

Week 10

## The Invitation of Love — Please Be with Me

### Guide: The Call of Our Baptism



Imagine that someone we love has just returned from a week of retreat in the Dominican Republic. Consider this invitation that he or she might make to you.

*The experience changed my life, dear. My heart is filled with this image of a little girl in the children's hospital in Santiago. I feel a profound call to go there and serve for a year. If we can work out all the details to get time off here, will you please come and be with me? I know we can make a difference together. I need your love, your support. I need you. It won't always be easy, but we will have each other to lean on. And I know we can't even imagine how much more in love we will be, sharing this service together. Please be with me.*

All week of this retreat, we will ponder the power of this imaginary invitation from someone we love. What impact would it have on us? If this is someone we love, would our worry about the possible hardship of the service hold us back?

And all week we will compare this invitation to the one we receive from Jesus.

*Over the past several weeks, it has been the delight I've longed for — to show you how much I love you. How I have wanted you to know how much I have desired to free your heart. And now that you have asked me what you can do — what return you could make for such love — I feel eager to invite you to be with me.*

*Please be with me in the mission I have from my Father. "Because God has chosen me to tell the good news to the poor; to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers."*

*And I need you. I need your support and your free heart. It won't always be easy. But we will be together every time you are with me in loving. If you are with me in the struggle of love, we will grow together in love in ways I can ask you only to imagine. If you are with me in the dying to self-love that is our mission, then you will be with me in the fullness of life, forever. God's reign is at hand. Together we can bring it closer. Please be with me.*

Just consider this invitation all week. Feel it. It is the call of our baptism into Jesus. It isn't imaginary. It is very real. How special we are to receive such an invitation of love!

### Some Practical Help for Getting Started This Week

This week's consideration is about *love's invitation*. Over the past several weeks we have seen the transforming power of love. As *loved sinners* we have experienced two powerful movements: God's love for us and our desire to respond to this love. In these exercises we have grown in a sense that our relationship with God is truly a *relationship*. Everything in our faith life changes as we grow more

deeply into this relationship. Whereas before we might have tried to do good and avoid evil out of a sense of obligation, we now are looking for a way to respond in gratitude to someone who has loved us at the very time we'd been an unfaithful, unreliable friend.

That's why the first part of this consideration is about an invitation of love as we might experience it with someone we love. Each of us may add a consideration that is rooted in a concrete loving situation we are in now. It doesn't have to be an imaginative one. Perhaps your spouse and you are changing and have fallen into some ruts that haven't been good for your relationship. You decide to make some major changes in the way you live your lives, for the sake of the relationship. Whatever the invitation of love is, it will have the same components: *it won't be easy, but you will have each other.*

Then when we consider the call of Jesus, we can *sense* and *feel* the call in the context of the invitation of love in this relationship — your relationship with Jesus. Several of the readings we had a few weeks ago contain elements of this kind of call. When Jesus stepped into Peter's boat to preach (Luke 5:1–11), Jesus invited Peter into deeper water and showed Peter his power to net fish. Peter was humbled and wanted to run away. Jesus could *then* make the invitation of love — he could use a humble Peter. The woman at Simon the Pharisee's dinner party (Luke 7:36–50) shows us so much about love's power to transform us. Jesus tells his host that the difference between loving little and loving a lot has to do with how much we've been forgiven. This woman's awareness of her sinfulness has carved out in her a greater capacity to love.

Radically following Jesus can only be a response of the heart. We can all admit that too often in the past we have been too busy to even *hear* the call, let alone respond to it. Now that we have been touched by the forgiving and healing love of Jesus, now that our hearts are desirous of expressing our gratitude, we can hear the call as love's invitation.

Without jumping to our response yet, let's listen this week. We want to be *touched* by the invitation, to experience what it does within our hearts. Perhaps we will want to write out the invitation we are hearing from the Lord. Perhaps we would be willing to share some grace we have received so that the whole group making this retreat can share in it. Perhaps we want to use our bodies to pray this week. You can sit in your chair for a bit and just listen to the call deep in your heart. You can rest your open hands, palms up, on your lap as a gesture of openness and gratitude. This simple ritual gesture, or any other you might choose, then becomes an *expression* to give a lasting symbolic life to your prayer.

