

Week 11

The Invitation of Love — Our Response

Guide: Offering Ourselves Completely



This week we consider our response to the invitation of love. Through last week's exercise, we know that the depth of our response depends on the depth of our love for the person making the invitation. When a loved one calls for our response, we say yes. Even when we know the personal cost to us will be great, we respond because love always draws us to togetherness. We want to be *with* the one we love.

This week we will let our hearts respond to the call of Jesus. We can review his call from last week's guide. It is the call to join him in the

unfolding of the reign of God. It is different for each of us. We have different gifts. Different graces have been placed in our hearts. Unique crises and experiences of suffering have shaped our unique ability to be compassionate and to suffer with others. Special aspects of the call are addressed to each of us, according to our age and our resources and abilities to influence others. We want to hear the call as it is addressed to us individually. For all of us, however, the invitation and opportunity to respond is the same. Of course, we will respond by saying yes. There is no real happiness in a life that doesn't involve following Jesus. The question for this week is the *depth* of our response — how completely we respond. We do not know all that our *yes* will entail this year or next year or ten years from now.

So, on one level we can make an open-ended response that offers ourselves completely to *whatever* following Jesus might mean. But the graces of the past weeks' experience of the love of Jesus for us may have so moved us that we desire to really act against anything within us that is worldly or vain or self-absorbed.

We may so desire to offer ourselves completely to being with Jesus — to be outstanding, to be a sign for others — that our response is in the form of placing no barriers to our offering of ourselves. Should our Lord so choose us, we might express not only our *willingness* to be with Jesus in his poverty and his embrace of the human condition but also our *genuine desire* to enter into that same surrender of self that was his.

Let this photo of this teacher at Red Cloud Indian School represent our response to be with Jesus in being for others. Make use of the other helps this week, especially the section "In These or Similar Words . . ."

Let the words and expressions of response flow this week. The many weeks ahead will allow us to grow in a sense of this love-imitation desire and to explore the depths of our offering. This week we simply want to consider the response we are being given the grace to offer.

Some Practical Help for Getting Started This Week

Helping someone respond to a personal invitation of love is a little like helping someone pick out a birthday or anniversary gift for a loved one. The questions might be these: How close are you to this person? What do you want the gift to say? How much do you want to spend? At this point in the retreat, the questions are these: How deeply have I been touched by God's love and mercy? How grateful am I? How deeply did I experience the call of Jesus? What response is forming in my heart?

The first advice for this week is to get started with the simplest of responses. Just say yes. Practice saying it out loud. What does it feel like to say it in different ways? With different degrees of conviction?

The next exercise might be to be more *specific* about the *yes*. I can say yes and mean that I will accompany Jesus in the mission he has from God by being faithful to whatever comes my way *today*.

I may sense a *special* kind of fidelity wrapped up in the invitation of Jesus to me. So, I might make my *yes* even more *explicit*: "Yes, I will be with you in the costly fidelity of loving my spouse" (or in loving my children, in accepting the difficult challenges of my job, in forgiving that relative or neighbor, or in acting against that self-defeating bad habit I have).

I may feel the invitation reaching to the areas where I have heard the call but have not responded. I might make my *yes* more open ended. "Yes, I want to be with you in the ways you are loving, and I will open my heart more completely to the needs of others, especially the poor" (or make time to get more involved, or respond to that invitation to service at my church, or write that letter to my political representative).

Such a desire may be growing in my heart to respond in growing love to the love of Jesus that I may want to express my *yes* more effectively. I may want to try words and expressions that are personal and loving and full of tenderness, from deep inside. I could try to express my desire to be so close to Jesus that I want to experience the same vulnerabilities he experienced and experiences today. As lovers do, I may want to place my heart with his. I can practice saying out loud, or writing out, my growing desire to know and enter into the same struggles and poverty and surrender that fill the heart of the One I love. Then, my *yes* and my desire for intimate togetherness come together.

