

## CHRIST OUR EXEMPLAR

By BRO. GEORGE KINSELLA, O. P.



IN all the works committed to our trust, we should strive to attain success. For the successful completion of any work we must necessarily have a plan or an example. To seek to complete a work without one would be folly, for we would be relying on chance for success. Thus it is that the architect draws the plans for a building, in order that the constructor may know just what he is going to do. It does not matter whether the work is big or little, there must be this guiding principle of action. The model may be worked out on paper or with other materials visible to the eye, or again it may be only a mental picture. It does not matter what it is, as long as it is sufficiently well defined and is adequate for the required purpose. It is an essential requisite for all work and without it no work can be brought to its ultimate end with any amount of success.

We, as creatures of God, are here on earth for a definite end. That end is to attain eternal happiness with God in heaven. If we fail in the attainment of this aim we are doomed to the everlasting pains of hell. It is, in the final analysis, the only eternally important thing we have to do on this earth. Fifty or seventy-five years from now it will not concern us what success we have met with in any other line of work, but the one thing that will be of concern to us is what success we have met with in the pursuit of our ultimate purpose in life. Then we will realize that there was only one thing in life that counted, and woe to us if we have failed. Then the truth of that text of Scripture will be brought home to us with all its force: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul."<sup>1</sup>

Our work then on earth is a work with which we cannot afford to take chances, since failure means for us eternal damnation. For the success of all work however, an example is necessary, and this work of salvation is no exception. Therefore we should have someone who can serve as an exemplar to us. From

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew XVI, 26.

him we should be able to learn how to fulfill our duties to God and to our fellow-creatures. Then when we are in difficulty we can turn to him, and in his life find a solution for our troubles. Thus we will not be going about this all important work as one groping in darkness, but we will have a light to our path.

God in His infinite wisdom realized the condition of fallen man. He knew that if man was to attain his purpose in life it would be well for him to have an exemplar, and He mercifully answered this need by sending His only Begotten Son. Before the coming of Christ men had as their models the Patriarchs and Prophets. The work of these men however was not perfect. This was due principally to the fact that they were human, and thus had failings which marred the force of their example. Even Moses the greatest of the Patriarchs, doubted in the Lord. In order then that man might have as a model, one in whom there was no blemish, God sent Christ, His only Begotten Son. Primarily the Incarnation took place in order that the Redeemer might atone for man's sin and reopen to him the gates of Heaven. This primary motive of Our Lord's coming did not require any length of time. Since the Saviour was the Son of God He could have atoned for man's sin instantaneously by one single act. Why then did He spend thirty-three years on earth? The reason for this must be sought elsewhere, than in His desire to redeem us. The manner of his coming was determined in great measure by His desire to give us an example of how to live. This was one of the objects He had in mind in spending such a long period on earth. The proof of this lies in the fact that He has given us such a splendid example. If we will but pattern our lives after His, we will have little difficulty in arriving safely at our ultimate destination.

A short study of the life of Christ will convince us that he has left us an example of how we are to meet the obligations of life. Man on this earth is confronted among others with this three-fold duty. He has a duty to God, since he is a creature of God and has God for his end. He has a duty to the state inasmuch as he lives in social union with others and is ruled by the authority necessary for that union. He has a duty to his fellow-men, because they are creatures of God, and companions to him in his life work. Man's exemplar should show him how he should meet these duties. Briefly let us examine how Christ has shown him.

Man's obligation to God is his paramount duty on earth. He must realize that this duty comes first; he must be constant in prayer, and he must be ready to submit to the Divine Will in all things. Christ has exemplified this for us.

Christ during His lifetime always realized that His duty to His Eternal Father in heaven came first. He allowed no other duties however sacred, to interfere with this primary duty. We have a splendid example of this when He was only a child of twelve. He had accompanied His parents to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Passover. After the feast His parents started home, each thinking He was with the other. At nightfall they discovered their mistake, and returned to Jerusalem seeking Him. After searching for three days, they found Him in the temple in the midst of the doctors, teaching them and asking them questions. Mary inquired of Him: "Son why hast Thou done so to us? Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." To which He replied: "How is it that you sought Me? did you not know, that I must be about My Father's business."<sup>2</sup> The anxiety of His earthly parents was not sufficient reason for Him to neglect the work of His Eternal Father. It is true that He had no desire to cause worry for Mary and Joseph. Still to avoid causing them sorrow, He could not neglect the work of God. The satisfaction that came to Him as a result of fulfilling His obligation, compensated Him for the sorrow He had at causing pain to His parents.

