

Christof Wolf, S.J.

# The Moment Is For Me

An Ignatian Guide to Prayer

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# **SECOND WEEK: LIFE OF JESUS**

Socrates says: “An unexamined life is not worth living.” Behind this is the question of the standard by which I judge myself in my life. What values and ideals do I have? Often the answer is: What you spend the most time and money on, that is your highest value. It is certainly worthwhile to think about this. However, a skewed picture can emerge, because we are not always free to choose what we do and how much effort we put into it. Whether I like what I do, on the other hand, is also relevant to the question of my highest value. What ultimately motivates me to do something goes deeper than time or money, or liking it.

Every person is looking for autonomy, competence, and affiliation. I would like to decide for myself; I would like to be able to do something particularly well; and would like not to live it alone, but in relationship. The human will is a double entity. I may want something — career, wealth, happiness, relationships, etc. — but then I can ask myself if I really want what I want. If I can answer this question in the affirmative, that is, if I know what I really want, it leads me to true freedom, and I recognize my “true self,” as Sören Kierkegaard called it.

However, the decisive question still remains open: How do I find out what I really want? How do I avoid being mistaken about my true self? How do I get out of my pure self-centeredness? Spiritually asked: What is the will of God for me and my life? God’s will for me, Ignatius is convinced, is revealed by the contemplation of the life of Jesus. That is the key for the way I want to live my life. Jesus did not preach about an abstract God, the “unmoved mover” (Aristotle), but the Father who loves man without reservation. God loves us as no man loves or can love. Even if the whole world condemns us, God restores us like the prodigal son. “God is closer to our self than we ourselves are,” says Augustine.

The second week is often seen as the center of the retreat, because here is where the person praying is invited to make a choice. How can I know God’s will for me, in order to choose it? Ignatius himself gives three criteria. First: What I choose must be good in itself. Second: Does it give me inner peace (comfort) in my soul? And third: Does it serve other people? My decision — whether I stand before a concrete choice like partnership or religious vocation, or whether I want to confirm myself in the choice I have already made — is about self-realization. For the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, self-realization is the heart of reality: “What is real realizes itself, and what realizes itself is real.” In the end, my longings express themselves in what I allow to become reality. The crucial question of this week: Where do I hear the call of Jesus in my life? What self-realization does he call me to?

## MEDITATION 1

### John 1:1-12

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.

<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God.

<sup>3</sup> All things came to be through him,  
and without him nothing came to be.

What came to be <sup>4</sup> through him was life,  
and this life was the light of the human race;

<sup>5</sup> the light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup> A man named John was sent from God. <sup>7</sup> He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup> He was in the world,  
and the world came to be through him,  
but the world did not know him.

<sup>11</sup> He came to what was his own,  
but his own people did not accept him.

<sup>12</sup> But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name.

## Comment

The gospel of John is the latest of the gospels, with its prologue more like poetry than a strict dogmatic explanation. According to the prologue, life begins in God, who creates becoming and form. God guarantees that the world does not sink into chaos, that there is order and creativity, continuing into a future. His light shines in every life that has been created.

Before God sends His Son into this world, He calls John as a witness who prepares the way for Jesus. This is John the Baptist, who lives in the desert, feeding on locusts and honey. He attracts people, and many follow his call to repentance and are baptized by him as a sign of this. Because he criticizes those in power (Herod and his wife Herodias), he pays with his life. Like Jesus himself, John experiences acceptance and rejection. But his main function is to testify to the true light, present in Jesus. Whoever accepts it becomes a child of God, concludes the first part of the prologue.

Belonging to the children of God is open to all people. Every person is invited to make an active decision: I can reject God, or I can accept God. The decision for God gives me the power to be a child of God. This is not the power of the powerful. As a child of God I live without hidden intentions and resentments, but rather with curiosity, joy, and gratitude.

## Suggestions

- First I prepare the scene for myself.
- Do I feel myself to be a daughter, or a son of God? What does being a child of God mean to me?
- Is my relationship with God like a child's relationship with its parents? Do I feel His motherly and fatherly concern for me?
- What does God mean for me?
- Do I reject certain images of God? Why?
- Do I experience rejection or acceptance when I confess Jesus?
- Do I bear witness to Jesus's coming, as John did?

## Film

The Gospel of John

Canada, Great Britain 2003, 171 Minutes. Directed by Philip Saville

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