinds of life were to be restored, as there were two kinds of death from which we had to be redeemed, the one bodily and the other spiritual. As the passion of Christ removed both forms of death, so His resurrection restored both forms of life. And "since the flesh is the instrument of His divinity, and since an instrument operates in virtue of the principal cause, our double resurrection, bodily and spiritual, is referred to Christ's bodily resurrection as the cause." [10] The great difference, of course, between the redemptive function of the passion and resurrection is that only the former was meritorious, "for the glorified Christ was no longer a wayfarer and so was not in a position to merit." Yet there are so many ways that the risen Saviour is the cause of our supernatural life that theologians speak of the resurrection as pertaining to the integrity of our redemption.

The influence of Christ in His glorified humanity is exercised most universally as

Head of the Mystical Body, the Catholic Church, of which we are the actual members. "Who has reached more lofty heights," asks Pius XII, "than Christ the Man who, though born of the Immaculate Virgin, is the true and natural Son of God, and in virtue of His miraculous and glorious resurrection, a resurrection triumphant over death, has become the first-born of the dead?" Because Christ is so exalted, he alone by every right rules and governs the Church, not only visibly through His ministers, but directly and personally and with an intimacy that beggars description." As the nerves extend from the head to all parts of the human body, giving them power of feeling and movement, so the Saviour communicates His strength and virtue to the Church, to enlighten the minds of the faithful and inspire them with generous desires. From Him streams into the body of the Church all the light which divinely illumines those who believe, and all the grace by which they are made holy according to His own sanctity." [11]

All sanctity begins with Christ, and therefore has Christ as its cause. For no act conducive to salvation can be placed unless it proceeds from Him, the God-Man, as its supernatural source. Grace and virtue flow from His divinity, through the glorified humanity, for the salvation of the world. If we grieve and do penance for our sins, and return to God with humble confidence in His mercy, it is because Christ is leading us. He is continually pouring out His gifts of wisdom, counsel, and fortitude. When the sacraments are administered – baptism, confirmation, and the rest – it is the risen Christ who produces their effect in our souls. On the altar, in the Sacrifice of the Mass, the oblation of Calvary is renewed because it is the same Priest and Victim who offered Himself on the cross.

Only the manner of offering is different. On the cross it was a bloody sacrifice, “but on the altar, by reason of the glorified state of His human nature, death shall have no more dominion over Him, and so the shedding of His blood is impossible.” [12] And in Holy Communion we receive the risen Saviour in all the perfection of His humanity, hypostatically united with the divinity which has conquered the grave and, according to the promise of Christ, is the stay of our spiritual life on earth and the hope of being raised up on the last day.

In the light of these implications of the resurrection, we cannot wonder that St. Ignatius gives so much attention to the glorious mysteries, even, so it seems, at the expense of the mortal life. He recognized a guiding norm in Christian asceticism, which he incorporated into the Exercises and practically implemented by his accent on the risen Saviour. Implicit in all the great mediations, it says that Christianity in its ultimate components is not a mere juridical structure but a living organism, and its highest motivation which produces saints and heroes is more than a body of precepts binding under pain of sin. It is a Personality, at once divine and human, that still lives because of the resurrection, not only as a memory but as the object of present history, indwelling in the hearts of those who love Him and destined to be possessed for all eternity.

Chapter 11 **References**

[1] *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius*, New York, 1900, p. 56.

[2] Francis Suarez, *De Mysteriis Vitae Christi*, Disp. XLIX, sec. 1, num. 2.

[3] St. Augustine, “De Consensu Evangelistarum,” PL 34, 1206.

[4] Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, N.C.W.C. Translation, 1943, p. 36.

[5] Felix Levy, *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. VII, p. 193.

[6] *Letters and Instructions of St. Ignatius*, London, 1914, p. 94.

[7] Xavier de Franciosi, *L’Esprit de Saint Ignace*, Paris, 1948, p. 46.

[8] *Summa Theologica*, IIIa, q. 53, a. 1.

[9] Romans 4:25.

[10] *Compendium Theologiae*, cap. 239.

[11] *Mystici Corporis Christi*, p. 19

[12] Pius XII, Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, N.C.W.C. Translation, 1948, p. 28.

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