

Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

On How the Enemy Tempts Those Who Want to Serve God

By Saint Ignatius of Loyola

[From the book *Letters and Instructions of St Ignatius of Loyola*]

May the grace and love of God Our Lord ever favour and help us.

On receipt of your letter some days ago, I experienced joy in the Lord Whom you serve, and desire to serve still more, to Whom we must attribute all the good that appears in creatures.

You ask me that for the love of God Our Lord I should take charge

of you. It is true that for these many years His divine majesty, without any desert of mine, has fostered in me the desire to give all the consolation I can to every man and woman that walks in the way of His holy will and approval. Also to serve those who labour in His holy service; and because I do not doubt that you are one of them, I shall be pleased to have the opportunity of putting my wishes to effect.

You also ask me earnestly to write to you what the Lord tells me, and to give you my opinion freely. I will very willingly tell you what I feel in the Lord and the conclusion to which I have come; and if in anything I appear hard upon you, I should be still harder upon anyone who tried to disturb you. In two things the enemy makes you err; not so as to make you incur the guilt of sin that would separate you from our God and Lord. Still he does draw you from His better service, and from your own greater peace of mind. The first is that he sets before you, and

persuades you into, a false humility. The second is that he suggests extreme fear of God, on which you dwell too much, and to which you pay too much attention.

Now as to the first point, the general course that the enemy follows with regard to those who desire and begin to serve God Our Lord, is to place impediments and obstacles in their way. And the first weapon with which he endeavours to wound is this, viz.: how canst thou live all thy life in such great penance, without the enjoyment of relations, friends, possessions, and in a state so solitary

Author: Saint Ignatius of Loyola

Ignatius was born in 1491 to a noble family in the Basque country of Spain. When he was 29 and fighting against the French who were attacking Pamplona, a cannonball shattered his leg. Ignatius spent a year in bed recovering from his wounds. When he was 30, Ignatius turned from working as a soldier to working as a missionary for God.

During that year, Ignatius read the Bible and about the lives of saints. In these books, he discovered new work. He would “find God in all things.” He would do everything “for the greater glory of God.” His actions, decisions, and plans would bring the good news of God’s love to others. He visited a monastery, where he took his military clothing and weapons and laid them before an image of the Blessed Mother. And at the age of 30, Ignatius went back to school to learn more about his faith. Soon, a group of six men gathered with him. In 1540, the seven together became the Society of Jesus—the Jesuits. Ignatius was their leader.

Ignatius died in Rome in 1556, when he was 65 years old. He was canonized by Pope Gregory XV in 1622. He is a patron saint of Catholic soldiers, and many Jesuit schools and universities throughout the world are a tribute to his work and his faith.

ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

July 31st



without the least consolation? Whereas in another state thou canst be saved without so many perils. So he leads us to believe that we have to lead a harder life than any man ever lived because of the difficulties he sets before us, while he hides from us the great consolations and solaces which the Lord is accustomed to give to the novice Servant of the Lord who breaks through all these impediments, and elects to desire to suffer with his Creator and Lord.

Next the enemy tries his second weapon, which is that of boasting and vainglory, giving him to understand that there is much goodness or sanctity in what he does, placing him on a higher plane than is his due. If the Servant of the Lord resists these weapons, and resists by humbling

and lowering himself, without consenting to the notions that the enemy suggests, then he tries his third weapon. That is, when he sees the Servant of the Lord so good and humble, as to fancy that though he does all that the Lord commands, still everything is without profit, looking as he does upon his own weakness, and deriving no glory therefrom whatsoever, he suggests the idea that even if he discovers anything given him specially by God Our Lord, any deed done, any intention or desire inspired, then he sins through another species of vainglory, inasmuch as he speaks in his own favour. Thus he secures that he should not speak of the blessings he has received from his Lord, and so prevents good fruit both in others and in the man

himself; for the remembrance of what he has received is always an incentive to higher efforts. It is true conversation of this kind must be carried on with discretion, so as to be conducive to the good of all, I mean oneself and others, according to circumstances and when profit is likely to result; on the other hand in making us humble the enemy tries to bring us into false humility, that is, a humility extreme and vitiated; and of this your words give ample evidence. For after mentioning some weaknesses and fears, which pertain to yourself, you say: "I am a poor nun, and, so it seems to me, desirous of serving Christ Our Lord." You do not venture to say outright, "desirous of serving Christ Our Lord," or "the Lord has given me desires to serve Him"; but you say, "desirous, so it seems to me." If you will look well at it you will see quite clearly that these desires to serve Christ Our Lord do

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not come from yourself, but are the gift of the Lord; and thus when you say, "the Lord has given me great desires to serve Him," you give Him praise, because you publish His gift, and you glory in Him Himself, not in yourself, seeing that you attribute nothing of that grace to yourself.

We must then be very careful; and if the enemy lifts us up, we must lower ourselves, counting our sins and miseries; if he lowers and depresses us, we must lift ourselves up in true faith and hope in the Lord, counting over the benefits received, and with how much love and kindness He waits upon us so as to save us, while the enemy does not

trouble whether he speaks the truth or lies, but only whether he can overcome us. Bear well in mind how the martyrs, when placed before their idol-worshipping judges, proclaimed themselves the Servants of Christ. In like manner do you,

when placed before the enemy of the whole human race, and tempted in this way by him, when he wishes to deprive you of the courage that the Lord bestows upon you, and when he tries to render you weak and timorous by means of his snares and deceits, do not merely venture to say that you are desirous of serving Our Lord, when you ought to proclaim and profess without fear that you are His servant, and that you would rather die than desert His service. If he puts before me the justice of God, I reply with His mercy; if he hints at mercy, I answer with His justice. So we must act if we would avoid trouble, that the deceiver may himself be deceived, applying to ourselves the teaching of Holy Scripture which says: "Beware that thou be not so humble that in excessive humility thou be led into folly."