We have another instance of this when as He was preaching, He was told that His mother and brethren were outside. He replied: "Who is My mother and who are My brethren?" And stretching forth His hand toward His disciples He said: "Behold My mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the Will of My Father, that is in heaven, he is brother and sister and mother."<sup>3</sup> By this statement He did not mean to renounce His earthly parents. What He did mean, was that those who obeyed the commands of God were united to Him by a spiritual relationship which took precedence over any earthly bond. Thus those souls who were united to Him by this supernatural relationship came before even Mary His mother, inasmuch as she was just His mother. The fact must not be disregarded however that

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<sup>2</sup> Luke II, 48-49.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew XII, 49-50.

Mary over and above her earthly relationship was united to Him in a spiritual union which was far above His union with any other living creature. Christ here was only considering Mary in regard to her earthly relationship with Him. Our Lord in this place gives the doctrine, which He later announced in the words: "He that loveth father and mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me. And he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."<sup>4</sup> His objective in both places is to stress the fact that the service of God comes first.

We also learn from Christ the necessity of prayer. Prayer may be defined as the lifting up of our hearts and minds to God. Since Christ was God there was no necessity for Him to pray. Yet because He was man He could pray, and in fact did pray that He might give us an example. His whole life was one of prayer. Before starting out on His public life He first retired to the desert for forty days, to fast and to pray. Thus He teaches us that before entering on any work, we should first turn to God, and ask His assistance. Thus we will not be depending on ourselves but will rather depend on the help of God. Christ however was not content with praying only at the outset of His work. All through His public life we find that He prayed. After a long day of travelling and preaching, we find Him at night retiring to pray: "And it came to pass in those days, that He went into a mountain to pray, and He passed the whole night in the prayer of God."<sup>5</sup> When we find Him dying on Calvary His first words are a prayer for His persecutors. Thus He has given us an example of constancy in prayer. Moreover in the "Our Father" He has given us a model of how we should pray. In this prayer He teaches us not only the things we should pray for, but also the order in which we should pray for them.

He was always seeking to do the will of His Eternal Father in heaven. To quote His own words: "I seek not My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me."<sup>6</sup> He found joy in doing the Will of God, for His union with God was sustained by His obedience. "And He that sent Me is with Me, and He hath not left Me alone, for I do always the things that please Him."<sup>7</sup> Again when speaking of His death, He said: "I lay down My life that

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew X, 37.

<sup>5</sup> Luke VI, 12.

<sup>6</sup> John V, 30.

<sup>7</sup> John VIII, 29.

I may take it up again. . . . This commandment have I received from My Father."<sup>8</sup> In His last hours on earth we find Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me. Nevertheless not as I will but as Thou wilt."<sup>9</sup> Thus as St. Paul has so admirably expressed it: "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross."<sup>10</sup> The reward that Christ received for His obedience was the divine love. This is the reward which He also promised to us if we will be obedient to God's commands: "If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love, as I also have kept My Father's commandments, and do abide in His love."<sup>11</sup>

Man's second duty is to the state. This obligation arises from the fact that he is a social being and pursues his end in company with others. Whenever individuals are joined together in a group there arises a need\* for an authority. On each individual of this union there rests an obligation of obedience to that authority. Without this authority, and without obedience to it, society would be a failure. Christ who was perfect man has shown us how we should act toward the civil authority.

Christ acknowledged the rights of the governing authorities. We learn this from His reply to those who tried to entrap Him. He had been asked: "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar." After being presented with a coin of the tribute, and learning that Caesar's image was on it, He replied: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."<sup>12</sup> This is an admission of the rights of the state. It also brings out that the people have an obligation to the state. From the last part of Christ's speech it is evident that this obligation in no way interferes with one's duty to God. If one performs his duty to God, he can at the same time perform his duty to the state. It is well to note here that the ruler whose authority Jesus acknowledged was a pagan and no model of perfection. On the contrary, Tiberius Caesar was notorious for his vices. Nevertheless he held the authority, and as a result he was en-

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<sup>8</sup> John X, 17-18.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew XXVI, 39.

<sup>10</sup> Phil. II, 8.

<sup>11</sup> John XV, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew XXII, 21.



titled to the respect due to authority. He was to be obeyed, not because he was a sinful man, but because he was the ruler.