Finally, we can all be renewed in the sense that we are on a journey. We are growing in our ability to find intimacy with God in our everyday lives — from the moment we put on our slippers to the moment we take them off at night. In all the *background* moments of consciousness, we are journeying through our life with a richer imagination and a deeper affective relationship with the One who is always faithfully with us.

## **For the Journey: Knowing Jesus**

We have been praying these past weeks about God's creative and redemptive love. We have also been discovering exactly who it is who has loved so much, so deeply, and for so long.

When you receive a letter or note without a signature, you might be less likely to take it seriously. If you were to receive a nice gift without any signature except for a set of initials, you might be more interested about this benefactor. Something deep inside us wants to know more about anybody who might like us, send us cards and gifts, and might actually love us. Who are they and why are they so

good to us? What do they want in return? These are the questions that end the first section of the Spiritual Exercises and flow into the second.

We have received deeply the gifts of our having been created and then re-created in the salvific love of Jesus Christ. Who is this God; who is this God-made-man come to us? He comes not anonymously, not jotting just a two-letter signature, but Jesus proclaims his name and who he is. We pray to study Jesus' signature and to know him as gift and the gifts Jesus offers. Be very aware that each of us has resistances to Jesus' teachings, Jesus' ways, and the path of mystery to which he calls us.

As with the men and women with whom Jesus entered into deep intimacy, their questions, their fears, their excuses, their other plans, and their natural reluctance to trust all became part of their encounter and ultimate surrender to Jesus. We ourselves want to know what we are going to be asked to do. We are called to pray this week with these questions, these reluctances, these fears well in hand and heart. They are the places where he met Peter, Nicodemus, the early church, and all the saints. We pray within the truth of our truths. Jesus meets us the way he finds us, but we have to find our fears and distrusts in order to be intimately met.

Out of love we were called into life; out of love we were called from death through sin; out of love we are constantly being called into trusting what real life can be with and alongside Jesus. His call to us is a freedom from and a freedom for. The *from* we know; the *for* is the cause of our fear and the platform of our prayer. We pray for the desire to know him and his personal love for us so deeply that, with our fears before us, we can slowly let him take them away one tremor and one tremble at a time.

## **In These or Similar Words . . .**

Dear Lord,

I am moved by so much in this week's retreat. I see the stunning face of the little girl, standing next to a huge bed in that hospital. It's a poor place, I can see that by the cracks on the wall. But what can I do with the little girl? I can't bring her home with me.

But as I continue to look at the photo, I feel an invitation from you. I feel so moved when I read the imaginary conversation at the beginning of the guide for the week. What if my own loved one came home from an experience like that and asked me the same thing? Would I go? Of course. It would mean so much to us and to the way we would experience our love together, in that strange and wonder-filled place.

Is that what you are asking? You want me to consider an invitation from you to go someplace I've never been? Maybe it's someplace new but, at the same time, someplace right here at home. It's different. I'm different. But you, my loving God, would be with me in it? If I were frightened, you would be there? I feel your promise not only that you will be with me but also that the love between us will grow. What a dizzying thought!

In the past weeks, I have been amazed at the depth of love I feel growing between us, Jesus. I feel your presence in my prayers, and I sometimes feel self-conscious, wondering whether I'm a little crazy for imagining a deep feeling coming from you. But in the quiet of my prayer, I *know* it's real. A very real love is deepening between us. It makes me feel some deeper longing for you.

Let me sit quietly with this invitation, Jesus. I feel your calling me to something, but I'm not sure what. I feel an emptiness inside that I know you can fill, a yearning for some way to draw closer to you.

Be with me, Lord, as I pray with the photo of the little girl. Stay with me as I contemplate the invitation you hold out to me. Be with me. Fill me. Let me feel your love. Thank you for this call you are sending me. Give me the patience to stay with it this week, to pray with it, and to be patient with it.

### **Scripture Readings**

Luke 4:14–20

Mark 1:16–20

Luke 5:27–32

Luke 9:57–62

Luke 12:32–34