

## ONE LAST WORD

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*Closing homily to the Congregation, Loyola, September 2003. Original in French.*

The Gospel reading, with which the Lord welcomes us to this Congregation of Procurators, is a scene that St. Ignatius truly loved. He introduced it among the mysteries of the life of Christ in his Spiritual Exercises. As always, in its three points, St. Ignatius is not content to simply summarize this story, but he directs our contemplation to that which we desire: an interior knowledge of the Lord who became human for us in order that we might love him and follow him more closely (Ex. 104).

This sinful woman, who remains nameless for the evangelist, is for St. Ignatius Mary Magdalene, while Simon, who invites Jesus to share at his table, is, for St. Ignatius, only an anonymous Pharisee. Thus, one's attention is concentrated completely upon what St. Ignatius calls the conversion of Magdalene (Ex. 282), not at all the moment of her conversion, but an incident of a life given totally to the Lord through a movement of never-ending conversion. Of all the words of the table discussion and the parable of the debtors, St. Ignatius retains only the words addressed to Magdalene praising her faith and her love. Magdalene says nothing: love ought to manifest itself in deeds more than in words (Ex. 230). In the presence of the Lord, who has been Goodness to her, Magdalene is able only to weep, kiss his feet, wipe them with her hair, and anoint them with precious ointment, intended, rather, for the anointing of his head. Her more humble gesture at the feet of the Lord does not matter; she has loved a great deal, and for this reason a great deal has been forgiven. Magdalene is reassured: "Your faith has saved you, go in peace" (Ex. 282).

In contemplating thus with St. Ignatius the mystery of an on-going conversion of a Magdalene whom the hand of Christ touches, whom his words overtake and his grace sustains, a Congregation of Procurators recalls to mind that it is not a large board of directors of a multinational corporation, but a company of men whom the Lord has chosen to continue his salvific undertaking, by making us partners in his mission in the world, not by a contract, but by a "yes" to his person. This mission of making present, among

believers and non-believers alike, Christ chaste, poor, obedient, prayerful, and priest, is, as in the case of Magdalene, a question of personal relationship, of faith, and of love. This mystery is realized in us, as in Magdalene, when we acknowledge to ourselves that we are truly sinners, and, in spite of this, called to be companions of Jesus in order to proclaim to the world: the peace that comes from the Father, the gift of self for the true life of the world to which the Son witnesses, and the joy that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The words of Our Lord and Magdalene's deed, sign of a superabundance of gratuitousness, tell us that, when we are interested in the condition of the Society, we are obliged to challenge ourselves and examine our faith which saves, our love which pardons. The mission of the reconciled sinner is a mission of reconciliation: the work of faith doing justice; the free gift of the love of Christ (CG 34, 538). At what point is our faith in the mission of Christ, in its way of proclaiming the Good News today? At what point is our contemplative love of the mystery of Christ and his Church in an apostolic work, which, over and above usefulness and efficiency, preserves the gratuitousness of this ointment of great price, poured out upon the feet of Jesus out of pure love?

In celebrating this Eucharist —the greatest token of Christ's love (Ex. 289)—, let us pray that this Congregation of Procurators renews the faith and love of each of us and of the whole Society, so that it may become a "society of love," uniquely dedicated to the Father, possessed by Christ, and loved by the Holy Spirit for the salvation of our world.