4.2

THE HIGH CALL TO MISSION



Optional *Lectio Divina* Prayer

1. Read Matthew 9:35–38.
2. Meditate on the words.
3. Speak to Christ about this passage.
4. Rest and listen in God's presence.
5. Discuss together.

The most important battle you will ever fight is not in business, politics, or a military campaign.

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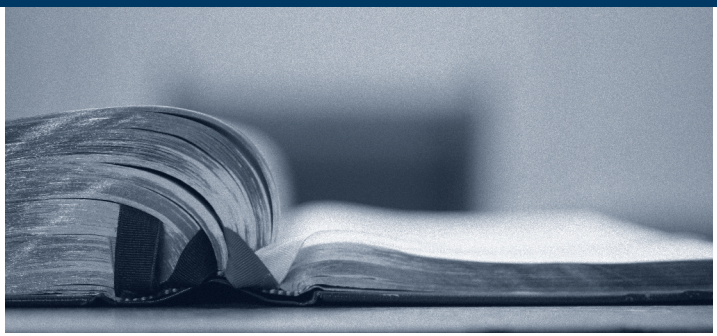
It all has to do with what role you choose to play in the struggle that has been raging since the beginning of time. It's the battle between God and the devil, good and evil, heaven and hell — either loving God even to the point of contempt for self or loving self to the point of contempt for God.[1] This is the battle happening within every human heart, regardless of whether we consciously realize it, and it has eternal consequences.

This is the crucial question many saints challenge us to face. St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits and author of the renowned *Spiritual Exercises,* invites us to consider the real spiritual battle taking place around us at every moment. St. Ignatius' famous "Meditation on the Two Standards" reveals the choice that every person of faith must make: For which side of the battle will I give my life?[2]

Put yourself in the scene. Two commanders stand on opposing battlefields, calling on soldiers to follow them. On one side, a riotous, angry crowd presses in around their general, who sits atop a chair of smoke and fire, terrifying in shape and even more horrible in demeanor. He charges his troops to scatter from the field, "not omitting any provinces, places, states, nor any persons," and to use their "nets and chains" to entice souls away from the love of God and get them to give their lives to pleasure, possessions, power, and pride.

At the other end of the battlefield stands another Commander-in-Chief, beautiful and full of love. He looks out over "all his servants and friends." They are generous, courageous, and ready to make many sacrifices to serve the Lord. Seeing the destruction and despair being spread by the rival army, Jesus, the "Lord of all the world chooses so many persons — apostles, disciples, etc. — and sends them through all the world, spreading his sacred doctrine."[3]

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It is a call to mission. Jesus sends them out to bring souls to his love. He calls for people to give their whole lives for the kingdom of God and for the love of souls — souls who, if there is no one willing to go out to them with the Gospel, will be swept away by the enemy. Our knowledge of what Christ has done for us and our love for others should propel us to action: Who will say "Yes" to Christ's call? Jesus waits under his raised standard to see who will come to him.

This is where you come in. What will *you* do? Which camp will you serve? Where will you dwell? These are the questions St. Ignatius challenges us to ask. It is up to us to choose which banner and which army we will claim as our own.

DISCUSS

What stands out to you in this meditation? Where is the Lord directing your attention?

AN URGENT INVITATION

This meditation should awaken in us the urgency to share Christ's love with others. As Christians, we don't believe in reincarnation; no one gets a "do-over," a second chance to help people in some second, third, or fourth life. No, the time is now. This generation of Christians is responsible for helping this generation of souls. Today,

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people suffer from all kinds of poverty: material poverty and slavery, social poverty, psychological poverty, poverty of relationships and the poverty of being unknown, unloved, and forgotten. Most of all, there is a particular urgency to serve those in need spiritually — to reach souls who do not know Christ and have not surrendered their lives to him, souls who may be forever separated from God unless Christians go out to them and share the Gospel.

You might be thinking, "I can see that this battle is real. But what does it have to do with me? What good could I do?" The truth is this: Jesus invites you to participate in his mission to save the world. He has people whom he specifically desires for you to encounter, accompany, and love. He does not expect you to be perfectly ready, but he does invite you to give him your small and humble "yes" to his mission.

