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THE  
CATHOLIC  
HOUR

"R. S. V. P."

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Deacidified



In the last three weeks as we considered three of Christ's first words, we have said some hard things and offered some harsh comparisons. We said them because they needed to be said in the general analysis we were making of our time. For an age of soft lives and dull consciences, someone must say hard things and make harsh comparisons. But for today and for next Sunday, we should like to turn our topic more specifically to you. . .each one of you. We give over the general attitudes and the vast purposes of God's plan and the tremendous scope of Christ's work to save to consider the individual you...not the groups of you and the nameless congregations of you that listen...but the individual you who, alone, hears my voice...the individual mind that weighs my words, the individual heart into whose soil they fall.

With all that I have said in the past weeks, I was very conscious that none

of it could radically affect your life unless you were deeply aware that Christianity is never a compulsion; it is simply an invitation. To lose that notion is to lose the truth of how Christ is in our lives; to forget that is to spoil our service, for to serve Christ from any other motive than having been invited is to change ourselves from companions of Christ to slaves. To serve Christ in fear or resentment is to cripple Christianity and to cheat Christ, because such an attitude lessens what we do and robs Christ of the good He can use.

Christ must have had this in mind when He spoke his forth word in the Gospel. Almost in keeping with our own analysis, He turns His words from the general aspects of His mission and begins to deal with particular persons. The scene of the word is again the country where John the Baptist is preaching. But this time Christ merely passes the crowd on the edge and walks by without stopping. John sees Him and cries out, "Behold the Lamb of God."

Christ does not stop but keeps moving along. Suddenly two of St. John's disciples break from the crowd and hurry after the retreating Jesus. They

have almost caught up with Him when Christ stops and asks them, "What seek ye?" Of the two who followed it is Andrew who speaks: "Master", he says, "Where dwellest thou?" Jesus beckons them with the words: "Come and see."

This was really the first declaration Christ made that He sought disciples to His way, but it became a pattern for all the calls that Jesus made on any of His followers. There is no recorded account that He called any of his disciples by any other means than an invitation. Peter stood by the lake and Christ walked by and said, "Come"; He asked John and James to "follow" Him; Phillip joined them a few days later but only at the invitation of Christ; Matthew, the tax collector, was added with the same words of invitation. Considering these six situations I think we can safely argue that Christ followed this procedure of invitation with all the twelve.

In fact, the incidents in the future life of Christ are our best argument that He followed this procedure of invitation not only with His twelve apostles but with everyone who came close to him. He used this method for the moments that demanded great decisions or for the

moments that seemed of little importance. Christ may have phrased his call differently as He applied it to some specific problem in the life of the person before Him but most often, under any situation, Christ's words carried the impact of that one word of invitation, "Come!"

I think if I were forced to name a favorite word of Christ, I would select this word, "Come." He uses the word over and over again. . .and notice, He never uses it as a command. . .it is always a simple invitation.

Take the simple story of the gospel that describes the first missionary journey of the disciples and their return from that journey. Of all people, Christ knew the discouragement, the rebuffs, the trials these men endured in this first experience at preaching for His sake. He knew that now was the time for them to get together and compare these experiences, to ask questions, to learn lessons that would be profitable for them on their next outing as missionaries.

As the Master, as the Divine expert in preaching and converting, Christ could well have acted the martinet and *demande*d that if the disciples wanted to continue at this work they *HAD* to go

to school and learn from Him the techniques of their vocation. The gospel shows us that Christ made no such demand. Knowing how much He is going to depend upon them and how much responsibility for Christianity He is going to place in their hands, Christ still does no more than invite them to further learning. "Come apart with me," He says to the return followers,—"Come apart with me and rest awhile."

Another expressive incident in the gospels...and only one of the many... is the occasion where Christ meets the Samaritan woman at the well. Here is a woman who has lived a succession of marriages and divorces. Christ reveals that He knows the story of her life and shows her that there is more to life than this folly and stupidity of on-again, off-again marriage. He tells her that He can give her the water of life...the living water after which she should truly thirst. The Samaritan woman petitions Christ for such a boon.

His answer is not to rebuke her for her evil life, not to demand anything for now. His words are in the pattern of His previous calls to others, "Come to me and bring thy husband."

Before we go on, let's add one more

situation to these others. This occasion is almost a must because it has become the class story of Christ and His invitations to souls. Remember the rich young man? The dramatic picturizations of this moment show Christ as he gazes lovingly upon a searching and sensitive soul. The young man has eagerly pressed forward to speak to Christ directly and he asks - "Master, what must I do to gain eternal life." Our Lord tells him that he must keep the commandments. The young man yearns for more and tells Christ that he has complied with this requirement from his youth.