Coming to the second matter, as the enemy has placed in us a certain fear

Next the enemy tries his second weapon, which is that of boasting and vainglory, giving him to understand that there is much goodness or sanctity in what he does, placing him on a higher plane than is his due. We must then be very careful; and if the enemy lifts us up, we must lower ourselves, counting our sins and miseries.

under the appearance of humility, which is false, and so suggests that we ought not to speak even of good, holy, and profitable things, so he brings forward another and worse fear, which is, whether we are

separated from Our Lord, cut off from Him and outcast, and this in great measure by reason of our past lives. For just as the first fear prepares the way for the enemy's victory, so he finds it easier to tempt us when we are subject to the second. To illustrate this in some way I will mention another of the enemy's devices. If he finds a person with an elastic conscience, who passes over sin without consideration, he does all in his power to make venial sin seem nothing, and

mortal sin, even very serious mortal sin, of no account; so that he turns to his purpose the defect he finds in us, that of a too elastic conscience. If in another he discovers a conscience over tender -a tender conscience, be

it noticed, is no fault, - and if he sees that such a one will have nothing to do with mortal sin, nor even with venial sin so far as is possible - for it is not in our power to avoid all -, and that he even tries to cast off every slight semblance of sin in the shape of imperfection or defect, then the enemy makes an effort to confuse so good a conscience, suggesting sin where there is none, and defect where there is even perfection, anything to be able to disturb and afflict us; and in many instances, where he cannot induce a soul to sin, and has no hope of ever bringing it about, at least he endeavours to torment.

In order to illustrate still further the way in which fear is produced in a soul, I will briefly mention two lessons which the Lord is accustomed to grant or to permit: The one He grants, the other He permits. The first is interior consolation, which evaporates all perturbation, and brings a soul to complete love of the Lord; and to such as He enlightens with this consolation He reveals many secrets, both at the time and still more later on. In fine, thanks to that divine consolation all labours are a pleasure and all fatigue is rest. To him that walks with the fervour and warmth of this interior consolation, there is no burthen however great

that does not seem light, and no penance nor other trial so great but it appears to be sweet. It points out and lays open to us the way, that we must follow, and it teaches us to flee from the opposite. But it does not remain always with us; it ever follows certain periods according to appointment. And this is for our good; for when we are deprived of this consolation, then comes the other lesson, which is this: Our old enemy now puts in our way every possible obstacle to turn us aside from what we have begun, and harasses us unceasingly, all contrary to the first lesson. He fills us full of sadness, without our being able to explain why we are sad; we have no devotion in our prayer, we cannot contemplate, we cannot even speak of or listen to the things of God with relish or any interior delight. Not only this, but if he finds us to be weak and excessively humbled by these diseased: thoughts, he then suggests ideas such as whether we are entirely forgotten by God Our Lord; and we come to think that in everything we are separated from Our Lord; and that all we have done and all we have desired to do has been of no value whatsoever. Thus he endeavours to bring us to want of confidence in everything, and thus we shall find ourselves reduced to

the greatest timidity and weakness, making too much of our infirmities and showing ourselves too passive in face of his deceitful reasonings. It is necessary therefore to ascertain what is the condition we experience; if it is consolation we must become humble and lowly, and remind ourselves that soon the trial of temptation will come; if it is temptation that besets us, darkness or sadness, we must bear up against it without any vexation, and await with patience the consolation of the Lord, which will put an end to all trouble and exterior darkness.

There now remains something to be said of what we feel when reading of God Our Lord, how we must understand what we read, and, having understood, how we must learn to profit by it. It often happens that Our Lord moves and forces our soul to some course of action or other, laying all open to

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it; that is to say, He speaks within it without the sound of voice, raising it all to His divine love, without our being able, even if we were willing, to resist His idea. And this

idea which we grasp is of necessity in conformity with the Commandments, the precepts of the Church, and obedience to superiors, and full of entire humility, seeing that the same divine spirit pervades all. Here, however, we can often be seduced into error; for after such consolation or inspiration, while the soul remains filled with joy, the enemy will sometimes come under cover of joy and in an appearance that is good, to make us exaggerate what we have felt from God Our Lord, so as

again to throw us into disorder and to disconcert us utterly.

At other times he makes us detract from the lesson we have learnt, conjuring up inconveniences and

obstacles to prevent our carrying out in its entirety all that has been made known to us. And here more prudence is necessary than in any other matter; many times we must check the great longing that we have to speak of the concerns of God Our Lord, at others we must speak even more than the accompanying desire or inclination prompts; for in this it is needful to think more of the interests of others than of our own desires. When then the enemy endeavours to increase or diminish the good impression that has been derived, we must go forward ,with a view to benefiting others as one who seeks to cross a ford. If he finds a good crossing, that is, if he hopes that some benefit will follow, he must go forward; if the ford is turbid, that is, if others would be scandalised by

his good words, then he will always draw rein, seeking the time and hour most propitious for speaking.

In what I have said things have been suggested into which it is not possible to enter further without writing at great length, and even then much would remain which it is easier to feel than to state, above all in a letter. If it so please Our Lord I hope we shall soon meet, and then we shall be able to communicate more satisfactorily on these matters.

I conclude praying the most Holy Trinity through its infinite and supreme goodness to give us full grace to feel its most holy will and to carry it out in its entirety.

From Venice, June 18, in the year 1536.

Poor in goodness,
Ignacio.



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