It can be tempting to sit on the sidelines, to believe that "somebody else will do it" and respond to the call in our place. But to abstain from the battle is not a neutral decision. It actually falls into the strategy of the devil's army. He celebrates when Christians choose not to give their lives to extending Christ's kingdom on earth — because that means there is less resistance in the world to his evil ways and fewer heralds of the Gospel, which means more souls may never come to know Christ's love and his eternal salvation.

DISCUSS

What do you think of this call to enter the battle of bringing souls to Christ? Does it intimidate you or inspire you? Where do you see your place in this battle for eternity?

THE INVITATION TO MISSION

Ignatius' powerful meditation is a clear call to action. People are dying each day, and their eternity hangs in the balance. How do we

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move from recognizing this call to Christ's mission toward beginning to live it in the world? The rest of this article traces the journey from accepting Christ's standard as your own to going out on mission for the salvation of souls. This can be broken down into three elements: the Message, the Mission, and the Method Modeled by the Master.

- *The **Message**: The Gospel and Your Story*

  As St. Ignatius' meditation shows, a spiritual battle is raging all around us, as Christ and his army fight for the salvation of all souls. Choosing to follow Christ and stand under his banner is the first step for entering the battle at his side. We cannot serve him in this battle if we are not totally committed to him, if we are not surrendered to him as Lord, if we do not allow him to reign over every aspect of our lives. We cannot serve him in this battle if we are not allowing ourselves to be transformed by the saving power of the cross. As you begin to think about Christ's mission, remember what God has done in your life and how he has redeemed you, healed you, and made you new.

DISCUSS

How has the decision to follow Christ changed or shaped your life? How are you continuing to grow in placing Christ at the center of your life?

- *The **Mission**: Missionary Discipleship*

  After coming to stand under Christ's banner, the next step for entering his mission is to receive the call. Like the invitation found in St. Ignatius' meditation, Jesus gave his disciples a very specific command in his last moments on Earth. Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus said to his disciples: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to

observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age'" (Mt 28:18–20).

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This is the mission Jesus entrusted to the Church, and he invites all of us who are baptized to participate in this work of evangelization as missionary disciples (cf. CCC 831). As Pope Francis says, "In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization."[4] It's not reserved for priests and religious or biblical scholars and missionaries. If we have truly encountered Christ, how can we not share him with others? "[I]t is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn."[5] To the degree that we respond to this call, souls will be saved; to the degree that we fail to respond, souls will be lost. Our lack of commitment in evangelization can cost the eternal life of souls.

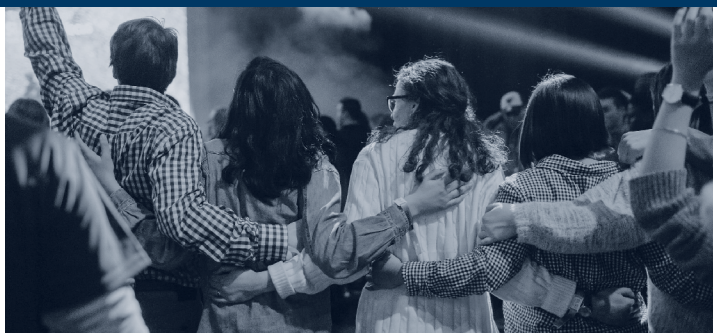
DISCUSS

What do you think of the fact that you could play a role in inviting others to choose the standard of Christ and receive eternal life with him? What does it mean to you that Christ would entrust you with such a mission?

- *The **Method Modeled by the Master**: The "Little Way of Evangelization"*

  Once you have chosen to serve on the side of Christ and answered the call to participate in the Church's mission of evangelization, how do you begin to go out and live that reality? We only need to look to what Jesus himself did throughout his earthly life and follow his example.

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Jesus' way of evangelization was not a big way, but a little way. He did not travel the world to preach the Gospel to everyone on earth himself. Rather, he invested deeply in a few whom he formed in the Gospel of the kingdom and trained them to go out and do the same for others. Though he preached to the masses on some occasions, he spent most of his time investing in his small group of disciples. He spent three years living with them, teaching them, and showing them how to preach, heal, and lead as he did (Mt 4:19, 5:1ff). Then, he sent them out to preach the Gospel themselves and "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). Jesus' approach to evangelization is what we call the "Little Way of Evangelization." It is the approach to evangelization that Jesus modeled for us, the "Method Modeled by the Master." We aspire to imitate the method of evangelization that Jesus himself exemplified.