Since Christ admitted the rights of the law, it is quite natural that He should obey the law, for to one who is perfect, to see an obligation is to fulfill it. We have an example of Christ's subjection to the law during His passion. He allowed Himself to be brought before the civil power. When Pilate examined Him, not understanding Christ's silence, he inquired: "Dost Thou speak nothing to me, thy judge? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee and power to release Thee?" Jesus in His reply did not deny that Pilate had power over Him, rather He acknowledged it by merely pointing out the source from whence it came. "Thou wouldst have no power over Me except it had been given thee from on high."<sup>13</sup> This is the same doctrine which St. Paul restates: "Let every soul be subject to higher powers; for there is no power but from God and those that are, are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God."<sup>14</sup> Thus it was that Jesus submitted to be tried and condemned by the civil power, since it had its source in God.

Although the Gospels tell us very little of Christ's submission to the law, nevertheless we can feel confident that He obeyed it in every detail. The very silence of Scripture concerning His violations of the law is proof that He obeyed it. The Jews were continually trying to entrap Him and would have been only too glad to denounce Him to the civil authorities if the chance were given them. The very fact that we have no record of their doing so proves that they did not have the occasion. Christ then, not only performed His duties to God, but also to the state and may be regarded as a model citizen.

Lastly Christ exemplified for us how we should perform our duties to our fellowmen. This third obligation falls naturally into two divisions: first, the obligation towards those with whom we live, and are united by the ties of blood; and secondly, the duty we have towards those whom we come in contact with outside of the home. Christ who did all things perfectly, also fulfilled His duties to His fellowmen in an exemplary manner.

For thirty years Jesus lived a retired life with His parents in

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<sup>13</sup> John XIX, 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Romans XIII, 1-2.

Nazareth. Of His life during these years Sacred Scripture gives us only a glimpse, but that glimpse is sufficient to reveal a great many things to us. During the period extending from Our Lord's return from Egypt, until the beginning of His public life, there is only one incident recorded in the Gospels. It occurred during the twelfth year of Our Lord's life, when He accompanied Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem. Here in two verses the Evangelist gives us a resumé of Christ's family life: "And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them. . . . And Jesus advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and men."<sup>15</sup> A child has a three-fold duty towards its parents; namely, to obey, to love and to honor them. This short passage of Scripture tells us that Jesus fulfilled these duties. When we are informed that Christ was subject to His parents, we see that He performed the first of them. When the Gospel tells us that He advanced in grace with men, it informs us that He advanced in grace with His parents also. To advance in grace with one's parents means that one make oneself pleasing and acceptable to them. No child however could be pleasing and acceptable to his parents unless he honored and loved them. Thus we learn from Scripture that Christ met the requirements of a perfect child.

There is another lesson to be learned from the hidden life of Christ, and that is, to be content with one's state in life. Christ did not set His heart on wealth, honor, ambition or any of the other allurements of this life. He was satisfied to live in the despised little village of Nazareth. Poverty meant no disgrace to Him. Labor was not a thing He despised. It was in these things that He found His peace and contentment. They were the lot which His Eternal Father had predestined for Him, and that was sufficient for Christ. Many more souls would be saved, and considerable trouble for many others would be avoided, if this example of Christ were followed.

Christ in His dealings with others outside of the home, is a model of the way we should act toward our fellow-creatures. He was charitable in all His actions with them. This is especially evident in His consideration for the failings of others. The Gospels are filled with illustrations of Christ's toleration of other's faults. Thus He did not reject the Apostles, even when

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<sup>15</sup> Luke II, 51-52.

they followed Him with their minds set on a temporal kingdom. He waited patiently for them to realize that His kingdom was not of this world, and at length He was justified. Again when those who were themselves in sin, brought to Him the woman taken in adultery, He, who was alone without sin, did not condemn her. Another instance of His regard for the shortcomings of men is shown in His treatment of Judas. In spite of the latter's treachery when they met for the last time, Christ greeted him with the title "friend." He still hoped that Judas would realize his sin and repent. Thus we see He never condemned but was ever willing to overlook. When He did condemn, it was the sin He condemned and not the sinner.

Jesus also did all He could to lend a helping hand to those who were in need. To be convinced of this we have but to read the Gospels. He cured all sorts of ailments, He gave food to the hungry and pardon to the sinners. To enumerate the instances in which Christ gave assistance to others would be to rewrite the Gospels. We are not all able to imitate Christ's miraculous manner of helping others, but we can certainly imitate His spirit.

This brief summary will show us that Christ has indeed left us an example of how to live. If we are to attain eternal beatitude, we must follow the example which He has given, for He is "the way, the truth and the light." Imitating Him we will first of all render to God that which is His due. After this, but in no way interfering with it, we will render to the state what belongs to the state, and it will never be said of Christians that they are unpatriotic. Finally in our dealings with our companions, we will be charitable. It will only be when we take Christ as our model that we will be worthy of the name of Christian, and when we are worthy of this name, we will not have to worry about our last end.