In the weeks ahead, we will take up our desire to grow in knowledge of, intimacy with, and togetherness in service with Jesus. This week, we have the luxury of letting our consciousness be on all the ways we can say the *yes* of grateful love.

As we do each week, let the graces we are asking for be part of the background from the moment we awake, through all the in between times, to the time we prepare to sleep. We can practice taking a slow, deep breath as we go from one thing to another, as we answer the phone, as we get in the car, as we do whatever we're doing. That deep breath can be a slow, deep *yes*. Practice letting your response fill the *background* of your everyday life and experience the power that growing in this relationship of love can have.

For the Journey: Entering Christ's Kingdom

The RSVP contained in many invitations implies that a response is expected. Upon receiving such invitations, we consider whether we have the time to attend, whether we want to go there — and for some, there is no question: of course we wouldn't think of missing it.

“Respond, if you please” is implied within the many gifts and interruptions by which God calls to us. *Response* is different from *reaction*. A response is a result of pondering, weighing, evaluating what is being asked, what is in it for us, and what it will cost. A reaction is more impulsive and immediate.

Once a year, the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of Christ the King. He comes as a servant king and a summoning king, inviting all to follow him in service of those whom he is calling, “the whole world.” We are invited by St. Ignatius to consider the many ways we have been called in our lives to enter more deeply into Christ’s kingdom. In creating us, God has invested us with gifts and talents of all kinds. The Call of the King in the Exercises asks for a response to him by a response to those very gifts. Christ asked the fishermen to be fishers of souls; he asks us according to the unique and particular people we are. “I’ll call you to do this, because I have given you this and that.” Christ’s call then is a reinforcing, a blessing, of the gift that each of us is.

We pray also this week with the melody and words of the folk song “Follow me.” “Where I go, what I do and who I know, . . . take my hand and say you’ll follow me.”

Jesus asks that we follow him, but he will be with us and work through us and not ask anything of us that he has not asked of himself. He invites us to his victory but also to his real human way of gaining that victory.

We are asked to consider, to ponder, to reflect on the cost — what’s in it for us — and to listen to the gentle invitation to the use of the person and gifts God has given each of us.

Remember, we can never totally, irrevocably surrender everything of our lives and person to God. Peter, the first of the great fishermen, left everything to follow Jesus and spent the next three years taking it back little by little. At times we would like to place it all at his feet. He will take whatever little bit of our heart, gifts, and life we can offer at any one time.

In These or Similar Words . . .

Dear Lord,

I feel your invitation so deeply. I sit with it quietly, and I recognize the longing for something unanswered in my life and realize that your gentle invitation is the answer.

I know. I feel you calling me, inviting me, offering to fill the empty longing I so often try to ignore. The emptiness that is hidden so deeply inside of me is where you belong, loving God, where I belong with you. How is it that this invitation from you is so personal to me and so clearly addressed to me? Of course, my answer to you is yes. How can it not be, after the faithfulness and love you have shown to me in my life?

I don’t know where my *yes* will take me. Your invitation is gentle, not the fear-filled one I fretted over. You are somehow asking me to change the focus of my life and, in doing that, to be more of myself than I am now. I become a little afraid when I wonder where this will take me and how this could change my life. But somehow, I know if I answer, I will become more of what you created me to be. I will become more my real, authentic self.

I am beginning to understand, my Lord, that it isn't the results of my *yes* that are important. It is my *yes*. It is the deep desire I have to be with you, to follow you, and to serve you in any way you present to me.

I long to have the real desire to surrender myself so completely to this *yes* and to you. Help me, Lord, not to hold back in my *yes*. Let me cling to your hand, not to my fears.

“For all that has been, Thanks. For all that is to be,

Yes.” Yes, Lord. Here I am. Yes. YES!

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 6:1–8

Psalm 116

Luke 10:1–9; 17–21

John 21:15–19