If you become who you are meant to be, you will set the world on fire.

— St. Catherine of Siena

Consider the potential impact of this approach. Imagine one person pursuing a deep, personal relationship with Jesus and desiring for others to know him. She starts intentionally investing in three others who also have a desire to know Jesus. As they grow together, each of these missionary disciples begin investing in friends of their own — three, six or more — who eventually go on to do the same, forming more and more missionary disciples with each new cycle of growth.

The effects begin slowly: For example, one missionary disciple who reaches three others makes four. If each of those three

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new disciples reaches three others, the total becomes thirteen. For illustration purposes, imagine if all continued to go ideally well — after seven cycles, the total number could reach nearly 1,000, and after 13 cycles, more than 500,000. At this rate, the entire world could be reached in just 22 cycles — that's within one lifetime of the original disciple! While human weakness and failure will always be present along the way, this model, while purely mathematical, still beautifully illustrates the potential effect one person can have in impacting the world!

But the main point is that you don't have to be a talented speaker, a social media guru with thousands of followers, or the most charismatic person in your community to become a missionary disciple who impacts the world. You need only to invest in a few, winning them to Christ, building them up as faithful disciples and sending them out to do the same. Think of this as the "Little Way of Evangelization": Just as St. Thérèse of Lisieux was able to accomplish great holiness through humility, prayer, and little acts of great love, you too, by humbly and generously investing in a few, can bear tremendous fruit as you participate in the Church's mission of evangelization. All it takes is a lifetime of love. When we imitate Jesus' model of evangelization, we are more likely to see a kind of "spiritual multiplication," in which the Gospel touches many more people's lives , more missionary disciples are likely to be raised up and many more souls can be rescued from the reign of the evil one and brought into the kingdom of God.

DISCUSS

What inspires you about the "Little Way of Evangelization" that Jesus models? Why do you think it is important for evangelization to occur through relationships and deep, personal investment?

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THE COST OF BATTLE

It's clear that the rewards of this battle are great, but they are not without cost. Jesus himself tells us in Luke 9:23, "'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." To follow Jesus as missionary disciples will mean making sacrifices — like denying ourselves certain comforts and personal control — so we can pour out our lives for the conversion of others. We will experience suffering in a new way as we contend with rejection, discouragement, and disappointment. We will have to rearrange our schedules to make more time to love others, to grow in our own formation, and to spend time in prayer. But when we prioritize holiness and mission in our lives, we can have an eternal impact. As St. Catherine of Siena once said, "If you become who you are meant to be, you will set the world on fire!"

Now, considering everything that has been discussed in this article, are you willing to move forward? Will you take the next step? Will you accept this High Call to Mission?

DISCUSS

Will you accept Jesus' call to make disciples by committing to investing deeply in a few and teaching them to do the same?

TAKE ACTION

If you desire to move forward in the journey of becoming a missionary disciple, set up a consistent time to begin meeting for regular training in mission. Use this time to begin walking together intentionally on mission, even as you continue to share life together and grow in the Christian habits you have been forming.

As you enter more deeply into a life lived on mission, revisit this article frequently! The High Call to Mission is not a one-time event.

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After you commit to living out this mission, take this article to prayer or discuss it again regularly to rekindle your conviction and be reminded of Jesus' call to you.

KEY CONCEPTS

Missionary Disciple: "In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization."[6]

The Little Way of Evangelization — The Method Modeled by the Master: Jesus' way of evangelization was not a big way, but a little way. He did not travel the world to preach the Gospel to everyone on earth himself. Rather, he invested deeply in a few whom he formed in the Gospel of the kingdom and trained them to go out and do the same. In so doing, he imparted both faithfulness and fruitfulness that transformed the world. We are called to imitate Christ and his method to reach the world.

Notes

[1] St. Augustine, *City of God,* trans. by Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950), XVI.28.

[2] St. Ignatius of Loyola, "Meditation on the Two Standards," in *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, accessed March 5, 2020, https://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/seil/seil22.htm.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, accessed November 3, 2020, Vatican.va, 120.

[5] Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, accessed March 5, 2020, Vatican.va, 24.

[6] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120.

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