Here is a man who by his own words has practically put himself under the responsibility of going beyond the ordinary obligation of the commandments. He is giving to Christ the occasion to demand, to order more perfection in his life.

But there is no demand, no imperious order thrust upon the rich young man. Christ will act no differently with this eager soul than He has acted with the disciples who surround Him. "If thou wilt be perfect," Our Lord says, "go, sell all that you have and come follow me."

The keynote of Christianity is preserved in this meeting of Christ and a



soul just as it has been on all other moments. Invitation was the way of Christ with the first follower. . .it will be the way of Christ with the last. . .it is the way of Christ with everyone in between.

You are one of those in between. And you, like the disciples, have heard of Christ and hastened after him and have been asked the question, "What seek ye?" Yes, my dear friends, you have sought the place where Christ dwells as you have gone about your life looking for peace or happiness or success or whatever goal you think is the one that will complete you. You have sought His place directly, surely, courageously. . . or you have sought His peace in the indirection of weakness or cowardice of sin.

Christ passes by in the life of each one and the simple word, "Come!" is uttered. No matter how rudimentary our education or how shabby our background. . .no matter how effete or educated, how clever or accomplished we may be. . .the difference with us does not make for a different Christ or a different approach. Whether it comes in a sermon or through contact with a person, whether it comes by a joy that

elevates our soul or a tragedy that strikes deep into our lives, whatever the means, wherever the time, Christ passes by and the simple word, "Come!" is uttered. We receive our invitation to follow...our invitation not our order.

Which one of us would say that this is not so? When was the last time, for example, that Christ whipped or drove any of you an inch nearer to Himself. Which of you could say that Christ ever wrenched or forced your soul to comply with His wishes for it.

We are free to refuse. The sad proof of our ability to reject Christ is seen in the sad stories of those who did reject Christ...rejections that stretch out from the time before His birth to the moment of His death. His life begins with the sad stories of the souls who slammed doors on Him before He was born and cried out, "Move on, there is no room for you at our hearths," and His life ends with the sad tale of traitor who kissed Him to His death and cried in his soul, "Go away, there is no room for you in my heart."

Between these moments the favorite word of Christ fell in the souls of many and they rejected the invitation as we have noted for example in the case of

the rich young man. Even so much as a whole city rejected His invitation because we see Christ lamenting over Jerusalem as He prays, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou who killest the prophets and stonest those who are sent to thee. How often would I have gathered thy children...but thou wouldst not."

Christianity is a history of rejections that are tragic because it is a history of a just God who will not force the love of the lowliest creatures. But remember that as it is a history of rejections that are tragic, it is also a history of acceptances that are glorious. Its gloriousness is that in freedom, souls choose and in freedom, souls serve and in freedom, souls love and in freedom, souls follow.

And now, what about you...you, alone, listening now in this hour...closed in from the world and set apart even from the people who sit beside you. There falls in your heart at this moment Christ's favorite word, "Come," ...what is your response?

The word may come as the invitation to accept a vocation and follow Christ more closely. It may come to you a distracted soul whose faith is weak and whose purpose of life is wobbly. . .Christ

may be saying, "Come apart with me and rest awhile." Maybe, you are discouraged and Christ speaks His "Come" to you as he did to the people of His own day, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavily burdened and I will refresh you." Perhaps, to a married couple foolishly avoiding children, He speaks and tells them, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." Or to a searcher after truth and faith, He speaks as He spoke to Andrew, "Come and see."

Christ speaks to each of you and makes His invitation to follow. It will be always and only an invitation that you get. . .not for one moment will He let you serve in slavish fear and trembling.

In a previous talk I mentioned a statue of Christ and called it the rejected Christ. Let me now describe that figure of Christ as He stands before. The figure stands with two arms outstretched, empty and waiting.

The meaning of two open waiting arms is obvious; two arms are held out to a venturesome child trying to take its first steps in life. . .the arms are a sign that it will not be allowed to fall; the two arms are held out to a frightened soul fleeing danger. . .they are a sign

to it that there is a haven from harm; two arms are held out to the weak and the old and the tired. . .they are a sign to all these that here is support and strength; two arms are held out to a lover who knows that they are the boundaries of the whole world to their love.

The two arms of Christ may have any of these meanings for you as He extends them toward you. You are being invited to enter and dwell within the safety of these arms. . .and that there may be no doubt of your invitation, Christ speaks His favorite word, "Come!"



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